Chapter VI
A Comparative Glance at the Native Writers and
the Non-Native Writers

Canadian literature is remarkable for the number and prominence of its women writers. The present dissertation takes a look at the work of a representative selection, mostly from the last thirty years, and including native-born Canadian women and immigrants, those from the main stream and members of ethnic minorities, traditional and more experimental writers. Their prose covers a wide range of situations - falling in love, marriage and pregnancy and divorce, the mother-daughter relationship, growing old and dying - all seen from a woman's perspective.

In Canadian literary history a debate took place in the 1980s and 90s: which is the appropriation of voice? In Canada, this debate centered around aboriginal stories and traditions. The debate involved two questions: 1. was it acceptable for non-Native writers to write from the perspective of a Native character or viewpoint? 2. Were non-Native writers authorized to use traditional aboriginal stories in their fictions? From the discussion carried out in this research work, it is obvious that Native women’s problems are well expressed in the voices of the Native writers like Maria Campbell and Jeannette Armstrong. They give a fresh voice with a sense of self involvement in their writings. They could
describe the problems from the sufferers’ point of view and give solutions to the same in their own perspective.

Jeannette Armstrong, the Okanagan women writer is more likely to bring out the problems faced by a male persona in her Slash. This shows that women in their sense are always able to get into human sufferings with a deep insight of love. The most problematic text by contemporary Native woman writer in Canada- Jeannette Armstrong's controversial political novel Slash is a work that charts the period of Native activism and "Red Power" in Canada and the United States in the late 1960s and early 70s. Aboriginal writing in Canada has been influenced by the extraneous assumptions imposed on it. Examples range from the accepted evaluation of Slash as being insufficiently ‘literary’ to Halfbreed supposedly ‘transparent’ rendering of Métis culture.

Armstrong's Slash has been singled out by non-Native critics for its ‘flawed’ writing style. Such instances of cultural myopia are perhaps the very thing that Slash succeeds in highlighting. "Perhaps narrative plausibility and psychological individuation," takes "second place to thorough probing of the political and psychological alternatives facing Native peoples"(Kenny 26). Slash, then, might be approached for the ways it forces non-Native readers to confront their "cultural arrogance" (Kenny 27), an important pedagogical message for discussions of the
novel in non-Native classrooms. Maria Campbell and Jeannette Armstrong address questions around 'difference' and the locations of cultural insider and outsider in relation to their texts. Drawing on post-colonial, feminist, post-structuralist and First Nations theory, they explore the problems involved in reading and teaching a variety of works by Native women writers from the perspective of a cultural outsider.

Over the past decades, Aboriginal people (the original people or indigenous occupants of a particular country) have been oppressed by the Canadian society and continue to live under racism resulting in gender/class oppression. The history of Colonialism and Capitalism has played a significant role in the construction and impact of how Aboriginal people are treated and viewed presently in the Canadian society. The struggles, injustices, prejudice, and discrimination that have plagued Aboriginal peoples for more than three centuries are still grim realities today. The failures of Canada’s racist policies toward Aboriginal people are reflected in the high levels of unemployment and poor education. Presently, the state shapes the construction and social reproduction of racism, racialization, and sexism as experienced by Aboriginal people in Canada.

Education is tied closely to the discussion of work and, frequently, is offered as a solution to many of the
employment problems faced by Aboriginal women. However, research indicates that although education policies offer some solutions for Aboriginal women seeking better work opportunities for themselves, the education system has, conversely, been a site of oppression. (Kenny 6)

As the communal society slowly faded by British domination, women began to feel the gender oppression. A lack of egalitarianism made many women severely disadvantaged. Negative images make it difficult to recognize the positive contributions of Aboriginal women to community life and social change. Those who lost status because of marriage to non-Aboriginal males have been penalized through the deprivation of Indian rights. As a result, women lost the decision-making powers they had over their labour and the use of the goods they produced. Today, Aboriginal women are the most victimized group in Canadian society. These women had to confront all forms of discrimination (gender, race, and class). Law established by sexist white men, determined the new patriarchal identity of native women. Economically, Native women are more vulnerable than non-Aboriginal women, and aboriginal men in relation to levels of income and employment opportunities.
What do Aboriginal women need in a general sense? I think we all need support, to be able to come to circles like this to share. I felt the strength of a woman’s support group about six years ago when I was going through a difficult time for a couple of years at it was just so power…. I think we all need that and that kind of sharing. (Kenny 24)

Native writers are struggling to deconstruct these misrepresentations and find a voice within the dominant institution of English literature. Historically, Native peoples have been silenced: politically, economically, and culturally. Writing by Native writers represents the struggle to tell the truth; to tell of the realities of Native life and culture. Many Native writers find themselves "writing back" and for some, this equals empowerment. "Native people's voices were absent from written literature until the 1960's; these early attempts by Native writers were heavily edited by non-Native missionaries, anthropologists, and hobbyists who tended to represent Native "tales" from the igloo, the smokehouse, or the campfire as 'quaint' or 'exotic', fit for ethnological inquiry, but not for serious literary study" (Lutz 35). Native writers must struggle as individuals to deconstruct the negative stereotypes surrounding their collective cultures, but more importantly, they must struggle for literary recognition from the oppressive, white, dominant Canadian literary canon.
Canadian literature, as an expression of the nation’s prevailing ideological structures, continues to erode the ethos of Indigenous women. Non-Native writers, like Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro, have monopolized Canadian literature and consequently help to eradicate negative images of Native women. non-Native, or dominant, white writers are the foundation of Canadian literature. It can be argued that collectively, these writers cannot be held responsible for some of the racist and sexist attitudes towards Native women.

Contemporary Indigenous writers write from culturally distinct positions that challenge non-Indigenous writers’ stereotypical images of Native women. Native writers represent part of a new literary trend that encourages Indigenous writers to create more realistic images of Native women and ultimately break down the established misrepresentations portrayed in non-Native literature. It is through the power of words that Native women have found a voice. Writing for many aboriginal women is empowering. It is a means of recognizing and acknowledging the strength, the beauty, the value, and the contributions of Native people. It is a means of affirming the cultures, of clarifying lies, of speaking truth, of resisting oppression, of asserting identity, of self-empowerment, of survival, of moving beyond survival.

Maria Campbell, through her autobiography, serves to make our knowledge of women in Métis communities more precise. She helps to
refine available data in generational terms. The alliances of white traders and Indian women in fur trade post contexts are clearly represented by Maria. She states that these issues are qualitatively different from second-generation alliances involving the first women of biracial descent, and second-generation from third-generation ones. She brings out the detailed family histories of the Métis communities with time depths of three, four, and five generations, and brings out important and subtle comparisons and paths of change, as the experiences of these native families accumulated, and as persons outside them in turn responded and reacted to them, helping to confer on them a new ethnicity. It is clear that such studies will also contribute to give better knowledge of Métis demographic profiles to the dominant society.

Similarly, Jeannette Armstrong indicates that for a Native, life is not as easy as it is to the other. Also, the process of knowing life of oneself occurs through lived experience which grows from one’s willingness to scrutinize and preserve. She says that the Natives greet and respect the vast landscape as part of his/her own being. Hence, she says, the Natives will pay great homage to the natural world and so if protagonists find themselves falling apart, as it happens in the case of Tommy and Penny, they wish for, and initiate the real and spiritual relationship with nature, so that they may overcome their failures, and understand the larger and original meaning of life.
Maria Campbell contributes her time as being a cultural and political activist for Native rights. She works for the growth of Native people, especially for women and children. She is fascinated in oral storytelling as she says in her conversation with Lutz:

…I am not a writer, bumping around all over reading and talking about “great literature.” I don’t think of myself as an authority on that. I get quite embarrassed when I have to speak from the point of view of a writer, because I really don’t know what that is. I know what a storyteller is. A storyteller is a community healer and teacher. There’s lots of work in my community, which is important. (Lutz, 42)

Maria’s works are confined to a small circle which she calls “my community.” Her autobiography portrays it very vividly. Her contribution to the literary world as a writer is less when compared to Armstrong. After Halfbreed, she is in a long way to come out with another fiction that would support the Native people. This shows her meager commitment to literature. On the other hand, Armstrong has created a strong ethnic background in the literary field. More than a writer, she has extended her wings in all other aspects related to the developmental activities of the Native people. Her longing desire is to make Native people aware of themselves, their strengths and dynamism with which they can utilize their potential toward their upliftment.
To me it’s important that Native people be brought to health. It’s important for me, as a necessary process for all the people, that Native people be brought back to that process, because it’s here that I’ve been able to see help, and wholeness in sprit, in balance with all the other things. And it’s here that I know the work has to be done among all of us. And it’s here that Native people’s words, and their thinking, and their process, and their system, their philosophy, world view or whatever, need to be understood, and looked at, and assimilated by other people. That’s so important, and so critical, and so necessary, because we all deserve—we all deserve—the happiness, and the joy, and the cleanness, and the purity. We all deserve that! And we are, I guess, being bereft by our own actions, by our own unthinkingness. (Lutz 32)

Both the Native writers have shown great interest in the part of coming back home. Maria Campbell, in her autobiography, finds a spiritual power ruling over her when she comes back to her home ground. Similarly, Armstrong in her discussion of Slash and Whispering in shadows seeks to center her Native protagonists’ inextricable relatedness to their homes. The home is their centre, and however far they may wander from it due to incidental force, they have to get back to it, in spite of the dangers that lie on the way. The home
making the protagonists achieve involvement in experiments and troubles caused by the deculturizing traps set for them by the conventional culture. Home, to the natives, is also an essential part of their culture, like the society and the land. Hence, they have to get re-integrated to it to remain true Natives.

‘To be home’ means to dwell within the landscape of the familiar, a landscape of collective memories; it is an oppositional concept to being in exile. ‘Being home’ means to be a nation, to have access to land, to be able to raise your own children, and to have political control. It involves having a collective sense of dignity. In a postcolonial situation, in the subversion of the stories by the colonizer, one is able to reassert one’s narratives. A collective memory emerges from a specific location, spatially and temporally, and includes such things as a relationship to land, songs, ceremonies, language and stories. (Ruffo 17)

The act of returning to the home-ground is seen in the novels of Atwood and Alice Munro. In Surfacing, the narrator’s voyage to the home land makes her realize her own self. Also, her amnesia gets cured after reaching her mother land. Likewise in Lady Oracle, Joan says that she should one day go back to her native place so that it would help her to come out of her psychological problems. Alice Munro, in her The View from Castle Rock, brings out the narrators eagerness
to reach the home-ground and research the history of her own generations.

Maria and Armstrong plead for the cause of psycho-social dislocation and segregation for the Native people who exist in this prejudiced society. They have a unique contention that society is generally unaware of Native people and Native requirements and desires. According to them, the Natives have been misinterpreted and typecast into unconsciousness. It is this separation of Native people that can be most disparaging. They find a reality of isolation within the superior and prevailing white society, and isolation from one’s own society and people. They feel that this takes place when a Native person pierces and participates in white recognized and white dominated social, educational and cultural institutions or becomes concerned in interpersonal relationship, especially sexual relationships with white people. They strongly depict that alcoholism, drug abuse, family violence, suicide, prostitution are the products of hopelessness, despair, poverty and loss of identity.

I didn’t really understand what she was talking about until she started to throw my clothes outside. When I started to pick Lisa up, she tried to stop me. I lost all control of myself then and struck her. I threatened to kill her if she touched my baby. John finally separated us and got Lisa and me into the car. Bonny was standing outside screaming that I’d
ruined her brother’s life, that I was nothing but a dirty Indian Breed. (Campbell 110)

The non-Native writers fictions are in no sense theoretical statements about feminism, though they are all written out of a conviction of the worth of women and the necessity for women to be critically conscious of their own roles in conventional social structures. Novels and short stories do what theory cannot do, for they deal with particulars of individual experience, problematizing theoretical issues by writing in the instabilities which are the very conditions of knowing. Many of these writers’ stories are about the lives of girls and women and are concerned with exploration and survival, crossing boundaries, challenging limits and glimpsing new prospects. Such a description makes them sound like stories of male heroism. The main reason for this difference is that heroism is redefined in these fictions, for these are stories about inner adventures which are often invisible to other people. Their novels have women writers as protagonists engaged in a struggle with language and inherited literary conventions to find more adequate ways of telling about women’s experiences, fighting their way out of silence to project more authentic images of how women feel and what they do. Both lack the sense of liveliness as their problems are described in a sense of less importance when compared to that of Native women’s.
First person narrative is the common technique followed by both the Native and non-Native writers selected for study. First person narrators, ironic self-reflective narratives, and symbolic or even mythic structures are common in their writings. There are, however, elements that place them within a broadly-defined Canadian tradition. The major achievement of Canadian literature is virtually a contemporary manifestation. Canada has produced authors who are classic in the sense of possessing greater visions. With these writers, Canadian literature continues to be studied primarily as a part of Canadian life and almost exclusively in its "social and historical setting." Canadian writers often review each others' work and generally publicize the literary enterprise through various forms of public exposure. Encouraged, for better or worse, by such institutions as the Canada Council, many writers are continually on display as personalities and performers; some are forced, willingly or unwillingly, into the role of cultural 'guru'. Survival and isolation, for instance, are not unique to Canadian literature. Canadian authors may use these universal themes in characteristic ways that reveal a common cultural focus, but the existence and nature of such a focus can be determined only within a consistent series of comparative contexts. Particular themes must be situated within the total form of a particular work; that work within the author's canon; that canon within the national literature; that literature within the context of literature in general.
Atwood and Munro adopt a method contrary to this critical induction. Their approach treats the whole of Canadian literature, in effect, as a vast, uncontextualized commonplace book from which isolated fragments are selected arbitrarily to support the individual hypothesis of what the "Canadian consciousness" is. This method, and the preoccupation with content it necessitates, corresponds to the operating procedures of the sociologist and produces, once again, a sociological, not a literary meaning for the term ‘Canadian’.

Canadian literature has met a significant change with the emergence of women writers. The male power in the literature has gradually given way to the women writers. Both the Native and non-Native women writers discuss the problems of women under political, social, psychological, and cultural background. They possess certain common qualities in describing womanhood. They also suggest solutions for the problems of women who are forced to satisfy the males’ physical urges. Their writings are mainly concerned with certain existential issues as women’s liberation, feeling of anxiety and absurdity of male supremacy, etc. They plead for feminine identity and also for promoting the man-woman relationship.

The object of reality is personalized in the writings of Native authors whereas this reality is viewed with a distinct sense in the non-Native authors. Reality in the sense, real sufferings, absurdness and
socio-economic conditions of the Native people are perceived in the Native writings. On the other hand, self identity is the central theme with the non-Native writers.

Margaret Atwood’s own self-conscious obsession with the paradoxes of the act of artistic creation in both her prose and her verse was not unnoticed by her critics and explicators, though few have ventured to link these aesthetic, formal concerns to her moral thematic issues. This is presumably because they feel, as indeed many have, that such literary introversion somehow precludes the moral orientation of the English novel condition. Her early use of the short lyric poem has led many to suggest that for Atwood, to write is to fix, to order into a static form. But her increasing concentration on narrative, by nature a more temporal, kinetic art form, should attempt a critical review of this ‘circle game’ interpretation of the ‘creative process according to Atwood’- both in its formal and in its thematic dimensions. (Grace&Weir 17)

Glancing at the point of comparison, one can see the writings of Atwood and Munro as a part of a unified project. While generalizing these works it is possible for the readers to view their individual strengths and weaknesses. Taken together, they reflect multiple
voices, divergent critical approaches to various "texts," and wide-ranging analyses. This said, however, it may be useful to note a few similarities among them. They are described as feminist in their orientation. A comparison can be done with a carefully focused study on Atwood’s *Surfacing* with Munro’s *The View from the Castle Rock*. As the subtitle of *Surfacing* tells us, it is "a Reader's Guide" to Atwood's watershed novel, and its format and style are particularly suited to its predominantly undergraduate audience. Similarly, Munro has presented *The View from the Castle Rock* with her unique style of setting it in her soil. In *Surfacing*, the narrator comes back to her place to find out the mystery of her lost father. Likewise, in *The View from the Castle Rock*, the narrator returns home with a view to find out the history of her own tribe. Also, “gothic fantasy” is common in their writings.

Women’s fiction is insistently double in the recognition of contradictions within the self and the perceptions of incongruity between social surfaces and what is hidden beneath them. It is interesting to find gothic fantasy that old devious literature of female dread and desire, surviving in the fiction of Atwood, Munro and Hebert, updated certainly but still retaining its original charge of menace, mystery and malignancy. In all these stories there is an intricate balance between the urge for self-
discovery and women’s self-doubts, between the celebration of new freedoms and a sense of precariousness. (Moss, 28)

Campbell and Armstrong focus on the Natives’ problems that are portrayed in their novels. Both writers are convinced that the attitudes of the mainstream people have negative and disastrous consequences for the contemporary Natives. They identify mis-education, stereotypes, racist and discriminatory practices as the causes for the Natives’ problems. They strongly believe that education has affected the personal development of the Natives. Both writers view education which is based upon white middle-class culture as a major force in increasing the feelings of inferiority and shame and in lowering the self-respect and self-image of the Natives.

Campbell and Armstrong feel that a large majority of mainstream people are ignorant about the Natives and it is the root-cause of the Natives’ pitiable plight. Both writers demonstrate the importance of familiarity with Native culture, which truly brings the Natives a sense of identity and confidence in them. Regaining their Native culture and customs and mingling with their own people will have a positive effect on Natives’ consciousness. Campbell and Armstrong believe the Natives’ feeling of racial inferiority to be a crucial problem for Natives today. This inferiority complex is so deeply rooted in the minds of the Natives that they feel themselves to be second-class citizens. This psychological
condition, unfortunately, helps to worsen the present socio-economic situation of the Native people.

These Native writers address the cultural conflicts in which their traditional values and sense of self-worth have been destroyed by contact with White civilization. They describe the near death of the “self” in their writings. Both writers argue convincingly that an awareness of who the Natives are is greatly needed to revive their fortunes and help them survive as a distinct people in Canadian society.

Unlike the Native writers, the white writers plead for revival nature and for a remedy for the psychological problems of their people. This is because when compared to the Natives, the mainstream people are less subject to poverty and other socio-economic problems. Being distinct viewers, the white writers fail to present the wounded self with reality. Native women appear as characters in much of the Fiction written by white women, where they are shamans leading the protagonists in the quests toward a new relationship with the nature and the cosmos. (Godard 1)

The non-Native writers speak through their narrators about marriage and its failure, and mother-child relationships. They are able to receive a wide recognition from the audience because their writings reflect the self-image of the mainstream society. They possibly tend to say that the lack of closed knit family circle and child negligence are the reasons for the problems that the non-Native people face. The writings
of Atwood and Munro highlight them as skilled and versatile stylists, capable of working with success in a variety of genres.

Although racism influences the economic lives of the Natives, the impact of sexism complicates and still worsens the economic situation of Native women. Campbell and Armstrong speak out the double impact of racism and sexism in the lives of Native women. They say that Native women experience unemployment levels almost twice as high as non-Native women and more than twice as high as non-Native men. They find these high levels of unemployment as a contributing factor to the poverty of Native women.

The writings of Canadian Native women indicate that they have a radically different sense of self than the non-Natives. Their writings document the material givens of oppression in the lives of Native women and men. They also document the search for and discovery of a way to organize around that oppression, to control the material givens of oppression as much as possible in the present, while working to change them for the future.

The internalized oppression of the Native characters is even more devastating than the material oppression they suffer. Armstrong says that Slash is brought in a home in which traditional values are very strongly stressed. Yet he is not immuned to internalized oppression. According to Armstrong the traditional upbringing may even make the internalized oppression more difficult to deal with. All Natives in
The white writers take art as a moral issue and they feel that their responsibility is not only to describe their world, but also to criticize it, to bear witness to its failures, and, finally, to prescribe corrective measures. Atwood’s and Munro’s protagonists share a curious ambivalence towards their craft. They create illusion rather than transform reality. Their protagonists are always explorers through tradition and myth in search of a new identity and in search of a voice, a language, an art, with which to proclaim that identity. Particularly in this sense, they can be seen as ‘feminist’ writers, as they show concern for the psychological and physical survival of women. They see this in terms, not merely of individual survival, but of sisterhood.

By intermingling different temporal frames and multiple points of view, the non-Native writers’ narrative technique as a whole contributes to the problematizing of the notion of subjectivity. Viewed from a

Halfbreed and Slash are affected by internalized oppression; the only difference between them exists in their reactions to or the coping mechanisms they use to deal with it.

Campbell and Armstrong, in exposing Canadian colonialism in writing, begin the process of healing that can end both the material and internalized oppression. Since Native writers Campbell and Armstrong tell their own stories in their own words, the truths they communicate cannot only illustrate but also begin the process of healing and in doing so, can begin to change the world.
feminine perspective, Atwood’s and Munro’s writings appear to be an intricate analysis of female history and recording of the dismemberment of the female body.

Campbell and Armstrong discuss the characteristics of stereotypical of Native people which tend to be negative. They raise a question- whether these traits are the real characteristics of the contemporary Native people or the false perceptions of white people. They say, in either case, it is an ironical fact that the stereotypes are partially or greatly reinforced by the realities which are manifest in Native communities. They argue that the Natives tend to have suffered from dominant stereotypes which represent them as drunken, filthy, and lazy.

Campbell and Armstrong show the effects of the attitudes of the dominant society on the Natives, and the importance of familiarity with their own culture to take pride in themselves and self-identity. They are of the view that if Natives take pride in them, it will give them the inner strength which is necessary for survival in the mainstream society. As far as identity crisis is concerned, Campbell and Armstrong’s arguments for increased familiarity with Native culture are clearly valid. The fictional approach in their writings provides an enhanced understanding of the inner feelings of the Natives. If there is any gap between the real world of the Natives and the literary approach, it lies in the elements of hope and expectation which Campbell and Armstrong put into their works. Both writers are convinced that the sufferings of the Natives will
ultimately fade away, as they have presented possible solutions to the Natives’ problems in their writings.

Feminism is commemorated in the writings of both Native and non-Native women writers. This distinctive feature brings their works together. Moreover, their voice of feminism is subjected towards their characters, for whom they plead for. The sexual authority played by male arrogant society, is intensely explored by them. Their despair and unfulfilment in marriage is well echoed in their writings. They violently dispute the traditionalists who force the females to be in the darkened end of the civilization.

All these four women writers, Maria Campbell, Jeannette Armstrong, Margaret Atwood, and Alice Munro, are against the view that the feminine thinking cannot be ideal. They are able to construct women with reality as they are concerned with members of their gender. They tend to create a paradise of love, nature and beauty for the wounded self. This shows their utter disgust to the society and its prevalent beliefs and practices. A woman attains a stage of fullness by sharing her experiences with others. Their narrative technique brings their writings close to the readers. The roots of these women writers’ self-righteousness are deep and go a long way in celebrating their womanhood.

Self-discovery is not portrayed as a historical process, but it takes the form of an abrupt and visionary apprehension of underlying unity
which leads to an overcoming of ironic and alienated self-consciousness. The conceptualization of female identity as an essence to be recovered rather than a goal to be worked toward is reflected in the literary structures of the Native and White writers which foreground the symbolic and lyrical dimension of the texts of these select women writers.

**Surfacing** has been interpreted as a novel of self-discovery, as an anti-colonial novel, and finally as a feminist novel. **Surfacing** can also be interpreted in terms of Ecofeminism. Feminism is an ideology which seeks not only to understand the world but to change it to the advantage of women. As a feminist, Atwood aims at making women the subject of her own story and not the object of male desire and male satisfaction or a whipping block for male frustration. Their quest for self-knowledge and self-realization which can in turn lead to relationships based on mutual understanding and respect.

In Canada, Colonial exploitation is seen as a kind of exploitation of both Nature and women. Colonial power-structures have gone deep into the collective unconscious of Canada and have become a metaphor for feminine and Nature and exploitation for women writers. The kind of attitude that links Colonial exploitation of female and Nature together gives rise to Ecofeminism. Atwood greatly deals with women’s experiences in a male-dominated world. In **Surfacing** she has dealt with Ecofeminism. She makes the female protagonist give voice not only
towards the exploitation of feminine self but also towards the exploitation of the landscape of Canada. Similarly, Alice Munro speaks about Ecofeminism in her *The View from Castle Rock*.

Only women were allowed to care about landscape and not to think always of its subjugation and productivity. My grandmother, for example, was famous for having saved a line of silver maples along the lane. These trees grew beside a crop field and they were getting big and old- their roots interfered with the ploughing and they shaded too much of the crop. My grandfather and my father went out one morning and ready to cut the first of them down. But my grandmother saw what they were doing from the kitchen window and she flew out in her apron and harangued and upbraided them so that they finally had to take up the axes and the crosscut saw and leave the scene. (Munro 2006: 130)

A comparative study with the novels of Native and non-Native women writers offers the readers a multi-ethnic, a multi-cultural and feministic experience which transforms their human dimension. One of the major contributions to feminism is to provide the historical and cultural analysis that weaves the various forms of oppression into a coherent theory of action. In the perception of the present writers, feminism is not just a woman's issue. Feminism, in all its diversity, can enlighten, enlarge, and empower everyone. The writers taken for discussion mainly deal with the emotional defeat and frustration of the
females on the one side and their inability to escape from the cages of
the male dominant society on the other.

This apart, they also provide certain rare glimpses at the cultural
and traditional aspects of Canada. They attempt to achieve certain
triumph by developing a sustained comprehensive vision of life.

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SUMMING UP

The present research investigation centres around the novels of Native writers, Maria Campbell and Jeanette Armstrong against those of non-Native writers, Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro. Their writings are analyzed textually from the point of view of the problems of women, without resorting to the ideology of. The women writers chosen for discussion develop an empathy towards the issues of the women. They speak rather personally, as they themselves have been victimized in difficult circumstances in their own societies. These writers contend that women should not be caged birds in the hands of men. They should develop their strength and meet the challenging world forcefully. They suggest that education and social commitment will help women to articulate themselves freely without any reservation.

The Native Writers, Maria Campbell and Jeanette Armstrong present the sufferings of women from a Native’s perspective. They address the problems that spring from poverty, lack of education and racial discrimination. Campbell and Armstrong say that Native women are strong in their will-power when compared to men and non-Native women. The emotional impact of these authors is well understood by
their readers. They recognize the writer’s narrative expertise as they hear it in natural narrative.

From the Native writers’ point of view, aboriginal Canadians are decent, fair, tolerant and compassionate people; they are deeply frustrated and profoundly disappointed at the way they have been treated by both the provincial and federal governments. Also, they praise the aboriginal leadership and the Native’s dedication, eloquence and common sense, as they dealt with government and solved the problems that beset aboriginal communities. Campbell and Armstrong insist on the necessity for the preservation of the Northern environment and the rights of the Native peoples living on the frontiers. For the Native people, their claims are the means to preserve of their culture, their languages, their economic mode - the tools with which they can continue to assert their distinct identity in the midst of the Whites and still have access to the social, economic and political institutions of the dominant society.

The present thesis focuses on Native novels to emphasize the basic rights of aboriginal women who argue how and why the implementation of these rights enhances the democratic ideals that lead to a successful solution of their problems. This, in turn, should promote a conceptual framework which permits the equal-status integration of Aboriginal peoples into a multinational and multicultural Canada, under conditions of mutual trust, acceptance and well-being. Both the Native
writers have searched for the best methods to bring down the troubles of their people in the context of individual freedom, fundamental equality, economic development, and maintenance of democratic institutions and ideals. These women have achieved the good will and mutual understanding with the Aboriginal Canadians.

In this thesis, there is a focus on the need for a comfortable, political and social environments for the Natives, including the socio-political institutions, that are necessary to permit the Aboriginal Canadians to experience equal-status and similar socio-economic development alongside economic and political unity and peace.

The writings of Campbell and Armstrong weave about the warp of their grandmother’s words. Their texts are communal texts and are designed to create a unique Native community. Most Native women’s narrators are traditional, empowered by their grandmothers who are the true authors of their texts. The Native writers say that the activities of the grandmothers are important in shaping their life-history.

The Native women writers have found a notable position in the Canadian literary history with their strong emotional and extensive orientation skills. They describe how aboriginal women struggle to maintain the traditional roles they hold within their communities. They observe that successful aboriginal women writers step out of their traditional women’s role and marry outside their aboriginal culture or
alienate themself from their husbands to obtain a safe living. They are of the view that the breakdown of women’s traditional culture has a direct effect on their children and their education. Campbell and Armstrong give vent to their bitter feelings owing to the lapses in the Canadian education and child-welfare system.

Campbell and Armstrong consider the aboriginal women’s work in three distinct economies: domestic work at home, paid work outside home and a third one unique to the Native women: traditional or bush work. They say that the domestic work includes housework and childcare and it is largely an unpaid work for aboriginal women. Because of the heavy burden of domestic work, many women are unable to render childcare and thus are unable to obtain jobs and participate in formal economy.

These two Native writers find marriage as a conflict in which women’s traditional values and sense of self-worth have been destroyed. They feel that women’s self-pride is abducted by their men in the act of marriage. The Native writers know that their fellow women suffer from want of self-respect when fostered by their ambiguous cultural tradition. They feel that when the native women are dictatorially pulled into the underworld of white urban society, they will be forced to agree with the White’s concept that there are no good Natives. As a move towards the miserable situation of mere isolation, the Native women start destroying themselves through alcohol and drugs. Loss of
self-identity takes the Native women to end their life. But Campbell and Armstrong have given viable solutions to the women’s crisis and thereby have made the Natives retain their self-esteem and self dignity.

Campbell and Armstrong have fictionally offered to address the needs of the aboriginal women. They also highlight the importance of Native women’s enrolment in politics and social developmental programs. They suggest that an open-ended coverage should be given to these women who are discriminated by the White society. Also, they say that adequate remedy should be provided to those who seek relief for such discriminatory behaviour.

The writings of the non-Native writer, Margaret Atwood, are identified owing to her surfacing theme of self realization. Atwood’s novels are preoccupied with the ‘self’. Her novels explore the impressions, thoughts, and emotions that constitute a person’s being. This is most often effected through the creation of a single protagonist whose focalizing perspective and narrative voice organize the plot, and thematic concern. In Surfacing and Lady Oracle, Atwood speaks of the ‘divided self’ of her protagonists. She shows the ‘divided self’ as the split between fantasy and reality, the unconscious and the conscious, the mind and the body and so on. The inner divisions that afflict all Atwood’s protagonists can be understood as a manifestation of a female’s conflicting possibilities in the male dominated society.
The alienation that makes human subjectivity and its relation to identity-formation is well illustrated in the Atwood’s *Surfacing* and *Lady Oracle*. The concept of aggressive relativity that originates in the moment of specular identification perfectly suits Atwood’s novels. Through her writings, Atwood is able to create for herself a new position with regard to symbolic discourse and articulate a revised subjective position with regard to desire. Atwood highlights the crippling emphasis that society places on the female image as a consumer item, as a blank page to be written on. She points out how these blank pages are to be filled in by women themselves and how women should write their own personal stories.

Atwood’s writings make the readers feel that women should not be discriminated in any sphere. Her focus is on developing a reciprocal relationship, a relationship of mutual trust, concern and understanding. She says that women should not be subjected to the mechanics of civilization. She internalizes the disciplinary mechanism and this effects the production of isolated and self-policing subjects. Atwood does not confine herself to a particular area where power is exercised. She has examined different patterns of domination of men over women. She explains how economic, cultural, psychological and political abuses reinforce and double back on one another. She also investigates the process through which the powerless come to resist their masters, creating alternative spaces and thereby arriving at self-mastery.
Likewise, Alice Munro probes the female psyche in her writings. They reveal her concern and commitment for women. Her stories deal with rural culture as they are set in rural background. She idealizes the lost oral culture within the confines of the realistic representation of the world around her. Munro’s adherence to the oral storytelling tradition has drawn the attention of her readers. It is obvious that the structure of Munro’s stories cannot be accounted for without some reference to orality. The context of oral tradition helps to explain the layered nature of Munro’s stories, how they meander like a river toward no conspicuous goal. Although Munro is of mixed Scotch, Irish and English descent, she seems to identify most with her father’s Scottish ancestors. So, her stories have numerous explicit Scottish references. Her response to the Scottish experience enables her to resist, even as she acknowledges the power of nostalgia.

Munro uses several traditional metaphors to describe her women characters in her stories. Most of her characters seem to get loose from the narrator’s knowledge and control. The openness of Munro’s characters to metamorphosis has received considerable critical attention. On a close reading of her stories, one can categorize Munro as a writer of realism. She uses crossed narrativeness in her short fiction where the characters unknowingly extract roles from other characters’ lives. Though there are strange twists and ironies in her stories, her genre and method are familiar to the readers.
It is further argued in the thesis that the non-Native writers Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro have created a positive outlook and have helped the readers to recognize how fully they are to be internalized in a society. They plead for a fair share for women who are alienated in this world of artificiality. With a rebellious self, they say that women are not to serve as mirrors for men. The writers follow a kind of continuum of disconnection in their works, wherein their protagonists are positioned from a sense of dislocation and estrangement. They bring out the varied functional behaviours, multiple personalities, and complete psychological disintegration in their characters.

As members of the mainstream Canadian society, these White writers also have protested against the pitiable predicament of the Native women. They allude to the Natives’ poor economic background, and the miseries they endure. Through this they plead for a better womanhood. They act as researchers who are particularly sensitive to the Canadian social context as something that needs to be restructured. They take note of what they see and hear about the Natives and work it out in their writings. Academic reviews of their books have tended to appreciate them as ethnographies and dismiss their theoretical contributions. They tend to use the descriptive, rather than the theoretical materials of current Canadian ethnologists.

This project further examines the historical, legal, social and political evolution of aboriginal people in Canada as seen in these select
Native women writers. There is a strong international legal evidence and support for the essence of the Canadian government position viewing aboriginal Canadians as an integral part of the Canadian multinational state and under the laws and jurisdiction of the Canadian constitution. But this approach fails legally at the junctures where it would ignore the interrelation between Canadian constitutional law and international law.

Both Native and non-Native writers have tried in their own ways to console the wounded feminine self to a great extent. Women writers, who say one story of them, cannot stop from telling another story. This is apparent in the authors taken for discussion as they bring out similar and dissimilar stories of the fellow women’s sufferings in their literary texts.

The women writers included in this research work advocate a few modes of life and conduct which will help their fellow women to come out of their suffering. They say that success stories of aboriginal and non-aboriginal women should be taken as role models. Women’s importance in the families and social commitments should be realized and thereby women must be encouraged to come out with their own words and deeds. They are sure that women’s commitment will bring about a positive social change in their communities. The writers urge to resist anything that violates the female codes of decorum.

The women writers, Native and White, have used their narrative technique as an optical instrument to trace the sufferings of women.
Their writings have strengthened the cultural and traditional aspects of Canada. Their works establish a cordial relationship between reality of womanhood and literature. Through this bond, they believe that the women will attain status on par with men.

There is every scope for further research investigation in this area. The Native women writers can be compared with Native male writers to comprehend if the female’s perception of life and society is different in any way from the male’s. Other than Maria Campbell and Jeannette Armstrong, women writers such as Janice Acoose and Lee Maracle can be read on the same line. They can be compared and contrasted with the Indian tribal women’s writings or with those of the Dalit women. Such approaches will bring about a defined literary relationship between the Native/Dalit minority women writers and the (White) majority writers. After all, there are always vital but unexplored links between the literatures of the world.
Select Native and Non-Native Canadian Women Writers: A Comparative Study

- A Synopsis-

Thesis Submitted to Madurai Kamaraj University for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English

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- A Synopsis -

Native culture and Native society were in a state of distress and disintegration by the time they were first described. Early accounts of the position of Indian women in their cultures were written by fur traders and missionaries, and they speak as much about the ideological perspectives of the authors as they do about the subject at hand. Unfortunately, Native women have left no written accounts of their status and the impact of colonization on their lives. One can, however, examine their status and changing roles in the myths, oral history, and materials written from the viewpoint of contemporary Native women. The position of women in Eskimo culture is a controversial issue for present day Inuit women. Some accounts of westward expansion manage to achieve a strange mixture of sexism and jingoism.

The Canadian government’s policy toward Aboriginal people has followed the dual goal of protection and assimilation. This means that aboriginals would be protected against negative aspects of Canadian society while at the same time exposed to the White social components which would allow them to take on the values and norms of Canadian society and result in their assimilation. However, over the past half century,
Aboriginal people have become more "Pan-Indian", more nationalistic and more militaristic in their quest for finding their niche in Canadian society. The central component of this movement has been sovereignty recognition by Canadians and ultimately the recognition of an Aboriginal nation state.

Although Canada is one of the world's most secure and prosperous countries, its Indigenous peoples who make up nearly 3 percent of its population and who form the numerical majority in the northern half of its territory are significantly disadvantaged. The recent clashes of culture and values that have occurred in Canada between the dominant society and the Native peoples have forced reconsideration by Canadians of the assumptions by which they live and of the means by which they hope to prosper in future. With the advance of industry to the frontier at a time when indigenous peoples' ideas of self-determination are emerging in contemporary forms, these age-old questions of the relationship between dominant societies cast in the European mould and indigenous peoples confront us again.

The Dene, the Métis and the Inuit are advancing proposals for two new political units in the Northwest Territories. Their proposals related to aboriginal representations in new political institutions and aboriginal rights in all spheres are still inaccessible. Whatever their outcome be, they are evidence of a renewed determination and a new capacity on the part of
Native peoples to establish a distinct and contemporary place for themselves in Canadian life.

Canadian arguments for coexistence and national policies that take into account its own multicultural diversity may be translated into arguments of feminism, for the power politics of imperialism and of gender have much in common. The nature of power relationships between the sexes and the social and literary consequences of this have been brought to public attention by the feminist movement, though the long history of such relationships has already been written into women’s literature preceding the last twenty five years. Contemporary Canadian women writers are aware of themselves as inheritors of a female literary tradition which includes both European and Canadian predecessors. Women’s writing has always been characterized by the urge to challenge the up-growing anti-feministic work.

Many of these women’s stories about the lives of girls and women between the 1950s and the 1980s are concerned with exploration and survival, crossing boundaries, challenging limits and glimpsing new prospects. Such a description makes them sound like stories of male heroism. The main reason for this difference is that heroism is redefined in these fictions, for these are stories about inner adventures which are often
invisible to other people. Many of these novels have women writers as protagonists engaged in a struggle with language and inherited literary conventions to find more adequate ways of telling about women’s experiences, fighting their way out of silence to project more authentic images of how women feel and what they do.

In the 1980s Native women in Canada began writing themselves into Canadian letters. Beatrice Culleton’s *In Search of April Raintree* (1983), Jeannette Armstrong’s *Slash* (1985), Ruby Slipper Jack’s *Honour the Sun* (1987), and Joan Crate’s *Breathing Water* (1989) are the first novels by a new generation of authors addressing the lives of Métis and Indian people in Canada today.

The present research project aims at analyzing the problems faced by Native and non-Native women in the contextual world. The feminine self is an enigma to the male gender. Positively; it is clear that the male personae elapse the feministic expression in their diction. According to them, it is an abuse to think of portraying the male arrogance towards the female. The women writers bring out the shameful, brutal activities of the men in their writings. The root cause of the women’s power is assumed in the writers’ aspiration towards womanhood. It is elite to elucidate womanhood in an effusive way in the hands of a woman writer, as they
plead towards the self challengingly. However, the way of writing differs, as they reflect their personal self in many aspects. The mere admiration of women’s writings tempt the women to have an awareness of the injustice done to them by the male dominated society and literature.

The present researcher compares the works of the Native writers, Maria Campbell and Jeannette Armstrong with those of the Non-Native writers, Margaret Atwood and Alice Munro. Maria Campbell was born in a Métis community in northern Saskatchewan in April, 1940. The proceedings of her life from early childhood to adulthood have been described in her autobiography *Halfbreed* (1973). It became the smash hit and still is the most important and seminal book authored by a Native person from Canada. Jeannette Armstrong, the first Native American woman novelist, was born in the Okanagan Reserve near Penticton, British Columbia. Her novels *Slash* and *Whispering in Shadows* are taken up for discussion in this thesis.

Margaret Atwood is a fiction writer, poet, critic, cartoonist, editor, children’s book author, lecturer, teacher and an active participant in literary organizations. Central among her wide-ranging interests is a fascination for storytelling. Her fictions simultaneously tell stories and comment metafictively on the narrative process, engaging readers with a provocative series of questions. Her novels *Surfacing* and *Lady Oracle* are focused in
the present doctoral dissertation as there are solid illustrations in these two.

Canadian writer Alice Munro was born in 1931 and grew up in Wingham, South West Ontario and has writing short fiction since 1950. Her works comprise collections of short stories, and one, published as a novel, is actually a set of inter-linked stories which falls between the two genres. Her accessible, moving stories are set in her native Canada, in small, provincial towns like the one in which she grew up, and explore human relationships through ordinary everyday events. Although not necessarily directly autobiographical, they reflect the author's own life-experiences, are concerned with women's lives. Her *Dance Happy Shades, Lives of Girls and Women* and *The View from Castle Rock* are interpreted in this dissertation.

The present research work analyzes the works of the authors from a social and feministic angle. The researcher proposes to bring out the intense sufferings of the Native women as depicted in their literature as against the little miseries of the majority women. As Armstrong says, ‘it’s not dependent on sex, men and women. But currently women, womankind, I guess, has been promoting that thinking’.

Campbell and Armstrong consider the aboriginal women’s work in three distinct economies: domestic work at home, paid work outside home and a third one unique to the Native women: traditional or bush work. They
say that the domestic work includes housework and child care and it is largely an unpaid work for aboriginal women. Because of the heavy burden of domestic work, many women are unable to render childcare and thus are unable to obtain jobs and participate in formal economy.

Atwood and Munro say that women should not be subjected to the mechanics of civilization. They internalize the disciplinary mechanism and this effects the production of isolated and self-policing subjects. Atwood does not confine herself to a particular area where power is exercised. She has examined different patterns of domination of men over women. Munro explains how economic, cultural, psychological and political abuse reinforce and double back on one another. Both investigate the process through which the powerless come to resist their masters, creating alternative spaces and thereby arriving at self-mastery.

Unlike the Native writers, the white writers plead for revival of nature and for a remedy for the psychological problems of their people. This is because when compared to the Natives, the mainstream people are less subject to poverty and other socio-economic problems. Being distinct viewers, the white writers fail to present the wounded self with reality.

The Native writers address the cultural conflicts in which their traditional values and sense of self-worth have been destroyed by contact with White civilization. They describe the near death of the “self” in their
writings. Both writers argue convincingly that an awareness of who the Natives are is greatly needed to revive their fortunes and help them survive as a distinct people in Canadian society.

The non-Native writers speak through their narrators about marriage and its failure, and mother-child relationships. They are able to receive a wide recognition from the audience because their writings reflect the self-image of the mainstream society. They possibly tend to say that the lack of closed knit family circle and child negligence are the reasons for the problems that the non-Native people face. The writings of Atwood and Munro highlight them as skilled and versatile stylists, capable of working with success in a variety of genres.

The White writers take art as a moral issue and they feel that their responsibility is not only to describe their world, but also to criticize it, to bear witness to its failures, and, finally, to prescribe corrective measures. Atwood’s and Munro’s protagonists share a curious ambivalence towards their craft. They create illusion rather than transform reality. Their protagonists are always explorers through tradition and myth in search of a new identity and in search of a voice, a language, an art, with which to proclaim that identity.
Although racism influences the economic lives of the Natives, the impact of sexism complicates and still worsens the economic situation of Native women. Campbell and Armstrong speak out the double impact of racism and sexism in the lives of Native women. They say that Native women experience unemployment levels almost twice as high as non-Native women and more than twice as high as non-Native men. They find these high levels of unemployment as a contributing factor to the poverty of Native women.

Campbell and Armstrong, in exposing Canadian colonialism in writing, begin the process of healing that can end both the material and internalized oppression. Since Native writers Campbell and Armstrong tell their own stories in their own words, the truths they communicate cannot only illustrate but also begin the process of healing and in doing so, can begin to change the world.

Both Native and non-Native writers have tried in their own ways to console the wounded feminine self to a great extent. Women writers, who say one story of them, cannot stop from telling another story. This is apparent in the authors taken for discussion as they bring out similar and dissimilar stories of the fellow women’s sufferings in their literary texts.

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comprehend if the female’s perception of life and society is different in any way from the male’s. Other than Maria Campbell and Jeannette Armstrong, women writers such as Janice Acoose and Lee Maracle can be read on the same line. They can be compared and contrasted with the Indian tribal women’s writings or those of the Dalit women. Such approaches will bring about a defined literary relationship between the Native/Dalit minority women writers and the (White) majority writers. After all, there are always vital but unexplored links between the literatures of the world.