Chapter Three

ON AND OFF THE RESERVATION:
JEANNETTE ARMSTRONG’S SLASH
AND
LEE MARACLE’S SUNDOGS
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Jeannette Armstrong’s Slash, ever since its publication in 1985, has resisted easy interpretations and categorizations according to standard literary canonical norms. A work heralded by Harmut Lutz as “The first novel by an Indian woman in Canada” (13), the book was "Not readily assemble into a Western literary traditions " as it "necessitates a confrontation for non - Native and feminist readers with questions of subject position and cultural hegemony”(Hoy 68), while Betsy Warland worried that "As a white woman, I have no context ären which to accurately place the book” (68) Frank Davey located difficulty" in the white reception of the Novel” and Barbara Godard found the novel a very 'flat' book not likely to make the bestsellers list in Canada” (218) and like Godard, Lynette Hunter read it as " a well meaning but naïve, or simply as failed or dismissible because it cannot be understood its too different" (159). The legitimacy of the political commitment of the novel, its account of the origin and growth of anti-colonial native activism since the 1960s and the formal novelistic strategies used offered a meaningful political or cultural point of view but kept it away from the purview of literary criticism and as Renee Hulan suggested, this aversion became the grounds for the convention rejection of some Native literature as "too political” (216).

Slash is in fact a highly contested and ambivalent site fraught with potentially contradictory positions with its allegiance to activist-novel, oral narrative and even the larger tradition of Native Canadian literary tradition. The novel, the central character of the novel bearing the name of the novel and the figure of the slash, the slash inflicted on the body of the character - all create a complex dynamic and a possibility of a contested discourse representing neither one thing nor the other and thus constituting, as Homi Bhabha would like to say, "a space of translation which properly alienate our political
expectations and changes as it must the very forms of our recognition of the "moment of politics" (10).

As I have suggested, the name slash is given to Tommy Kelasket as his activist name by Mardi, a fellow agitator representing The Red Patrol which takes as its symbol the literal genocide of the Beothuck in its active resistance to various forms of cultural genocide. Mardi renames Tommy "slash" after a barroom brawl when someone thought to carve a few lines on your shoulder" (59, making him as both a noun object of violence and a subject of "verbal" resistance he is changed and convicted, resisting arrest after the fight and taking a renewal activist interest in his struggle, and later on incarcerated and victimized.

'Slash' represents both the wound and the scar, the process of mutilation and the scar, an infliction on the body of Tommy and a signifier of historical injuries/wounds, bringing back the memories of the Native occupation at Wounded Knee, a site of historical resistance, present in the novel as a literal and figurative centre. It would be pertinent to mention here that wounded knee was the location at South Dakota where hundreds of Sioux Indians were massacred by US cavalry in 1890, and the novel describes the occupation of the same site in 1973 by the American Indian movement activists seeking US Senate investigations of Native American conditions.

The wound as a site of infliction where "someone thought to carve a few lines on your shoulder" also is a chilling reminder of the ways in which Slash's and other Native bodies have been inflicted over-written by colonizing historical narratives and stereotypes, like JFK's idea of the Great Society, described by Tommy as a "fake idea" (36).

As the title of the novel 'Slash' suggests the character's own resistant power of articulation achieved through a variety of stand points like his development of oral story telling techniques and embedded stories which open up the possibilities of other ways of knowing and representing, as distinct from colonial official historical truth-telling. Earlier Jeannette Armstrong herself had spoken eloquently about the privilege, the power and
significance of orality for Native cultural and educational practices. But the character Slash refuses priority to either speech or writing and insists on a hybrid status, by using the informal spoken English, "Rez-English" as Armstrong would like to say with its frequently a grammatical structure of Native speech mixed with English. While he understands the necessity of an oral story-telling technique as a way of teaching a certain number of people in his community, he also values writing. Such a stand reflects the views of Jeannette Armstrong who, even when supportive of oral tradition in the narrative of the novel is not averse to the tradition of writing. As she suggested in her interview with Lutz "a written piece like a novel can reach further than that" (15) and a gain. In her interview with Janice Williamson, she expresses her satisfaction and amazement that slash has been the means of initiating some people into the world of literature that way the novel situates the discursive violence of contemporary western narrative traditions which represent written history as the most visible representation of truth along with the trope of aboriginal story-telling, intratextual stories interrupting historical narrative, and the larger narrative of the novel written in "Rez English" contesting the boundaries between oral and the written, truth and non-truth, history and fiction. Jeannette Armstrong through her novel succeeds in re-historicizing Native political involvement in the 1960's and 1970s from a Native perspective. In the process she actually puts into writing the Native history of her people without toeing the European ethnocentric line of disseminating truth through the written word. Claude Levi-Strauss once described anthropology as a discipline capable of correcting, "the absence of written documents in most so called primitive societies" (1963, 24) With the development of such a discipline, "it is also possible" according to Levi Strauss to reconstruct the history of peoples who have never known writing"(1963, 24) Such an ethnocentric bias was responsible for suppressing the truth of "aboriginal modes of "writing", whether oral hieroglyphic, pictographic, syllabic, torn into the flesh, or woven into textiles- in other words, inscribed in systems other than that of a Roman or Ethnography" (Emberley, 108). The intratextual stories of Slash suggest the significance of traditional Aboriginal oral
"Story Telling" which unfold other ways of knowing "Knowledge-as-truth in the colonial syntax of history becomes knowledge-as-reading or interpretation, in the case of Armstrong's "story-telling" a re-writing and de-colonization of that official historical truth telling" (Emberley 108).

Armstrong develops the character of Slash as a key figure of reciprocal translation between spoken and written discourse, English and Okanagan and transforms the novel "as a site for discursive translation" (Jones, 56) Slash also intralingually "translates" written government documents, media reports and other accounts into the language of the novel supplementing them with alternative perspectives and in this sense Slash has traces of its origins in Armstrong's extensive documentary research and "massive interviews with people at all levels of the community" (Williamson, 123). All throughout, however, Jeannette Armstrong is conscious that the claims of the Native people are not identical as their social, cultural and geographical circumstances differ significantly As Slash says "We are talking about different nations here, not just one large conglomerate group called Indians...the government weakens us by making us fight each other to take one position, as each one wants their position to win out. Each position is important. "(235)

In spite of the difference in social cultural and geographical background for the Native peoples "Everyday living, song, dance, rituals" are the cultural practices central to the learning process and "there is a danger in separating the learning of skills from within traditional indigenous philosophy" (Armstrong, Traditional, Indigenous Education" (16)

That is why Slash uses a number of non-linguistic registers "semiotic demonstrations" staking claims like walks, occupations, fish-ins, family traditions, violent confrontations, dances and ceremonies cross-country caravans, road tolls and blockades Such "semiotic demonstrations can be taken as various forms of education for the Native peoples where the roles of teacher and student are reversed "you don't have to be a missionary" Slash says" Respecting people and being a good teacher just by your actions is enough" (205) Slash learns that "the only way I would work to help change come about was to set up a model or an example of myself. I had to be a teacher in that sense" (218) and he finally
concludes by stressing, "Indians can't be politicians They can only be themselves and 
show examples, good or bad In that way we are all teachers and that is what makes a 
difference"(219)

The Novel with its origins in the Okanagan Indian curriculum Project, 
commissioned for use as part of the grade eleven course of study in contemporary history 
relates to the native languages, values and rights without narrating "Just a day history of 
dates"(williamson121) The native values and rights are not just to be preserved like 
museum pieces, but to be practiced meaningfully" We couldn't protect our rights . I 
understood them that the practice of things separated us form other people" (211)

Jeannette Armstrong is regarded as the first Canadian Native Indian woman 
novelist for her novel Stash published in 1985 by the Theytus Books, Vancouver, 
Canada. Jeannette never intended to be a novelist, but always wanted to be an artist. She 
however realizes that “writing is a powerful tool for her as a Native person and a Native 
woman” (Fuse, 1988, 37). She belongs to the Okanagan Indian nation She is a 
multifaceted personality: a writer, an artist, a poet, an educator, an editor, a sculptor, a 
musician, a storyteller, and an activist.

Jeannette Armstrong was born in 1948 on the Penticton Indian Reserve in British 
Columbia She grew up in the Okanagan tradition among her family members and 
relatives in the community. She received a sound traditional education from her elders 
including grandmothers and medicine men She is the grand-niece of Hum-Ishu-Ma 
(Mourning Dove), the first Native American woman novelist who produced her novel, 
Cogewea: The Half-Blood (1927). She has also been educated in the western education 
system. She completed her diploma in Fine Arts from Okanagan College and her BFA 
degree in 1978 from the University of Victoria She could have been a well-established 
professional leading a comfortable urban life in a Canadian city But she returned back to 
her reserve after completing education to do something for her people and to improve 
their condition on the reserve.
Jeannette Armstrong has been working in various cultural and political positions in different organizations for her Penticton Band. She becomes the first woman executive and then the director of the En’owkin Centre, a First Nations Centre of Learning in 1985. This centre is a native cultural and educational association run by the Six Bands of the Okanagan nation. Its main thrust is to develop Curriculum material including everything from videos to language studies for pupils of kindergarten to grade 12 and these materials were prepared by and about Okanagan Indians for mainstream use in public schools. She also becomes the first director of the En’owkin School of International Writing in Penticton in 1989. This is the first indigenous creative-writing school in the world organized by and for Native people and it awards degrees and diplomas through the University of Victoria to successful Native learners after they complete their respective courses. The main aim of this institution is to make more and more native people creative artists who would realize the importance of words and writing in life. They would learn and teach how to write literature and how to get their works published. Many established Native writers are invited to teach young learners about several techniques and stylistic devices of writing. They guide the Aboriginal students to write all kinds of literature including poetry, short story, play, novel, biography/autobiography, and essays.

Jeannette Armstrong has published a collection of poetry titled *Breath Tracks* (Theytus Books, 1991). She has contributed to children’s literature through her poems and short stories based on her rich oral tradition and Okanagan legends. She has written two children’s books titled *Enwhisteetkwa: Walk in Water* (1982) and *Neekms and Chemai* (1984), both published by the first native-owned publishing house namely Theytus Books. Her individual essays, poems, and short fiction have been published in such anthologies as *Seventh Generation: Contemporary Native Writing* (1988), *All My Relations* (1990), *Our Bit of Truth: An Anthology of Canadian Native Writing* (1990), *Voices: Being Native in Canada, An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English* (1992) edited by Terry Goldie and Daniel David Moses. In addition to these, her works have also appeared in several other publications including
Gatherings, Canadian Fiction Magazine, and Malahat Review. She continues to make visual art as a qualified fine-artist. She teaches creative writing and native oral performance to young and inexperienced students. She has finished a collaborative project called *The Native Creative Process: A Collaborative Discourse* (Theytus, 1991) with first Native architect Douglas Cardinal and photographer Greg Young-Ing. She has proved herself to be a native musician by producing music albums using her poems as lyrics. Her poem “Grandmothers” has been produced on the compact disc *Word Up* (Virgin/EMI Music, 1995). She has also performed her poetry on the cassette tapes called *Poetry is Not a Luxury* (1987), *Theft of Paradise* (1988), and *Your Silence Will Not Protect You*, released by Maya Music Group, Ontario, Canada.

Armstrong has also edited an anthology of critical essays by Native scholars under the title *Looking at the Words of our People: First Nation Analysis of Literature* (1993). In 2000, she has published her second novel titled *Whispering in Shadows* (Theytus Books). She has toured around the world to address international gatherings on issues relating to Canadian Natives, such as Native education, Indigenous rights, and Native Empowerment and Sovereignty through Native Writing and other Arts. As an educator, she has worked extensively with the Okanagan Curriculum Project to develop educational material for First Nations learners. She is also an active board member of the Seventh Generation Fund which being the only Native funding agency provides non-governmental funding to native groups who wish to pursue self-sufficiency projects. As an activist, she is the co-founder of an organization named Owl Rock Spiritual Camp. The awards and honors she has received include Mungo Martin Award in 1974, Helen Pitt Memorial Award in 1978, and Honorary Doctorate from St. Thomas University in 2000 for her outstanding contribution in the field of First Nations art and literature.

Armstrong as a little girl has listened to a number of Native stories told to her by her grandmother late at nights. From an early life, she learned the power of words and was deeply influenced by the rich oral tradition of her people. Today she brings this
oratory into all aspects of her life, both private and public. "She believes in the power of the individual voice and is committed to promoting cross-cultural understanding through literature", writes Heather Glebe in the author's profile (Writer's Quarterly, 1990, 6).

As a Native woman, writing is a powerful tool for her survival. In an interview for Fuse magazine, she says. "It was more out of anger that I was Indian, out of resistance, rather than an affirmation that this is what I really am. I was saying "I'm not you," which is different from saying "I'm me" (Fuse, 1988, 37).

Victoria Freeman, a Toronto based writer and editor, interviewed her and asked whether she considers herself as a part of Canadian literature. In her reply, she states: "I've never really thought about being a Canadian writer; I've always thought of myself as a Native writer" (Fuse, 1988, 37). Armstrong was very much influenced by the American Indian authors including N. Scott Momaday and Leslie Silko. About her other sources of inspiration, she confesses: "Maria Campbell, who has shown so much endurance, has given me the courage to write. I recently was fortunate to meet Beatrice Culleton, who wrote In Search of April Raintree. I really have a lot of respect for those two women, who have produced novels of real significance in terms of Native literature in Canada" (Ibid.). In her interview with Prof. Lutz, she states that she was never aware of her role as the first Canadian Native novelist. She says, "I never set out to set a precedent or to be the first Native woman novelist!" (Lutz, 1991, 13).

Being a university graduate, Armstrong has an opportunity to read some books on Native literature. She found out to her surprise that the non-Native writers mostly wrote many of those books. She then decided to be a writer herself and she must write about the Indian stuff in a personal perspective. She had exactly the same experience as a board member of the Okanagan Curriculum project. To Victoria Freeman who asked her about the background of her novel, she informs about the incident. "My work for the Okanagan Curriculum Project, in which we developed Native social study units for grades eight to eleven, a chronology from the 1850s up to the present. Social studies units usually talk about dates and
events, but not a personal perspective, there's no in-depth understanding.

We decided we wanted works of literature to supplement the units. I had a long discussion with the consultant hired to put the project together. He had brought in some non-Native writers and had a meeting with them about the work of literature for the contemporary unit, and I got really angry at that meeting. I said if we are going to talk about an Indian perspective then we should be talking about writing by Indian people. I said I would go to the tribal chiefs or whoever I had to, to stop this project because I was not going to see our history bastardized again and some non-Indian paid to do it and getting a book out of it" (36)

The consultant gave her a challenge of writing the novel on her own being an Indian herself. "If Jeannette wants an Indian writer to write it, she can goddamn well write it herself" In her response to this challenge, she states, "Goddamn right, I'll write it!" (Ibid.) Armstrong took up the commitment of writing the literature to supplement the social study unit for the contemporary period and the output became an interesting novel.

Jeannette did research for about two years from 1980 to 1982. She met native elders and interviewed them. She searched for good historical literature on the present time. As she admits, she gets frustrated with her findings. She speaks to Victoria:

"The more I researched, the more I discovered that there had been a lot that I had completely misunderstood myself. I wanted to portray what had happened during the early Seventies, that really militant period of the American Indian Movement and afterwards when that changed to a more positive approach. Having come through that time period myself and having been involved to some degree in the activities, I found that the way it was being projected by the media and by some of the historical chronicles wasn't close to the truth. I think a lot of underlying feeling, the motivation behind what happened, has never been understood, even with our own people and that has caused a lot of the internal fighting." (36)
Armstrong realizes that the AIM leaders and the elected Band Chiefs have not properly understood the aspirations of the native peoples in principle. The elected representatives were in support of the government sponsored DIA programs and the AIM activists were for larger goals such as Native sovereignty, land settlements and self-government.

Armstrong knew well that she has no written history any other literature to rely on for the novel. She read all newspapers and periodicals carrying Native news items. She has mentioned about *Akwesasne Notes* and *Penthouse* where she could get material on AIM movement and Native demonstrations or protests. She speaks to Prof. Lutz: “And then I mapped it out chronologically, historically. I actually did a chronology of events in the country” (Lutz, 1991, 21) She made notes of all kinds of about 300 pages before thinking of writing the novel.

Armstrong wrote full time for about six months to complete the first draft. In 1982, she began writing it, but couldn’t complete till 1984. First, she prepared a skeleton of her work, an outline of her proposed novel of about twenty pages. She divided her twenty pages into four chapters, five pages for each chapter. Then she sketched the characters vaguely. She never developed the text chapter-wise in a linear fashion. She listened to her mind and was completely guided by her thoughts then. To Prof. Lutz, she says: “They weren’t written successively or progressively, like chapter one, chapter two, chapter three. The way my mind works is, if there’s something in chapter one that’s going to relate to chapter two, I would have to see it as a thread all the way through. So it’s a different way of developing a novel” (Lutz, 1991, 23) There were several threads in her mind and she wanted to “weave” them into a fabric, which was having various layers. In the second draft, she made several cuts in her novel to exclude irrelevant things. She sees the published version after four long years of tiresome work, without sleep and any recreation or entertainment. She was only worried about the rights of her people, and always going through the Indian stuff including their political goals, commentaries, and newspaper accounts.
Armstrong’s novel is not a mere fictional narrative of a Canadian Indian, but it is a social document that records the spiritual and political struggle of Canadian First Nations peoples during the 1960s and 1970s. She decided to write the novel from a man’s point of view because the American Indian Movement was mostly male-centered and the young Native males were at the forefront of it. She wanted to be realistic and truthful to depict the incident in the narrative. There were some women leaders like Anna Mae Aquash involved in it. However, Armstrong decided to write it in a general way without focusing on certain Native leaders specifically. That is the reason why his male narrator mentions in the prologue “the characters in this novel are fictitious. Any resemblance to persons, living or dead, is coincidental. The events are based on actual events but are not meant to be portrayed as historically accurate” (Slash, 13). She has honored the convention of making a fiction on real events.

In her interview with Karin Beeler who asks her about her choice of male narrator, Armstrong states, “I decided to choose that narrative voice because it’s a convention that I’m familiar with from my own tradition in terms of oral storytelling. The narrative voice is always the convention that’s used in oral story, and the storyteller becomes the character. For example, if I’m talking about the coyote, I become the character and I’m telling that story. And so it’s not Jeannette Armstrong that’s telling the story, it’s this character who is the narrator. I chose the narrative voice for another reason. I wanted to see how it would work in print as a literary process, and I was interested in seeing how I could carry it through because in previous exercises that I had tried, it was very difficult to sustain” (Beeler, 1996, 145). Heather Glebe states that this novel has been widely recognized as “a powerful exploration of the alienation of today’s Indians from the dominant society” (Writer’s Quarterly, 1990, 6).

George Ryga, whom the author regards as her mentor, writes in the “Foreword” of this novel that this is a gently written novel dealing with a brutal theme. She also writes that this is a story of colonialism in Canada and the rest of the American continent. The effects of colonialism over the First Nations peoples are “cultural and physical
deprivation and a legacy of racial genocide" (Slash, 9). The text is considered as a testament by the Natives of Canada and has an optimistic end. It brings in a lot of hope and aspiration for the Native youths at present. George Ryga states: “Through the wanderings of the hero, author Jeannette Armstrong traces the outlines of an emerging will for liberation and self-determination, beginning with a challenge to self-doubt” (Ibid 9). There is a passive discrimination found everywhere against the Natives and this discrimination does more damage to the whole race of Aboriginal peoples who exist in Canada for thousands of generations.

The title as well as the name of the chief protagonist “Slash” means “action adventure” (Fuse, 1988, 39). The novel as its title suggests critiques and deconstructs the notion of a single version of history, which should be obviously the white version. It presents another version of history, the realistic but fictional history of the American Indian Movement that was not earlier available in the white history. It presents the Native version about the Native suffrage movement in general. It focuses on the Okanagan Indian tradition and shows what it means to grow up in a society that has been historically denied the right to live under the assimilative policies of the dominant society. It asserts the Native perspective of social issues that should be recognized and solved politically through negotiations between affected parties. In addition, it is an important document for Native education, promoting the uniqueness of Nativity. As Robert Luke in his study declares, “It is an historiographical text that presents a Native education view that has been ignored by white/settler discourse” (Luke, 1998).

Prof. Lutz states that the novel “follows the development of a young Okanagan man, Thomas Kelasket, who grows increasingly involved in the Native struggle for human rights and self-determination”(13). Thomas Kelasket, a fourteen-year-old boy in the beginning of the story, is on an adventure to know about life outside the community and reserve. He attends a lot of AIM meetings but doesn’t take active part in any one of such meetings and other activities. He passively listens to others and becomes another of the world’s youngest elders full of new learning and political rhetoric. He is well set to
preach everything to others. He could foresee everything about the future that his colleagues and leaders fail to see. He has not only been exposed to relevant questions about native life but also he has found out all the right answers to these questions. He has known rightly that the European establishment is to be blamed for all the troubles and confusions of his people. He has grown up through twenty years to become an adult in the end of the story. He has matured and is fully awakened about the world around. He has a total knowledge of the social, political, and cultural values of the Native as well as the white societies.

The author searches for her own family and social background in the protagonist of the novel. Being an Ojibwa Indian, she feels that her search is very crucial for her existence and survival in a colonial state dominated by non-Natives/whites. In the "Prologue," she states, "As Indian people, we each stand at a pivot point at this time of history. We each have the burden of individuality deciding for our descendants how their world shall be affected and what shall be their heritage." (13) Being a Native woman herself, she explores the mind of every Native Canadian at this crucial moment of history.

Armstrong creates this male Native youth as the chief narrator of the novel to represent her people. Thomas Kelasket is a student of grade six in the school on the reservation. Jimmy Joseph is his friend. Danny, his elder brother, is out of school after grade six because his father didn't allow him to study in a residential school far away from the reservation. Thomas stays with his family members including Grandpa Pra-cwa, Dad, Uncle Billy, Mom, Aunt Shu-li, elder sister Josie, and elder brother Danny. As a young boy, Thomas comes to know about several government policies made for the Natives of Canada. He reads from the newspaper that Indians are now not only made legal citizens of Canada but also allowed to vote for the government like white citizens. One day he hears from his father that Indians are permitted legally to buy and drink wine openly in public beer parlors. He experiences effects of racism and colonialism in the town school where he is sent for higher education. The Principal explains the orthodox imperial rules of the school, which they have to follow strictly otherwise they will get
heavy punishment. The white boys tease them with abusive and dirty expressions. On the radio, he listens to an Indian agent saying that soon there won't be any reservation in Canada. The Chief of his tribe is warned by his Uncle Pra-cwa about the consequences of accepting the voting and liquor rights in the following manner:

"Now the government wants to end reserves. How are the people going to pay taxes? They will lose their lands. They will be skid-row people." (28)

When the Chief suggests for celebrating Indian Days on the reservation to help people feel good, Pra-cwa replies emphatically: "We like to live free. We don't want to change. We want our Indian rights always." (28) He joins the Native Youth Club on the advice of the priest in the local church. He attends meetings called "Current Affairs Discussions" regularly. He comes to know about the Negro Civil Rights movement, John Kennedy's and Malcolm X's murder, and other Indian activities there. He remembers the opinion of Uncle Billy that "someday, all the dark races will fight together against the white people for all what they do." (31)

Thomas realizes that the history books and movies made by the whites are all lies. He recalls: "Really the white people wished we would all either be just like them or stay out of sight" (Ibid. 36). He ironically thinks about the idea of making America a "Great Society" as declared by the new President because it is not free from racism and colonial exploitation. When the Priest asks him to practice Christianity and attend the church programs regularly, he replies negatively. He says, "I don't because I ain't a Catholic. Dad ... the whole world is our church." (Ibid. 36). He has practically learnt a lot of things in his Indian way and he doesn't require any formal schooling to learn them. At home and in his community, he has learnt about politics and economy. His father has taught him about his moral and cultural values. Unlike his friend Jimmy who hates "being an Indian and Indian ways" (44), he always regards his elders in his community and doesn't adopt bad habits and manners.

Thomas, however, has taken up drinking and marijuana due to bad companions like Jimmy and Johny. He always remembers the words of the uncle Pra-cwa who has
found out a difference in the viewpoints of the young and the old Natives. Regarding the young Natives who got education in the residential schools, he states, "They lost their language, their ways...a hope...if they do the things the white way." (Ibid 48) He has a difference with his white teachers due to his Indian background and he returns home as a drop-out from the town school. His father asks him to do the household works and support himself along with the family. He thinks differently from his father. He lacks interest in farming and says to himself "To me that sounded a lot like he had meant, either I could work if I was not in school, or could go out and support myself" (52).

He spends his days and nights in beer parlors without having any work to do. He is always found in the state of hangovers. He continues to attend political meetings and listens to several leaders on political and economic conditions of his peoples. He gets frustrated seeing the miseries and sufferings of them. He does not go for a sweat bath when his uncle invites to join him. He tries to find out answers to their social problems but does not succeed in his attempt. He doesn't "fit in anywhere" (55). He marks the changes in his reservation with the formation of fancy clubs and new life styles imitating whites. He starts doing temporary works in Vancouver for John. When he looks at the dead skid row Indians on the city streets, he decides not to end up like them.

One night he is attacked by two guys, stabbed with a knife, and finally arrested by the police while making a delivery at a place called Turkey Tom's Joint. Mardi from the Native Friendship Center comes to his rescue in the hospital and renames him Slash after which the novel has been titled. He reads Indian news bulletins there and comes to know about the current affairs. He reads about the White Paper of the Canadian government proposed by the Prime Minister Trudeau (1969) that recommends for the abolition of the Indian reservations phase by phase in five to ten years. It was strongly opposed by several Native organizations. The RCMP files a legal case against him for attacking against the police. He is imprisoned for eighteen months at his eighteen for his juvenile crime. He feels like a real culprit and convict. He loses his total freedom and feels like breathless. The prisoners are treated like dogs in the prison. He is very much depressed and says.
“Inside of me the hurt, anger and shame was like a pile of maggots gnawing away. Mostly, coming from shame over having to swallow all the shit dished out to humiliate you” (Slash 64-65)

He harshly asks Mardi to stop meeting with him there. He is nostalgic about his family and his independent past life on the reserve. He gets a little mental relief and revives his self-esteem. He takes the help of the Indian Education Club to complete his schooling and finish his grade 12. He finishes the college level and joins the art class too. He receives letters from Mardi regularly from different places that she visits. One of her letters is about Beothuck Patrol and cultural genocide happening there. She writes, “You see they only give us two choices Assimilate or get lost” (Ibid. 69-70). In reality, they aren’t two choices but one, because most of the Canadian Natives are either lost or dead and the rest have to vanish soon as a result of the racist and assimilative Indian Acts adopted by the government.

The Beothucks, for example, were one of the various Indian tribes on the east coast. They were forcibly wiped out and their lands were occupied illegally by the white settlers without giving them due compensation. Their dialect was banned and they were severely penalized for using it publicly. They couldn’t practice their Indigenous religions but only Christianity in order to be civilized properly like the mainstream. As Mardi writes to Slash in a letter:

“That is how we fit into this society. They just want us out of the way, no matter how. It’s called genocide. It’s what’s happening to our people right now. We are dying off because we can’t fit in” (Ibid. 69)

Mardi believes that there won’t be any true red man with his tribal beliefs and ways. The white-dominated federal and provincial governments have put barricades around Natives confining them into reservations that they can safely call their homes. They were prohibited from going outside these barricaded locations without prior permission of the DIA officials or legal pass. They were banned to do fishing and hunting that are essential for their survival. The treaties were signed with them to give them a special status
They were allowed certain provisions such as exemption from paying tax like other citizens and availing the welfare facility to meet with their expenses. At the cost of their land and other natural resources, they were sanctioned such meager provisions along with a great number of social problems. Tom rightly states that they don't have homes, jobs, and food. Many Natives have no work to do but get drunk or join the Caravans and demonstrations against the governments. He thinks, “poor housing, poor education, high suicide and death rates, and low economic opportunities were all reasons to confront the government to make some decisions to acknowledge the land claim issue” (151).

The government established an independent organization called the Department of Indian Affairs to look into the matters related to Native peoples. It functioned as a negotiator between the government and the Native Bands. Its role is that of a funding agency to provide finance for several Native related projects. Practically, it made deals with its favorites and granted funds to those who would listen to it and agree to its norms and conditions. Many Indian Chiefs were in favor of receiving funds for their own sake. They blindly accepted and followed the instructions of the DIA agents and officers to have money immediately. Thus the DIA as a government agency succeeded in creating divisions among various groups. It was really “a time of deep depression and a growing chaos” (188). Everyone used to look at everyone else with doubt and suspicion.

Tom dreams of his freedom, which comes at last. He goes out to meet Lenny at the Red Power Center. He identifies himself with the new name Slash. He remains introvert mostly, but listens to speeches and deliberations of several Native activists being at the background always. He is changed after leaving home and family. Lenny dissuades him from going back to his reserve. He returns home despite his friend's proposal to stay back. He hears about passive discrimination, the American Indian Movement, the rehabilitation programs in the prisons, the fish-in-demonstrations and war
Powwows organized in different tribes. His father thinks that his son is very much "mixed up inside" and advises him to do every work purposefully. Survival is one of the major issues for the contemporary Native youths in Canada. They are educated but jobless. They have to fight against various social evils such as poverty, unemployment, disease and alcoholism. At the same time, they have to revive their spirit and old traditions for self-determination and identity as a sovereign nation.

Thomas Kelasket, alias Slash, leaves his reservation to join a caravan organized all over the North America. The aim of this caravan is to "educate" Indians. Tom meets with Elise and both discuss on several issues related to native peoples in Canada and America. They talk about the government policies to civilize and assimilate them into the mainstream. The Native elders who are unwilling to assimilate and don't change their Indian ways and traditions "get hurt inside" seeing the changes happening around themselves. He takes part in an occupation where he comes across Mardi again. The symbolic occupation made people's barricades to put forth their demands before the government. The demands are to be reviewed by a task force comprising officers from several departments. When it is time for them to go home, Mardi separates herself from Slash. Tom wants her to come to Canada with him. She expresses her inability and states:

"We'll be together, Tommy, sometime when the blossoms come out and everything turns good for our people, but for now we'll do what we each have to" (107).

Tom is back in Canada alone and visits several cities to know about the urban Natives living on welfare cheques. He knows about the Wounded Knee take-over by Indians who are arrested in massive scale and put inside the prisons. Indian women are raped and misbehaved by the RCMP. If anyone looks like the AIMers, they are harassed severely. He is also arrested once and released later on. He also hears about Brando's decision to turn down his Oscar because of the prevailing social injustice. Tom recalls the impression of the whites of Canada in the following words:
“Shoot, we all knew what it felt like to sit in a movie and watch Indians being slaughtered over to over again. Why don’t them damn stupid Indians be like us, fit in, assimilate?” (118-119)

Tom searches for an answer to this problem of assimilation. He knows that the European white settlers have stolen their resources, land and language considering them as savages and forcing upon them Christianity and the white ways. He attends many bitching sessions organized by Native social activists to denounce white governments, the DIA, and other racial institutional prejudices.

Slash decides to “do something” instead of begging for welfare money and living on that like the dead. He says, “Do something!! Don’t die begging and crawling!! Die on your feet. Now is the time” (120). He considers the American Indian Movement as a spiritual movement like other Natives who prefer to adopt the “Indian ways” for achieving success in their struggle for self-determination and survival. Tom spends some time with a girl named Cindy. He starts taking booze. His sister Josie from the Indian Bar rescues him after Danny’s death. He returns back to his parents and finds them changed a lot. He tries to heal the wounds of them due to the mishaps in family. He receives “a song of Nature” (167) sent to him for revival and healing. He imagines his life like a film and does everything as it comes. He tries to reactivate depressed Indians on the reserve. They struggle to retain their traditional Indian identity in the age of science and discovery when the whole world changes very fast and becomes very much competitive to survive. The guiding rule is “survival of the fittest”. The oppressed and the downtrodden have no place to stay, unless they make an attempt to assimilate and acculturate to the mainstream society. They must compete and win the race to survive and to fit in. As Slash says, “we fight for survival, we fight to stop genocide” (184).

Tom pays several visits to the States and various cities for being an active participant in the ongoing reform activities led by his fellowmen. He hears about Mardi’s sad and unnatural demise. His little sister Jenny regards him as a hero and her ideal. He, on the other hand, feels hatred inside. He becomes sick due to heavy drinking. This time
Joe who sends him to a “medicine man” to be a real Indian and stop drinking alcohol saves him. Tom gets lots of knowledge about selfhood and Indianness. He realizes: “Being an Indian, I could never be a person only to myself I was part of all the rest of the people” (203) He has to be a “keeper of the ways” being a member of the family and community Although he finds “whiteness” all around him, yet he also has a glimpse of hope and promise for a bright future (206) He takes his father to an Indian Medicine Man who cures him from his illness due to a severe heart attack.

Slash promises to rebuild his people. He thinks of the preservation of the medicine places, of Indian cultures and traditional moral values The First Nations want a total control over their lives and organize gatherings and demonstrations in various parts of the country. Jimmy has an MBA degree but is without a suitable job due to racism and exploitation. This is only because of colonialism and social inequality meted to Natives in Canada In one of the gatherings of Native youths, Slash meets with another girl called Maeg. She is an intelligent and clever Indian girl who is also “very traditional in her worldview” (227). She delivers a speech on resistance and her approach is very practical and realistic. She sings traditional Native songs in meetings and knows about medicine ways too. Slash takes Maeg to his house where she “fits in easily” (228) They participate in a Sundance, stay together in a youth camp and decide together to get married. They build their own house separately with the help of his people He expresses his inner feelings in the following lines “It was great I never knew just how full a person’s life could be just to share it with someone who enjoyed it with you I had never felt so strong in all my life” (230).

They become parents to their little son named Marlon. Tom concentrates on his paintings for a while. Jim deals with the Constitutional issues He reveals that Natives are very much fragmented in their approach to solve their social crises. Tom approves of this fragmentary nature of Indians He puts the entire blame on the government and its policies to tackle their problems without any seriousness. Maeg also wholeheartedly joins the fight for the constitutional rights of her future children as bonafide citizens of the
Canadian Confederation. Several public programs such as Indian Food Show, Indian Fashion Show, Sundance, Pow-wows, and Indian ceremonies are organized to raise public awareness about their problems. They try to be united and demand their constitutional right to land and nationhood.

Tom and Maeg have different views regarding demonstrations for protection of their rights. Maeg is not willing to make any kind of compromise with the government with regards to their demands. She decides to go ahead with her plan of joining the movements against the federal government. She joins the activists on the “Constitution Express” to London and Europe. Tom stays back on the reservation and takes care of his son. At last, the Canadian government recognizes the Aboriginal rights in a half-hearted manner. Tom sticks to his Indian ways to achieve his goal without bowing down before the whites. He feels unhappy and depressed due to his separation from his wife Maeg returns in a box after meeting with a car accident. Slash is no more young and energetic. He is tired and exhausted, but dreams of a “future promise for his son” (250).

Lee Maracle who is another Canadian Native author has reviewed this novel as “Fork in the Road: A Story for Native Youth”. She has stated, “Slash comes from that inevitable fork in the road that every Native youth faces” (Fuse, 1988, 42). She strongly announces that it is not a European piece of literature but a Native work from the beginning to the end. She has realized that silence plays an equally important role as words used by the author. In one paragraph, she writes “Slash touches the private inner place where the spirit resides. A Native woman, at once ancient and young, told slash. His life is recounted with the campfire of our ceremonies in plain view. It is rich in traditional oral history and our “modern” dilemma. It is 250 pages of painful indecision at the fork in our road for which the final direction that Slash took was really simple” (Ibid.). Further she has regarded this novel as the “first truly Native novel, penned by a very Okanagan woman”. She states “Slash is the story of urban madness seen from the eyes of a woman traveling across the polluted skies to view the concrete wreckage below, forced onto the pages though a man’s mind. It is the story of natural peace and beauty.
that our ancient laws reflect. It was very much like being parachuted in the midst of the process of waving a blanket or beading your dance outfit” (Ibid).

Jeannette Armstrong wants us to experience the troublesome and conflicting life of the narrator and the Canadian Native cultures though his actions and experiences. She intends to speak rather than write the story to a fixed audience who is none other than a group of Native youth that would require something to hang onto and to come out of confusion. The contemporary Native youth in Canada needs to have a deep connection with his roots, past history, and his elders. He must be conscious of his place of birth that is the reserve where his family and community struggle for survival and existence, for fundamental rights like land, food, health and education. The directionless youth should not be blinded by false narratives but by the true historical account so that he can be guided properly to choose the right path in life. He, sitting at the fork of Native and white society, should be able to get the correct answers to his questions in life. He attempts to make sense of this new era of militancy for his people who either claim for sovereignty or demand segregation from the mainstream by means of resistance and violence. Everywhere there are anger and rage, hatred and frustration. He must try to take a decision that would be beneficial for his own self and for his people.

Jeannette believes that Aboriginal writers have a responsibility to break down stereotypes and the barriers of sexism and racial prejudice. She also believes that they should be able to tell their own stories from their own perspectives strongly and openly. The romantic images created about them by the non-Native writers, such as barbaric or heroic savages, squaw or Indian princess, must be replaced by their self-created images as real living human beings of this land. Being a self-taught reader and self-researched writer, she has become the role model of her people and also their spokesperson. Through her works, she fights against the oppressive forces and for their basic rights as legal citizens of the country. She is very fond of Native metaphors to express her inner feelings.
To Victoria Freeman, she states. “The process of understanding, the renewal of that feeling that we are going to determine our own destinies is essential” (Fuse, 1998, 36) She then elaborates that earlier she thought that it would be better for her people to be canadianized There won’t be reservations and people would be assimilated into the mainstream for having equal treatment like others Then there won’t be any social problem for them After her experience in Canadian cities, she could see that the situation has worsened. She states, “I could see that we would remain second-class citizens as long as our skins are brown May be I could make it, may be not, but a hundred of my relatives for sure can’t. They’ll end up as fodder for that machine, slaves making it run, and that’s not good enough for me I’m a first-class Indian I am from this land And that’s what I’m going to continue to be, not a slave to this machine that cares about no one” (Ibid.).

Armstrong has concluded that the Canadian government doesn’t have any intention to protect the fundamental rights of Native peoples The ancient rights enjoyed by them for generations and protected under the signed treaties by the British monarchy are no longer considered valid in the present modern age The white government wants to derecognize those rights constitutionally for achieving total assimilation and acculturation of these people into the mainstream. On the contrary, they are of major concern as original sovereign rights and are reaffirmed by all First Nations in Canada. Her opinion regarding Native empowerment is very clear and powerful She states “North American Indian people have a clear vision of true democracy and empowerment and the rights of people as part of that process-real human rights in other words, the natural rights of people to be able to live on this land and to be able to partake of the gifts of the Creator on this land Within Indian understanding is the right of every person to be part of decision-making, the right of every person to be empowered (37) Armstrong is pessimistic about the future of her people to large extent She finds that the government is very apathetic towards her people. She finds no practice of democratic
principles in Canada. According to her, the distribution of wealth, of ownership, and of skills, is totally lopsided. The white elitist and capitalist groups always make decisions for profit at the cost of humanity or common mass including Natives and minorities.

Spiritualism is a predominant theme in the works of Armstrong. Her spiritualism is closely connected with the land because Native people have a deep relationship with Mother Earth and Nature around them. To Natives of Canada as to all the Tribal peoples elsewhere, the land is the source of all life. In India, the Schedule Tribes are called the people of forests. To the settler Europeans, land is a commodity. To acquire land, they pushed the First Nations people to reserves and barricaded them. Europeans thought that Canada or the entire North America was a barren land before their arrival. They very well know that this assumption is a mere myth and they believe in this fake myth to justify their position. Europeans signed treaties with the Natives before having access to the land of the original settlers. They promised to protect their rights and forgot their promises made by them after the Aboriginals surrendered their lands to them for expansion. Now there are several legal cases for land settlement. Native people fight for their land ownership not for themselves but for their future generations yet to born.

Indigenous peoples all over the world are not a homogenous group as they belong to distinct and diverse nations. They however share common histories and experiences with the colonizing rulers. They have a shared connectedness to their land. Land gives them their identity. Land depicts their traditional oral history and culture. Europeans invading their land over the last five centuries have stolen their identity, culture and heritage. Armstrong speaks to Victoria about the relationship between Native people and the land, the environment. She views. “When I look at our land I see something different than a commodity to build a house on or to use to cut trees off or whatever. It’s a living reality that’s a part of us, and when our land is violated, it’s like raping us, in a worse way than physically; it’s like emotional, mental, spiritual rape, and it makes Indian people irrational in their actions when that happens. White people don’t understand because they don’t feel that connection in the same way that we do” (Fuse, 1988, 38).
Slash presents the struggle for Native sovereignty in Canada that mostly means settlement of their land claims and provision for self-government. They can reconstruct their lost image or identity and revive their decayed culture and heritage. Possession of lost land implies reaffirmation of lost culture and identity. Thomas Kelasket’s spirituality is strongly tied to his land. He relates his experiences using metaphors associated with land and nature. To him, land and nature are the sources of identity. His sense of being is well connected to the land around him.

The drum is a symbol of his people’s spirituality. He is proud to be an Indian and loves the company of his Uncle Joe. He knows that the medicine ways of Uncle Joe is very much linked to the land. His uncle has taught him the significance of ancient Indian ways from childhood days. He advises to join him for the sweat bath after he suffers from drug addiction and alcoholism. He recovers from his illness only by means of his return to traditional Indian ways.

Armstrong has rightly said, “It’s the spirituality that people need. The practice of religion is only a small part of that spirituality. The thought behind many religions of the world is love and caring and being responsible as a human being to those natural laws the Creator put down for us. This is spirituality that’s available to everyone, but the practice of it in various forms and various ways belongs to certain peoples and I don’t think can be interchanged or exported” (Fuse, 1988, 38). People should be well aware of their own internal spirituality and then only they can behave responsibly. They can invite change for the betterment of their selves. She strongly believes that everyone is replaceable and necessary for himself and for others around him. The loss of a single person should affect others or everybody. Thomas at the end of the novel realizes that his existence is needed for his son and people. This discovery about his inner spirit creates a positive image of himself and he is truly empowered. Each one in this universe has a power in him to shape this world and individually he or she can bring a lot of change to the situation and condition prevailing around.
Slash as the chief narrator is not given special attention by the author. She doesn’t isolate him from the community or keep him in isolation for long from the development of the events in the community. He is simply a part of other things in terms of the community. His character’s development is very much linked with his family and with people around him throughout the story. She states, “Everything is a part of something else. Everything is a part of a continuum of other things—a whole. There’s a whole bigger picture there that things are always a part of. The characters I presented are all parts of that whole” (Lutz, 1991, 16). His characters like the Native elder Pracwa and Uncle Joe are equally important as Thomas.

Like other contemporary Native novels, this story has a circular development of the chief character. As an individual, he is a healthy member of a family in a Native community. He is like a representative of all, a typical character. He goes out in search of his future in the world outside his community and people. This separation leads to his alienation and to conflicts with his nears and dears. When he doesn’t succeed in the outside world, then he makes a return journey. Some fail to complete the journey and reach their destination. They lose their lives on the way to the community. Either the opponents kill them or they commit suicide out of frustration and despair. Those who make their physical return possible, have to undergo a spiritual renewal through several ceremonies under the supervision of their elders called “medicine men.” This renewal of their body and soul make them a whole or completely healed person. At the end of the novel, Slash is a whole person full of maturity and understanding about philosophy of life. He is made corrupt due to his association with the external world. That was necessary for his renewal and growth from an adult to a man.

Armstrong believes in the Hopi medicine man Thomas Banyacya’s words, “each of us can become a stone that causes ripples, the ripples move outward” (Fuse, 1988, 38). She believes in the power of individual voices. She finds that the political systems of the western world lack spirituality. By spirituality, as we have heard her, she doesn’t mean only religion but “the philosophical world view of rights of the human being, the respect
of the earth and how we all fit together” (Ibid). She inspires her people not to subvert themselves to the oppressive white colonization but to struggle hard and resist against assimilation and acculturation. At the same time, she asks the European administrators to learn and respect the social, spiritual, and cultural values of Indians. Native people should take control over their own destiny and redress the damages made to them by the colonizers. They should have control over their children’s education, their economy, their health, their land, and natural resources. Thus, Slash is, states Luke, “an example of cross cultural communication transmitting a distinctly Native voice” (Luke, 1998). She uses English to inform about her people’s voice to all who knows the medium. Earlier the medium of English has been used to marginalize them, but now she uses it to reaffirm her viewpoint from a Native perspective.

Armstrong considers this novel as “an important document” not only for her people but also “for those people who colonized this country and who continue to make mistakes in terms of the colonizing process attempting to assimilate Native people” (Lutz, 1991, 15). This book has a lot of significance for her children and grandchildren because it will provide them with true information about their past, ancestors, cultural values, social customs, and traditions. At the same time, it will make the colonizers and their future generations what injustices they have made to the First Nations in order to be extinct from the land that was once theirs.

Lee Maracle is one of the foremost Canadian Native women writers, widely published and ranked next to Maria Campbell and Beatrice Culleton. She was born and brought up in North Vancouver. Her mother is Metis and father Salish. She spent her childhood in a poor working class neighborhood. As a child, she attended elementary public school and left after her eleventh grade. During her adolescence and adulthood, she continued to change her locations from Vancouver’s urban environment to the Chicano communities in California and the Skid row in Toronto. She then took part in the Red Power movement, also known as the sovereignty movement for the Indigenous peoples in North America, after leaving school. According to her, every person including
animals has the right to survive, express and experience in life. Her second autobiographical work *I am woman* deals with the struggle for survival and self-determination. In fact, all her fictional and non-fictional writings are literary documents expressing that ongoing struggle for recognition and identity. In her interview with Jennifer Kelly, she states: "I was one of the first Native people in this country to articulate a position of sovereignty, back in 1969. I have the reputation of being a pioneer of sorts, I suppose" (Kelly 73). In another interview with Professor Hartmut Lutz, Lee states:

"When we write, I believe that what we are doing is reclaiming our house, our lineage house, our selves, because I think we already have a spirit of cooperation that just underlines everything we do. The more pathways we trace to get to the centre of the circle, the more rich our circle is going to be, the fuller, the rounder, the more magnificent" (Lutz 176).

She considers our own physical bodies as house and we have to sacrifice our self-interests to struggle for our independence from all sorts of barriers. We have to come out of our houses, give up petty self-interests, and join the struggle to reform the society or community. Our survival as an independent nation largely depends on our struggle for equity, liberation from injustice, and preservation of culture and heritage.

Canada, to Lee as a Native person, means a "village" or community. She loves her country or community very much and imbibes the spirit of her place to heart. To Jennifer Kelly, she says: "The history of this country is not made up of conquest. The history of this country is thousands and thousands years old. And I think people should either sink roots here or go back where they come from. Get real" (Kelly 84). She is for the new happenings in her multicultural and multi-ethnic country with a lot of hopes for a bright future. At the same time, she is critical of the Canadian culture. To Janice Williamson, she says: "Canadians definitely have a parasite culture. It's also a male culture. It's a culture based on pain where courtesy is a class question. When you get cut, at first skin
start to mend, you experience the pain of having been cut. Social pain and social healing
is not any different" (Williamson 169)

Maracle knows and believes strongly that writing is a cultural endeavour and
through writing only she has to express her own self and also about her people. She
declares that if she remains silent, then she will "erase" herself (Maracle 167, 1990). As a
writer, she considers herself as a cultural worker. Regarding the Canadian culture, she
states: "If the culture in which we live cannot accommodate new thoughts, new feelings,
new relationships, then we need a cultural revolution. As writers, cultural workers, we
take this on." (Maracle 175, 1990) As a good writer, she decides to be true to herself, to
honestly present the truth about her community, history, and contemporary conditions of
her people. A writer is basically a good performer, a powerful storyteller, an inspired and
enlightened soul. As a Native Storyteller and community healer, she has engaged herself
in many kinds of activities. Writing is one of those activities meant for the healing and
sovereignty of her people. She says to Williamson: "Writing is like ceremony for me. I
have to be in a certain place to start talking to those dead trees, the paper that was
essentially murdered so I could put little black ink etchings on them, draw little word
pictures. It is a relation I have to trees, to the oil from the ground that makes up the
typewriter ribbon. It is a relationship to the people in my life who need to have their lives
articulated and to myself when I need to go forward out into the world. It's a huge
ceremony for me." (Williamson 177). Thus she connects her spirituality with her writing
and other social activities. She celebrates her special kinship with the physical universe,
the environment, the Earth or the Mother Land, and with the humanity

Professor Agnes Grant of the Brandon University, in her review of Maracle's
books, writes: "The steady literary production of Lee Maracle is rapidly making her the
most prolific Native writer in Canada today. Her writing career began slowly with Bobbi
Lee: Indian Rebel (1975), which was revised and reissued in 1990 following the success
of I am Woman (1988). This was followed by Sojourner's Truth (1990) and her
novels, Sundogs (1992) and Ravensong (1993)” (CJNS, 1993, 354) Maracle published her as-told-to autobiography Bobbie Lee: Indian Rebel two years after the publication of Campbell’s Halfbreed (1973) Then she did some sort fiction writing and later on took up serious writing. In an interview with Jennifer Kelly, she says “Sundogs is about the tension of the moment, but Ravensong is about historical tension that I think keeps all Native people locked in a certain place-fear, that governs how we care for our children and what our responses are to illness and what our feelings about the rest of the world are because of the epidemics we fought solely on our own. We lost in most cases” (Kelly 73-74)

Sundogs as the first novel revolves round the Oka crises that happened in 1990 in the Preface, Mike Meyers writes “The summer of 1990 stands out as a turning point in the evolution of the aboriginal fights struggle in Canada The events at Oka gave a great many people permission to express their frustration about their operation, ..look within themselves and become familiar with an almost forgotten sense of self” (Preface). In the new edition of the novel the novelist writes that the aboriginal are in the process of rediscovering and reclaiming there separate body of traditional knowledge. She says, I have felt the burden of having to drive through dark tunnels of memory and magic to reclaim the internal world of woman (14)” Joy Harjo writes that Maracle’s writings “came of age during the up risings of our nations and continues to translate the consciousness of our communities” (Foreword). Maracle, according to him, is an original warrior and represents the “consciousness of an age”(ibid.). Antanas Sileika in her review states that the novel is “really an expression of justified anger at the treatment of the First Nations by a culture so insensitive that it tried to build a golf course on top of a Native burial ground” (69).

The novel breaks down the stereotype images of native peoples They are not portrayed as “noble savages” or “Barbaric savages” but real human beings fighting for their self-determination and struggling to survive in the contemporary world They
recreate themselves, re-construct their history and identity and reclaim their homelands. This novel is about the narrator "coming of age" as a native person in Canada. The protagonist Marianne is brought up in urban Canada and educated in white institutions. A student of sociology, she intends to complete a research paper about "Marriage and Divorce in Khatstalano community". This community was once located at false Creek but now is integrated with a local reserve of North Vancouver.

The narrator lives with her family consisting of her mother, two brothers Rudy and Joseph, and two sisters Lacy and Rita. She is the youngest of five children and twenty years old. All are married except her. She has a dozen of nephews and nieces. During her adolescence, she has done enough babysitting of her nephews and nieces. Rita, her elder sister, has three children and is going to have the fourth one - "a premature birth". Others always consider her as a "baby" in the family. Her mother or anybody else never takes her into confidence.

Marianne is very much confused with her dual identity. "At home, I am not Indian enough and at school I am much too Indian" (Maracle10). At her twenty, she is allowed, little freedom in life. She has never enjoyed freedom like other kids in the family. She has to go to school and then come back home. She has to seek her mother's permission to go anywhere after school. She says: "When I was young she punished me. These days she keeps me tied to the house by guilteting me" (6). Her mom considers guilt as the "Klutziest of all human emotions".

Marianne denies doing any more babysitting. Her Mom puts blame on whites, on their policies and systems. She feels every white activity for natives is "cultural genocide". She listens to the Premier of Quebec telling about his new policy of "welfare cutbacks" in the TV new bulletin at 6'O clock. She shouts at him in rage. Marianne is ashamed to know about Indians living on welfare cheques. When she informs Rita about Mom's nation of cultural genocide, her sister explains "Honey it's such a long story. Our mothers have trekked through one wilderness after another without let up. There you are..."
at the bottom of the hill watching Mom grumble through the rest of her journey home and it all just seems too much” (12)

To the amateur sociologist, her family is her school. She thinks about her family members. Her sister Rita plans to take divorce from her husband Bill, who draws his suspicious in alcohol. Their children pine for their father but endure the icy wind of stepfathers. In a family gathering, Momma announces her sister’s divorce and her plan to buy a new house, where the entire family can be accommodated. Marianne thinks aloud: “Us? Buy a house. The whole notion is painful and absurd. Here we are, a bunch of rag tags trying to create a life from the ashes of a stolen land, stolen dreams, and our another suggests we just by-pass all that grief and buy back some of our stolen goods” (36). To her mother, a sixty year old native woman, buying a house is a "Challenge" but she has strong will and also the amount for a down payment.

The towns civic-authorities of Kanestake decide to occupy a native graveyard and built a golf course on it. Native people claim that the land belongs to them whereas the white administrators demand that they own the land. Marianne is surprised over the issue and states: "I can't believe the town could come to own our graveyards by legitimate means, more so, I can't believe anyone would want to play golf on someone else's graveyard" (125-6). To reclaim their graveyard, the Mohawks at Kanesatake have armed themselves, blocked the roads and occupied the graveyard and a bridge. In response to their demonstration, the police have attacked the mob with the support of the army. The government officials have begun negotiations to settle the issue. The press has covered the news of the incident but it has not written a single statement in favour of the Mohawks who fight for the cause. As Marianne states, "Not a word about the shame the Quebec government and the town of Oka should feel about golfing on other people's graves" (126). On the other hand, the press brings out ridiculous columns on Native land claims and gives good results.

The Oka event takes a severe turn when the army uses weapons against the Mohawks putting their lives at stake. But they are united "to stop this threat of death".
Marianne assumes that Elijah is trying to reshape the direction of Canadian Sociology, when the Premier is worried about the financial crises—the devaluation of Canadian dollar in the international market due to Elijah Harper's movement, her mother demands for the last homeland. Marianne's white classmate James admits that Indians have 'minds' after listening to Elijah Harper. Marianne responds, "You have just proven that Indians are capable of great invisibility in the context of Canadians and their sacred institution. Until Elijah messed up the legislature, we didn't exist" (83) She realizes that "the genocidal plot is falling apart at the seams and there is no longer any terra firma for white men to stand on" (84) The Okangan Nation organizes the run for peace. It is a human race against the government's apathy towards Native peoples and its passive attitude towards the Oka event. It is a race against the deployment of army to control the armed Mohawks at Kanesatake. It is a run against colonization, racism, and oppression of minorities in Canada by the mainstream/majority white settlers. It is a run against injustice and exploitation of bureaucracy.

Marianne is an awakened Native woman with revived spirit. She has regained her self-esteem and feels the need to live, not just to survive as a minor another. She states, "We want to experience the love and passion of social affection before we die. We feel this need to live so deep that we will risk life itself to feel blood pumping sisterhood and brotherhood to every moving cell in our bodies" (163). She identifies herself with the Mohawk warriors of Kanestake. The attack on their will to live in modern Canada. Taking up arms, they demand their right to self-determination and self-governance. Marianne decides to join with the runners in the Okangan Peace Run. According to her, "Running is a solitary thing. It is a thing of the spirit and deeply personal. It requires great effort and an appreciation for the mundane" (170). She realizes the greatness of the task and goes to Penticton to sweat in the log cabin on single creek road.

The run begins in the traditional way with the drummers playing on some old native song. She observes the run very closely and gives the community in every detail. The first man in front, the old one, clutches the feather and runs it to a group of even
older woman at the edge of the community. The three of the jog across the bridge, grinning from ear to ear and hand it to the sweat conductor's father. With style and flourish he spins about and trots the feather across the road. The ladies seem ancient and young at the same time, all a giggle with the joy of bringing the feather into the village and they fairly trot the rest of the way to the hall where we are going to eat and leave from "(169) She doesn't believe in native ceremonies and rituals but listens to the address of the elders, to the instructions about the runners' conduct, and to the wishes conveyed by people. Marianne remembers one instruction "the feather is never to touch the ground or stop" (169) She wonders how a feather is going to bring peace for her people. She is overwhelmed with the grand reception to the runners including her, though she doesn't belong to the Okanagan nation. She is empowered by the spirit to complete her run and to breathe homeland across eagle's feathers. She listens to her faith, which says "It's a long way but you'll make it" (171) She sweats and toils hard to see every inch of soil, the destruction of the mountains and the earth, pulsing and living till the end of the run.

The runners take food and rest in different native community centers at night of their way, but they don not stop in towns. To her query, an old man answers that they are allies of the six nations and they are obligated to support their quest for sovereignty. Marianne is aware of her new nationhood and she continues to run -- "Run, run, run for peace. Run for squaws, feathers, small things and great love" (183) She gets a mystical experience full of love, peace and life. She realizes "We are worthy. We are sacred. Life is sacred. Eagle whispers from my feather across the hot breath of my effort. Creation is sacred, and my body changes. It rearranges my pattern of thought, tears up page after page of nonsense, utilitarian and cluttered." (173)

The whole of Indian country (Nations) support this struggle for peace and is ready to pay any price for it. Rudy decides to go to Mt. Curne, where the community hosts a road block on behalf of Kane stake warriors. Paul also joins Marianne in the run. She realizes that the run has not much impact on the white government. She says "It's shameful that forty young native people and a handful of our elders should have to run a
small feather across thousands of kilometers with prayerful visions of peace in their hearts so that death can be prevented" (196) In Ottawa, Quebec, the runners are arrested and jailed without any change. They are restricted from further running. She is disappointed with such prohibition and discontinuation of the run. She promises to complete the run next year and leaves for home where her mom extends her a warm welcome. She finds her people with a new vision, a new world-view. "A world rich with peace. A world in which we were not invisible. A world in which we are not always running from behind, denied future. Denied access to the wonderment of being alive. We acquire a vision of the world in which the besiegement of ourselves, the encroachment upon our communities, and the death and neglect of one another, is not longer acceptable" (197-8). Her people are now awakened and recreated. She thinks about their sovereignty and equality, and their solidarity with all creation. Her mom is very happy to know that her lineage has given birth to a new child who would take up the responsibility "to fix the world". Marianne has returned alive from the run. She thinks that they have "survived the holocaust, the most unspoken holocaust in history" (206). The fight against all kinds of oppression goes on. It has given them the courage to move beyond grief and to live on. She finds "a rainbow of joy and hope. in the eyes of family members. She following her mother puts emphasis on eagle feather, pipe and drum. Native young men need these small things to bring prospective to their ongoing fight. These items symbolize their glory and pride. She wishes to regain her mother's language. She says, "I need to know that all of creation's children are equal from the snow flea to the whale, we are all just children of the earth. I have to know that small things make up the vastness of the universe, that love is built day by day; moment by moment with great effort on behalf of the collective whole: (210). She wants these things to govern her emotions, her spirit and conduct.

Marianne is a human being, and a young woman. She feels the need of love in her life. She wants to make love with somebody and to be loved in return. In the mean time, she comes across a white boy Mark who invites her to lunch and to go on drives with him. Once he brings her to his bedroom for making love and for having sex. He doesn't
want her to return to her home. She cannot cooperate with him in this regard because of her ordered life under her mom’s control and supervision. She reacts to herself emotionally:

"He cannot guess his remark would bring razors to my gut and that these razors would begin singing dangerous songs of resentment against the world, against the denial of language, against my womanhood. He can’t possibly see my insides have been one storm after another for weeks on end. Storms without let up which do not halt and birth clear sunny moments." (116) She leaves his place out of hatred and disgust. Mark remains separated from her. She feels like being "erased" by Mark. James appears as a rival of Mark and wants to love Marianne. Marianne wants to experience dating with her suitor. She wishes to "mix up" but her indifference prohibits her. She doesn’t succeed in winning the heart of a truthful and honest lover. She prefers to bury her youth in books and notes. She realizes, "The alternative was to consent to sexual reduction, withdraw or be reduced. Erase yourself or consent to shame. That is the sociology of being Native and woman in Canada. It is the result of besiegement, encroachment, small neglect, impoverishment, and mass death." (161). She is mentally and spiritually preoccupied with these two alternatives. She is crippled by the choices given by the mainstream society—the patriarchal racist society in Canada. After a break, there's a compromise between the two lovers. He again invites her to lunch. They discuss about Mark’s past—his marriage and separation. Mark remains silent mostly and tries his best to heal the rift with Marianne. He conveys best wishes to her for joining the run praising her as a "worthy" woman. His promising voice is textured with sensuousness and intimacy. Marianne wishes to hear his sweet voice "for all eternity." She loves him truly and admires his hidden feelings. Marianne wants to have her freedom and dreams of her bright future with Mark without her family interference. She experiences a completely new feeling in his presence. Her agony and depression change into happiness and hope. She has a renewed perception of her own self, her world, and the outside. She says, "I want to climb mountains and watch sundogs caper on the prairie." (210)
"Sundogs" is an abstract image. The Minnesota boy, her fellow-runner, tells the story about sundogs. He narrates "Impossible images reflected under extraordinary circumstances. Sundogs. Twin suns, twins image my family, my mountain home back dropped by twin mountains with twin peaks, made of twin sisters. My mountains, an impossible image, mirrors my family under extraordinary circumstance. My nephew and I twin, mirror lineage and battle stones hailed by hateful citizens under the extraordinary impossible shelter of a single feather. Sundogs, two suns, one a mirror, the other pure fire, magnificent fire" (185). Marianne love towards Mark has changed to her love for "manhood - the glorious humanity". According to her, "love for humanity sharpens your love for the individual; and this love again recreates love for the divine soul"(211). Now they have deep faith and love for each other. They dream together for a better future and happy married life. Marianne recalls her grandfather's leadership, her grandmother's support to his movements and her mother's dream, boldness and courage. She strongly advocates for her momma's action against the white world. Mark gives one instance admiring her: "It isn't our way to abuse woman. It shouldn't have to be such a costly lesson. When your mom got up there my sense of manhood all went out of the window. She meant to speak, right there in the heart of white urban Canada - this little bush momma. It was great." (214) Mark acknowledges that she "comes from a long line of wild cards." She is a strong woman to fight against racism, patriarchy and oppression.

The protagonist as a scholar of sociology makes some deep observations of both the societies - white and native. She finds lots of differences between the two. Marianne considers that whites are like bodies without character, family history. The white youth belong to the electronic world of TV, stereos, videogames, and spectator sports. They are shallow socially, intellectually, morally and culturally. White elders are found to live in cheap apartments on low incomes without the support of family members. Sometimes they stay alone in old-age homes. Marianne wonders that she has never heard a single white child telling stories of grannies on long winter nights. She puts a rhetorical question: "where are the stories of struggle of old white women to carve out a new life,
divorced from their lineage in a land so far from their birth place?" (189) She thinks that past, their culture and heritage by their grand parents. She feels that white people have become "The rootless, the lost, and the ridiculous" (137). On the other hand, she recollects her own native family and community life. Every year all members of her family pack up their baskets and head for the last berry - field on the periphery of the huge city that now spreads out all over the old food gathering places of her people. During each summer, all gather in their own communities to perform ceremonies and rituals in camps. Daytime, they pluck berries and at night they sing and dance around the fire.

Native people consider 'family' as an entity comprising of mere individuals. As a collective entity, it shapes everything for them. She says, "No one in this family sees heroes or genius outside the genius of the whole people." (199). According to her, the knowledge of the family is shared one. She rightly says, "I get the impression that the whole family participates in the development of their collective thinking" (Ibid). Her family is like "a spider's web of continuum" and she says, "Spider weaves its web inside my soul. In the center stands my mother, her mother, her mother's mother-infinite lines of grandmothers who spiral out, gain numbers and accumulate strength in their numbers." (172). Her grandmothers are "omnipotent" providing her power, courage and faith. She gets empowerment by the simplicity and greatness of their love. Initially, she doesn't like her momma's too much interference in her privacy. She emotionally suffers and says, "This is the consequence of belonging to family; it's a kind of curious contract of guardianship both the indulged and the indulgent all ascribe to" (134). She has accepted such indulgence for twenty years with little resistance. When she doesn't like to do baby sitting of Rita's new-born baby, her momma reacts strongly and says, "you sound just like them" (9). She further adds "They got our kids so filled with their junk, they don't know shit from government, education system, religion, language and way of life. She calls this "genocide" of her culture. Her brother Jacob explains her what harms whites have done to them. He states: "White men have everything, except our bedrooms and they want that
too. What bugs me is that the plainest white people manage to grab hold of our most beautiful youth." (129). Marianne has a completely new perspective of the issue. She loves Mark but finds James as a rival lover. She then asks "Does it always have to go that way—just at the moment when togetherness is possible, the ghost of white men invades the small space between you and erects an invisible wall dividing you" (126).

When she thinks about Terry Fox, the white boy, as her friend, she doesn't see any success in this relationship. She realizes, "White people don't fit in our homes, can't fit; the context which guides their behaviour is absent. They would end up alone, silent in some corner, feeling unsure about their whole personal human history." (188) Earlier she has observed "white men dodge and duck each other and their own women. Men of colour duck and dodge everyone. It's the hierarchy of things" (89). She doesn't see any difference in the treatment of white women and native women by the patriarchal society. White women are not considered intellectually astute. They are responsible only for their children's rearing. Native women, on the contrary, are very hard working. They don't give up their native traditions and customs. The narrator says, "Before they came, we worked, loved, reared children, and kept the social relations of our families sane. We continue to do that." (89)

Marianne doesn't want to separate herself from her family that gives her protection from evils. She doesn't want to move in a different direction from that of her family. She feels that they are no longer "victims" of the racist society. She establishes her position saying, "I am no longer on the periphery of their world and cut off from mine; they are on the periphery of mine." (SD 137). To her, her mom has become "a living breathing person with good sense." She cites an illustration earlier. Her mother comes to know about the government of Canada's decision to send its army to resolve the Iraq-Iran crisis in the Middle East. She shouts at the premier of Quebec who was addressing the public on TV and says "Don't you dare touch one hair on these boys' heads, damn you. You have done everything to us. Robbed us, raped us, and pillaged us, until we are no more. No more. No morals, no culture, just a bunch of raggedy Indians,"
not even people. A mistake. No identity" (135) She destroys the TV throwing a stone at it. White participating in the run, Marianne observes another level of distinction between the two generations of her people - the old and the young. She finds a great deal of difference between their life - styles and viewpoints. She says: "We come from two different worlds. Most of the runners are young, educated in European schools. The organizers are older, educated in Residential schools or not at all. They have always lived and worked on the reserve, immerse in their community." (187) The young men imitate the white ways of life and the white standards of judgment. They wear western dress, take European goods and want to stay in cities having their own jobs and families like whites. They are educated in English like the white youths, but they experience colonialism, racism and oppression. The old people don't experience them as they work together in their communities. They are not so much bothered about the white people and colonialism or racism.

Native people have got renewed strength, made new resolutions and regained revived spirit and courage to stand up and fight. They have struggled for their survival and reconstructed their new identities. They have made several attempts to rewrite to "alter Native" history of Canada. Marianne recalls how her instructor lectures on Native history and culture. She gives the impression that the pre-contact history is not history. It is too simple and very little. She narrates the historical background of native people's landlessness, poverty, hunger and disease. She mentions about the encroachment and the white settlement and its expansion. She refers to the laws made by the Royal Commissions that pushed Aboriginal peoples into several reserves and allowed whites to occupy their lands. The instructor presents the history as following:

"A map comes into focus. 1906: 1,800 small extinct tribes in B C. It took only seventy-five years of settlement to destroy one thousand, eight hundred villages by this process. Statistics become faces, relatives and friends... Disease and encroachment killed out future. We were pursuing life as we knew it and excluded from the life they created we came to understand that our lives had not value"(156)
Native people were seriously affected by enormous deaths. Grief and unwillingness to live was very common in them. She is aware of this nature of encroachment and process of colonization as a student of anthropology and sociology. The events such as AIM (American Indian Movement), the Oka crisis, and the Okanagan run make her achieve her nationhood and identity. She imagines how her mother moves into the city under many hardships and how she "never intends to integrate herself or any of her progeny into the social fabric of white Canada" (189).

Marianne begins to understand gradually who she is and what is important to her life. Her knowledge of sociological theories of white academicians seems to be irrelevant. She admires Native elders and leaders including her mother and grandparents, Elijah Harper and Louis Riel. She has a high regard for the Mohawk people and the Okanagan Indians who put a continuous fight against whites to prevent and ancestral grave site from being developed into a golf course. She believes in Native people all over the country and has enormous faith in their ability to unite and maintain equality and solidarity among themselves. Even she finds non-natives stand on the highways to support and encourage the fighters, to strengthen their power and solidarity. She is no more a social idiot, a "hauling ass across foreign terrain carrying two burdens on her back-racism and patriarchy" (76) and a little immature baby to her family members. On the other hand, she is a proud Native woman who gains her nationhood and self-dignity, being a thorough student of her own community and own people.

Marianne has marked changes happening to her people. Her friend Dorry has become "a painter of great worldly affection." Her sister is no longer "a fanatical feminist" but a changed woman with different attitudes towards non-natives/whites. She herself is ashamed to hear her people living on welfare cheques due to her self-dignity. "It shames me some to hear the statistics about us in class. The shame burns holes in whatever sympathy I may have for Indians." (3). She doesn't consider every white activity as cultural genocide like her mom and others. She recollects her momma grabbing her rosary of purple crystals and retreating to her catholic prayers. She knows
that her momma isn't a devout catholic. She practices this only when she is forced to so, "to rely on white folks". Her sister Rita has a career plan, but fails to achieve it due to her continuous pregnancy. She then takes a bold step to separate herself from her husband Bill. The Indian salesman at the coffee machine loves her and reveals the truth to Marianne. Her paper on divorce is finally finished after she "ploughs through theory after theory from a dozen different white, male scholar's perspectives about the why of divorce". (28). To this "sweet, blind baby", her Auntie Mary says, "shame is a worthy sentiment so long as you clutch it to work out change and not use it to excuse yourself with guilt, child" (32). She is very much influenced by this statement and changes her attitude accordingly.

Lee Maracle has given her people an accurate representation with historical and sociological details. These people are no more "invisible" and no one can "erase" them. They are very much at the "Center" coming from the "margins/periphery". Sovereignty is no more "an impossible dream" for them. They would continue to struggle for it, for having equality, liberty and self-determination. The government of Canada can't neglect or overlook their issues/problems. Sooner or later, there should be solution to the native problems. Aboriginal people should be left to them to survive as a sovereign nation in a multicultural country like Canada and should be treated equally with other ethnic communities/races. Rather they should be given due respect as one of the founding/(First) Nations of Canada, constitutionally and socially. They should enjoy their rights - right to speak their tribal languages, to practice their indigenous religions and traditional customs. Every attempt should be made to protect native culture and to record preserve Native heritage.

Assimilation or acculturation is not the solution to the native problem. No community can survive and flourish at the cost of another community. The white majority should not think of wiping out the other Native nations. It can't be done or is never possible. Instead of integrating them to the mainstream, they should adopt a policy of sharing each other and respect individual values and cultures.
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