CHAPTER II

AUTHOR AS PROTAGONIST: THE WAY TO RAINY MOUNTAIN
AND THE NAMES

In his memoirs, The Way to Rainy Mountain and The Names: A Memoir Momaday explores the holiness and beauty that his Kiowa ancestors attributed to the landscapes and the other natural elements. In The Way to Rainy Mountain, he brings in the folk stories, quotes some historical incidents connected to those folk stories, and finally he narrates his own close observation of ‘nature.’

The Way to Rainy Mountain is divided into three parts: ‘The Coming Out,’ ‘The Going On’ and ‘The Closing In’ which are chronologically arranged as twenty four groups, each containing three paragraphs. In the three small paragraphs, the first is a folktale written on the left page, the second is a historical note or a fact written on the right side, and the third one is a personal note written below the historical note. The tribal and the historical voices are linked by the personal voice as it establishes a strong bond between Momaday and his ancestors. To support the folktale content Momaday quotes factual information from the anthropologist Mildred P Mayhall and James Mooney. The third voice contains different personal experiences like a dream or imagination or sometimes even an intuition. “Gradually, as the book progresses, the three voices tend to merge, as each voice exhibits the characteristics of narrative, descriptive, and personal writing. This movement gives the book a dynamic quality, a
sense of discovery: a feeling of rich but fragmented pasts coalescing into a rich, meaningful, and personified present” (Roemer 771).

As the title suggests The Way to Rainy Mountain is the physical as well as the spiritual journey Momaday has undertaken from Yellowstone to the Rainy Mountain. The Kiowas had once travelled to reach the plains. Momaday might have two purposes in mind, to travel to the same place his ancestors had travelled and to reach the burial place of his grandmother Aho. There is an opening poem and a closing poem, a preface and an epilogue which lend completeness to his work. He mentions the old Kiowa woman Ko-sahn who gave him some critical insights into the Kiowa life.

It is difficult to determine the genre of The Way to Rainy Mountain and The Names. Momaday himself classifies “both books as memoirs.” Momaday explains that there are a lot of differences between the two books and they can never come under the genre of autobiography. In the interview with Tom King, Momaday acknowledges the appropriateness of Dee Brown considering his memoirs as the “most American book ever written.” Momaday makes a passionate statement: “I wrote that book out of the conviction of having lived, in my ancestors, for many thousands of years in North America. And The Way to Rainy Mountain proceeds also from that conviction” (King 70).

Momaday constructs his personal as well as communal identity by retelling the folk stories. Unlike the mainstream writers who create a unique identity through empirical observation and analysis of their own experiences, Momaday develops a communal
identity which is necessary for the establishment of his personal identity. The nomadic nature of his Kiowa ancestors and his travel towards the prairie land illustrate his creation of communal identity and thereby his personal identity. His ancestors migrated from the dark mountains to the sunlit plains. For them it was an escape from the confinement of the mountains to the freedom in the plains.

For Momaday, the journey from the city to the native lands constitutes both an escape from the darkness and a living in light and freedom. Momaday’s personal identity is created only through his travel backwards to his ancestry, in a fusion with the communal identity. As the Kiowa ancestors adopted sun worship, the most miraculous phenomenon in the plain region, Momaday too worships the sun and the vast sky by which he fulfils his spiritual as well as aesthetic quest. Whereas his ancestors’ travel to the plain region was for physical survival, Momaday’s is for spiritual survival.

Momaday’s thoughts and life style are probed in more detail by Woodard in his direct conversations with Momaday. Woodard is fascinated by the ‘biculural experience’ of Momaday, as he associates himself with the bear power, and with Billy the Kid (Woodard 36). It is obvious that Momaday is aware of both Anglo and tribal identities, but his writings, paintings and speeches show the great longing he has towards establishing himself as a Kiowa man. Barry associates Momaday’s travel experiences with the nomadic ‘nature’ of his Kiowa ancestors (116).

_The Way to Rainy Mountain_ is created out of the strong longing Momaday has towards creating an idea of himself and his people. Story telling is an effective way to forge communal as well as personal identity. Story telling was an inevitable part of
the Kiowa oral tradition. Momaday becomes part of the Kiowa story telling tradition by retelling the old story in a unique way and also by creating new ones. Momaday considers the story tellers as people “in possession of a great power. When the story teller tells his listener a story, he creates his listener, he creates a story. He creates himself in the process. It’s an entirely creative process” (Givens 81).

There is a close link between the folk story, the historical incident and the personal narrative. Following the pathways of the Kiowas’ migration from the mountain region to the prairie land, Momaday journeys seeking the Ultimate in ‘nature.’ He stands dumbfounded in the presence of the beauty of ‘nature.’ The knowledge that he has come to see the place where ‘creation is taking place’ exhilarates him. He goes through the spiritual, aesthetic ecstasy his ancestors had experienced long back when they found out the ‘abode of the Sun’ in the grassland.

He wants to experience ‘nature’ in its primordial purity. Keeping the Kiowa folk stories in mind, he establishes a close connection with his native landscapes. Throughout the book these stories help Momaday to look at ‘nature’ from an ancient Kiowa man’s point of view. For example, he narrates the Kiowa folk story of origin myth according to which they came out of a hollow log. Coming out of a hollow log suggests a movement from darkness to light and “it makes them glad to see so many things” (17). The feeling that must have accompanied that mythical moment is captured in the description of the beauty of the land in the narrative when he comes across “the northern Great Plains” (17).
There were meadows of blue and yellow wild flowers on the slopes, and I could see the still, the sunlit plain below, reaching away out of sight. At first there is no discrimination in the eye, nothing but the land itself, whole and impenetrable. But then smallest things begin to stand out of the depths – herds and rivers and groves – and each of these has perfect being in terms of distance and of silence and of age. (TWRM 17)

When they came out into the world through the log, the Kiowas must also have found the land whole. And each moment they looked around, they must have noticed things individually. Such a feeling of looking at the landscapes for the first time, the delighted state of the first Kiowas, is experienced by Momaday also. By enjoying the beauty of ‘nature,’ he partakes the consciousness of the primordial men, his Kiowa ancestors, the men who were in concord with ‘nature.’ As a writer, Momaday is enchanted and is drawn back into his communal past.

Momaday’s perspective of enjoying the beauty of ‘nature’ is quite different from the Kantian perspective. For Kant, beauty of an object is judged and enjoyed by reason. When man does this, he detaches himself from the object. For him, beauty is enjoyed with the help of the faculty of judgment. This aspect of logical treatment of aesthetics is inevitable as he divided the very concept of beauty into the ‘beautiful’ and the ‘sublime’. “The Beautiful in nature is connected with the form of the object, which consists in having boundaries. The Sublime, on the other hand, is to be found in a formless object, so far as in it or by occasion of it boundlessness is represented, and yet its totality is also present to thought” (Kant 61). Momaday holds beauty as
mainly deriving out of the emotional correspondence one feels towards an object or surroundings, though rational judgment too is involved sometimes. Whenever he enjoys beauty, he is seen satisfying his emotional needs by attaching himself to his native land. In one of the interviews he says:

That landscape represents to me, in the best sense, the cultural memory of the migration of the Kiowas. I look at it and I wonder who before in my own line of descent has looked upon it. And what did it mean to that person. That is a very exciting thing to think about. And thinking about it in such a way is an appropriation, too. You know, I take possession of the landscape when I look at it in that way. I feel that I’m gathering it into my experience and I am becoming richer because of it.

(Woodard 211)

The kinship Momaday feels towards landscape is a major feature that characterizes his writings. Though not new to literature this practice is crucial for anyone who makes a sincere attempt to develop his self and understand it. The way Momaday looks at landscape is different from that of other ‘nature’ writers like Wordsworth or Emerson. Wordsworth looked at ‘nature’ as his ‘nurse,’ ‘guide’ ‘the guardian of his heart’ and ‘soul of all his moral being.’ In his youth his attachment to ‘nature’ had helped Wordsworth to recover from his feelings of alienation. To Emerson ‘nature’ was sacred and this idea was essential for his spiritual growth. According to him, one can never possess ‘nature’ as it always is ‘inaccessible.’ When this ‘inaccessibility’ persists, man will start venerating ‘nature’ and treat it as an agent of great spiritual power.
The concept of transcendentalism emerged from this spiritual aspect of ‘nature.’
Momaday’s writings do not foreground ‘nature’ as god or guide but emphasize finding one’s being in ‘nature’s’ being.

There is a spiritual side to the story too. In most of the religious beliefs, man is created by a God and the general belief is that everything on earth is created for man. But unlike the origin stories in the scriptures of the most of the religions, the origin of Kiowas is neither divine nor superhuman. They believe that they “came out one by one into the world through a hollow log” (TWRM 1). The Kiowas are less in number because, according to the story, a pregnant woman gets stuck in the hollow log, preventing more people from passing through. They came through the “hollow log” which can be called a medium. Since the hollow log is part of the flora, the origin of the Kiowas happened only after the origin of flora. The mythical agent is definitely hinted at when Momaday finds a hollow log on the Rainy Mountain. The oneness the Kiowas, as do most tribes, feel with ‘nature’ is traceable to their origin myth which shows them emanating from plant life. Incidentally, the myth also makes a better ‘evolutionary’ sense.

The tribal past makes Momaday realize the concord human beings have among themselves and with their surroundings. Momaday’s works are a departure from the individual centric Anglo American tradition and are keenly oriented towards the Kiowa tribal culture. Comparing Anglo American and Native American novels Bevis William says that unlike the Anglo American novels the “native American novels are not ‘egocentric,’ centrifugal, diverging, expanding, but ‘incentric,’ centripetal,
converging, and contracting…In Native American novels, coming home, staying put, contracting, even what we call ‘regressing’ to a place, is a primary mode of knowledge and a primary good” (16). According to Bevis, the protagonists in the Anglo American novels go away from their home and hometown in search of identity and fortune. The bildungsroman novels are examples of this. Studying six major Native American novels-- *The Surrounded, Wind from an Enemy Sky, House Made of Dawn, Winter in the Blood, Ceremony,* and *The Death of Jim Loney*--Bevis observes that in these novels “‘identity’ for a Native American is not a matter of finding ‘one’s self’ but of finding a ‘self’ that is transpersonal and includes a society, a past, and a place. To be separated from that transpersonal time and space is to lose identity. These novels are important, not only because they depict Indian individuals coming home while white individuals leave but also because they suggest – variously and subtly and by degrees – a tribal rather than an individual definition of ‘being’ ”(Bevis 19). To the whites, the quest is towards self-identity whereas to the native Indian it takes them back to their roots to achieve fusion rather than individuality.

The reason behind this ‘centripetal’ phenomenon is owing to the belief system of tribal communities. When the tribal protagonist comes back to find his roots in his rural native place, ‘nature’ plays its ancient role of ‘provider’ and ‘protector’ to the lonely man. Most of the religious and tribal cultures are based on the belief that ‘nature’ is sacred. ‘Nature’ worship is the most ancient system of worship. Though almost all the mainstream religions have developed from such a base, later developments in various fields changed man’s attitude to ‘nature’. The primordial man saw ‘nature’
with awe and respect. They had so much spiritual as well as emotional connection with ‘nature.’ Ancient literature, scriptures and folk stories abound in personified ‘nature’ elements.

In the Kiowa folk stories the ‘grandmother spider’ and the ‘snake grandfather’ are venerated figures. Elaborating on the concept ‘self within larger Self’ Arne Naess argues that each individual should realize his ‘self’ as part of the larger ‘Self,’ the universe (9). When such realization gels, the modern man’s feeling of loneliness or isolation caused by ego, jealousy and enmity will gradually decrease. Such realization can be earned by acknowledging the sacred in fellow beings and the surrounding. The same concept is seen in the ‘Mandukyopanisad.’ “The same Atman who is viewed from the individual standpoint as individual soul, is also the Universal Soul” (13).

‘Nature’ worship is an umbrella term under which come various forms of worship. Broadly, spiritual traditions that worship earth or universe or both are termed ‘nature’ worship. There are two major divisions in ‘nature’ worship. Some worship ‘nature’ directly—the mountain or the sun, or an animal. Some worship deities who are embodiments of these ‘natural’ elements. *The Encyclopedia Britannica* defines ‘nature’ worship as a system of religion based on the veneration of natural phenomena – for example, celestial objects such as the sun and the moon and terrestrial objects such as water and fire. A predominant form of religion has not been well documented. Among the indigenous peoples of many countries, the concept of ‘nature’ as a totality is unknown; only
individual natural phenomena — e.g., stars, rain, and animals — are comprehended as natural objects or the forces that influence them and are thus in some way worthy of being venerated. There are different forms of ‘nature’ worship like star, fire, tree, animal, mountains, groves, herbs, well, megalith, standing stone, stone circle, thunder, totem, sky, water, Gaia worship etc. (www.britannica.com)

‘Nature’ worship has persisted in some form or the other through millennia the fact of which argues for the case that such impulses are intrinsic and inherent in the human psyche, may be even in the genes.

The Kiowas are sun worshippers. Sun worship is the most ancient of worship systems and was prevalent among many civilizations and tribal cultures. The anthropological study of Swanton deals with the common sun worship among the tribes of Southwest of North America. The tribe Yuchi consider themselves the “offsprings of Sun.” The Creek believe in the Sun as the supreme power or ‘the one above.” The Chichasaw see Sun as “the great holy fire above.” The surrounding tribes like Caddo, Cusabo, Timucuo and Chitimacha follow the same system of worship. The major difference, as said earlier, is that some worship the sun as god or goddess by attributing to it human characteristics and some others worship it as a natural phenomenon with “magical powers.” The Kiowas belong to the second category.

In the course of time, due to industrialization and reformation, the idea of holiness of ‘nature’ has tended to have less and less hold on human minds. Edmund Barrow says that “in our increasingly material driven world the separation between
religion, spirituality and our environment widens. Now people need to reconnect to
the natural world and what better way to do than to hold the natural world sacred” (42).
Such a need for reconnection with ‘nature’ is in the ascendant, say the psychoanalysts.
People want to be in a spiritual mode and this will in turn bring them close to ‘nature’.
Rubin says that “in spiritual experience one often feels nonseparate from the universe,
a sense of oneness with others and the world. This connectedness between the self
and the other is said to lead to a nondualistic outlook that fosters the potential for
heightened ethics. Spirituality is often presented…as the antidote to the egocentricity
fostered by secular individualistic culture” (80).

In Momaday’s writings, this aspect of ‘nonseparatedness’ is noticeable. The
spiritual concord the author feels towards ‘nature’ has its roots in the Kiowa tradition
of ‘nature’ worship. There are innumerable examples of this in Kiowa folk stories.
The story of tai-me is the most celebrated one. According to this folk story, Kiowas
faced a terrible famine. A Kiowa man went far away in search of food for his people.
After days of journey he came to a “great canyon” and suddenly it started thundering
and lightning. He heard a voice asking him “Why are you following me? What do you
want”? It was a creature with the “feet of a deer” and “body covered with feathers”
(TWRM 36). He told that creature about the sad situation of the Kiowas. Tai-me, the
supernatural creature, went with him to the Kiowa camp to redress and provide necessities.
The Kiowas started worshipping tai-me considering the “strange looking” animal as
part of Sun’s divinity. It has become a part of the Sun Dance ceremony.
The talyi-da-i story depicts the origin of another fetish of worship. The origin of talyi-da-i medicine bundle is also a folk story. A child was born to the Sun and a Kiowa woman. The child was looked after by a spider grandmother. Later, he got a twin brother by the magical power of the ring of the Sun. When the grandmother died, the children buried her ceremoniously. The story then goes on to state that the twin children “lived for a long time, and they were greatly honoured among the Kiowas” (*TWRM* 34). According to another version of the story, one of the boys “disappeared forever” and the other “transformed himself into ten portions of medicine” thereby giving his own body in a “eucharistic form to the Kiowas” (*TWRM* 35). Thus the “boy medicine” or “talyi-da-i” becomes “chief object of religious veneration among the Kiowas” (*TWRM* 35). Through the talyi-da-i, Kiowas establish their kinship with the sun.

Like the Hindu idol worshipping system, the tai-me and the talyi-da-i are stone fetishes. Into these idols the shamans conjure up the Sun’s power. Momaday narrates his visit to the talyi-da-i shrine when he was a small boy, with his grandmother Keahdinekeah. He saw the medicine bundle “suspended from the lashing of the poles.” Momaday says that “the holiness of such a thing can be imparted to the human spirit, I believe, for I remember that it shines in the sightless eyes of Keahdinekeah” (*TWRM* 35).

The incidents in Kiowa life show how much respect and fear they had for these fetishes. According to one of the stories the tai-me bundle once fell on the floor without any obvious cause and it produced a big sound, like the sound of a tree falling down. It frightened the tai-me keeper’s wife and Aho. They thought the ‘falling down’ was a bad omen, portending an impending doom to their clan. One historical note says that
Mammedaty used to wear “grandmother bundle” around his neck. The Kiowas have the belief that if a person doesn’t show “proper respect” to the bundle, it will “grow extremely heavy around his neck” (*TWRM* 81).

While the tai-me is the animal representation of Sun, the talyi-da-i is its human representation and the peyote is the plant representation of the Sun. Peyote is the seed of a cactus plant with the power to induce hallucination. Worshipping a plant, a tree or a group of trees is prevalent in different communities. For example, the Hindus worship the *tulsi*, neem tree and sacred grove. One of the historical notes contains a description of the peyote ceremony:

During the peyote ritual a fire is kept burning in the centre of the tipi, enclosed within a crescent shaped altar. On top of the altar there is single, sacred peyote. After the chief priest utters the opening prayer, four peyotes are given to each celebrant, who eats them one after another. Then in turn each man sings four sacred songs and all the while there is the sound of the rattle and the drum and the fitful, many coloured layer of the fire. The songs go on all through the night, broken only by the intervals of prayer, additional distributions of peyote, and at midnight, a peculiar baptismal ceremony. (*TWRM* 39)

The eating of the peyote by men may symbolically suggest their communing with mother ‘nature.’ It is also a tribute to ‘nature.’ Without it the human kind would not have found a place in the cosmic design.
The sun worshipping system of the Kiowas has profound influence on their life in the prairie. Momaday gives an account of the journey of the Kiowas to the sun world or the prairie land. The sun, the prairie land, the horse and the tai-me have close connections. Momaday realizes that their arrival into the sunlit world of grass land has given them a new culture of ‘sun worshipping.’ The Kiowas in fact consider the sun worshipping culture as their most valuable gain after coming to the grass land. There is scarcely any mention in their folklore of their life before they came to the plains. Almost all the stories celebrate their hunting bison on horseback and other daily life situations they experienced or imagined in the grass land. Momaday gives a brief description of the arrival of Kiowas to the plains:

They were a mountain people, mysterious tribe of hunters…in the late seventeenth century they began a long migration to the south and to the east. It was a journey toward the dawn, and it led to a golden age….They acquired horses and their ancient nomadic spirit was suddenly free of the ground. They acquired tai-me, the sacred Sun Dance Doll, from that moment the object and symbol of their worship and so shared in the divinity of the sun. Not least, they acquired the sense of destiny, therefore courage and pride. When they entered upon the southern plains they had been transformed. No longer were they slaves to the simple necessity of survival; they were a lordly and dangerous society of fighters and thieves, hunters and priests of the sun. (TWRM Introd.6-7)
Like most mythical origins, we can see in this instance a quest, a journey, empowerment and transformation. The post-transformation culture makes them men endowed with dignity and a sense of purpose.

In all these worshipping systems of the Kiowas, ‘nature’ is the centre. Momaday too is no exception to the influence of the holiness of ‘nature’ by which was governed a group of people in ancient times. Momaday’s memories are so vivid that he can see in his mind’s eye the old Kiowa man Cheney, praying “aloud to the rising sun.” Momaday says that as a child he “liked to watch him as he made his prayer.” He remembers “where Cheney stood,” “where his voice went on the rolling grass” and “where the sun came upon the land (47).” Either he would have prayed like Cheney, being in the same place, or he would have at least empathetically imagined it. In any case, it is obvious that he also looks upon the sun with veneration.

As a parallel, it is relevant here to look at the Gayatri mantra of the Hindus. In the Hindu worshipping system the sun is the giver of ‘energy.’ The Gayatri Mantra, a hymn in the Rigveda (3.62.10), addresses the sun directly: “om bhur bhuvah swaha tat savitur varenya, bhargo devasya dhimahi, dhiyo yon a prachodayat.” It is translated by many and there are slight variations among the versions. Radhakrishnan’s translation reads: “we meditate on the adorable glory of the radiant sun; may he inspire our intelligence.” The Arya Samaj has translated it as meaning: “O God, giver of life, remover of all pain and sorrows, Bestower of happiness, the creator of the universe, Thou art most luminous, adorable and destroyer of sins. We meditate upon thee. May thou inspire, enlighten, and guide our intellect in the right direction”
Enlightenment and spiritual awareness are the chief qualities associated with the Sun. From a scientific point of view as well we know that the sun is the life giver for, without its energy and warmth all life will perish. The progenitors of the western cultures, the Greeks, knew it when they worshiped Apollo. Hence, the Kiowa attitude to the sun is in tune with the global cultural perspective.

The ancient Kiowas saw the sun’s divinity in the ‘Buffalo,’ the source of their food. The Kiowas were buffalo hunters. There is a folk story about a buffalo with steel horns. The story is about the great strength of the animal, which could push trees down and kill horses with its horns. Its great strength may be another reason for it being treated as sun’s representation. To the Kiowas, the bear and the horse are also representations of the sun on earth. Naturally they too are symbols of great strength. The nail scars on the ‘Rock Tree,’ they believe, are created by the bear with his claws. The bear is seen as a symbol of masculine strength throughout their belief system.

Later, the horse becomes part of the Kiowa life and is treated like a family member and depicted thus in the folk stories. When the buffalos started disappearing, the horses came to be venerated in the Sun Dance Ceremony. The story of the horse that died of shame demonstrates the fact of the high esteem in which the Kiowas held it. Sense of shame is unique to the human kind and by attributing this capacity to the horse the story treats the animal on a par not with any ordinary mortal but a heroic one who would not hesitate to lay down his life in the cause of dignity.

As in the case of horses, the Kiowas respected dogs too. Before the Kiowas became acquainted with horses, dogs were their only animal companion. In one of the
stories, a dog rescues a Kiowa man from a bear which was wounded by him. In the historical note concerned, he adds that the principal warrior society of the Kiowas was named ‘Ka-itsenko’ or ‘Real Dogs.’ The leader of the warriors once had a dream in which the warriors were led by a ‘dog’ who told him: “You are a dog; make a voice like a dog and sing a dog song” (21). The dream symbolism investing the dog with faculty of human language is indicative of the importance they attached to dogs.

The dog as a devoted companion to man has been celebrated in numerous stories and myths. Dog’s devotion to its master is still interesting story stuff and what its companionship could do to growing children’s psychological development is widely talked about. So much so, a dog at home for a kid seems to be a standard prescription by psychologists. How important the dog was to man is also explained in the origin myth relating to the Kolli Malayalis in the Kolli Hills of Tamil Nadu, India. The story has it that seven brothers accompanied by seven dogs went to bring back the seven women who were kidnapped by the men from the neighbouring village. After a few days the dogs returned without their masters and as it was the tribe’s unshakable faith that the dogs would never desert their masters, it was concluded the brothers had died. The seven wives also completed the rituals passing into widowhood. What had actually happened was that the masters had been separated from their dogs which could reach the village before the former could. But as the ritual held sacred had already been performed, the brothers had to leave their tribe and wives to migrate to Javadi Hills. Each brother ended up settling in some place and raising a tribe of his own (Thurston 408-409 ). There is also an interesting study on how dogs helped man dominate the
world. The study suggests that man learned the symbolic art of marking territory from dogs. Fossil and DNA evidence points to domestication of dogs by man 100,000 years ago and probably this was also the time the latter learned the trick of symbolically making territory from the former (Tacon 19). The Kiowa culture also celebrates the importance of dogs but goes a step ahead. Whereas in most cultures and languages to be called a dog is derogatory, the Kiowa’s reverence for the animal was so great that they named their great warriors after it.

On the way to the northern plains, Momaday tells us, the Kiowas were enthralled at the sight of the magnificent Rock-tree. Enchanted by the sight of such a huge monolith, they created a story, through which the ‘rock-tree,’ the ‘bear boy’ and the Big Dipper stars became their sacred possessions.

The epilogue to *The Way to Rainy Mountain* ends with a note and a poem. In the note Momaday says: “it was all of this and more—a quest, a going forth upon the way to the Rainy Mountain” (88). He made a journey through the Kiowa’s sacred land, their memories, and their stories. His quest was to know more about his ancestry, ways of living of his ancestors, the land they lived, to experience their life and to be part of their stories. He covered the pathway the Kiowas had used to migrate, from the mountains to the prairies. Momaday says that the journey of the Kiowas from the dark forest to the bright grass land of the Sun was a fulfilment of an old prophesy, the promised escape from a dark, sunless world into the bright sun-lit prairie land. The journey of Momaday too, covering “fifteen hundred miles” to the Rainy Mountain is a “pilgrimage,” a movement from darkness to light—from the darkness of
anthropocentric life to the ‘nature-centric’ sacred land of the Kiowas. The completion of the pilgrimage quenches his spiritual thirst. The book is replete with descriptions of the ‘sacred’ and ‘beautiful’ Kiowa land. He is stunned by the beauty and the magnificence of the mountains, valleys, mesas, and we see him standing in awe and veneration at the sight of the landscape and the sun.

_The Names : A Memoir_ is different from _The Way to Rainy Mountain_ as it deals with his mixed ancestry. He talks in detail about his maternal and paternal forefathers and the incidents associated with the Whites and the White life style he adopted while living with his parents. The book starts with ‘the genealogical chart’ which demonstrates the Kiowa, Cherokee and French ancestry of Momaday. The photos and caricatures of parents and grand parents till the fifth generation are shown. Before the prologue, he gives a brief account of himself: “my name is Tsoai-talee. I am, therefore Tsoai-talee; therefore I am”. He has been given the name Tsoai-talee by his storyteller grandfather Pohd-lohk. Pohd-lohk believes that “a man’s life proceeds from his name, in the way that a river proceeds from its source.” Momaday too as a Kiowa storyteller proceeds from Tsoai-talee in search of the meaning of his very existence. Though he acknowledges his mixed blood ancestry, he asserts in the beginning of the book itself that he is Tsoai-talee. The same point is emphasized by him when he explains the nature of his memoir. In his interview with King, Momaday claims that _The Names : A Memoir_ and _The Way to Rainy Mountain_ cannot be assigned to the genre of autobiography and considers them both memoirs. But in the preamble to _The Names_ he admits to his narrative being autobiographical.
In general my narrative is an autobiographical account. Specifically it is an act of imagination. When I turn my mind to my early life, it is the imaginative part of it that comes first and irresistibly into reach, and of that part I take hold. This is one way to tell a story. In this instance it is my way, and it is the way of my people. (Not Paginated)

This passage highlights the idea that personal narratives are not just fabrications of the mind but defining perspectives emerging from felt organic experiences. The lode for stories comprises experiences actual as well as those related to aspirations. No narrative can be absolutely personal or completely social. Since Momaday’s memoirs aim at capturing both the tribal and individual selves the contradiction between his observation in the interview and his statement here becomes understandable.

Momaday portrays his childhood days. Momaday had to leave for Virginia in order to complete his final year at the school. A day before his departure Momaday had gone to the mesas across the river. He climbed up to the top of the mesa and looked down. He “could see the whole valley below, the fields, the river, and the village. It was all very beautiful, and the sight of it filled [him] with longing” (160). He spent his childhood days at Jemez Pueblo in New Mexico. He was attached to the surrounding landscape. He says that he waited there for the “strength to return.” This is a poignant moment rich with emotions related to parting. It is as though Momaday was leaving behind someone he loved most. The beauty of the landscape filled him with longing. This longing made him go back to it again and again. Based on sentiments and emotions though, this experience is transmogrified into an intensely aesthetic one
in his mind. Hagman emphasizes how inevitable aesthetic feeling is to life. “Aesthetic experience is as important to human life as sex, hunger, aggression, love and hate. Although we may rarely be conscious of it, aesthetic experience gives form, meaning, and most important, value to everything we do. Theoretically without it, life would be shapeless, meaningless, and colourless series of sensations, events, and reactions” (1).

A strong point of Momaday as a writer is this ability to demonstrate the process of transmutation of a purely personal experience into an aesthetic one.

The Rock Tree is the most astonishing and the most celebrated sacred rock mountain for the Kiowa tribe. Momaday compares the images of the ‘plains’ and the ‘big monolith’ and also reflects on the impact left by them on his mind. He says: “the valley is vast. When you look out over it, it does not occur to you that there is an end to it. You see the monoliths that stand away in space, and you imagine that you have come upon eternity. They do not appear to exist in time. You think: I see that time comes to an end on this side of the rock, and on the other side there is nothing forever” (TN 68-69). The moment is epiphanic as well as mystical fusing infinity and eternity and has the power to transport Momaday away from the limits of time.

Like the eternity he describes through the cricket and its image on the moon, and his own figure on the background of the mountain in The Way to Rainy Mountain, he describes the eternity that the monolith and the viewer attained against the background of the eternal space. John Dewey says of the unification of the viewer and the object
and the eternal state of both: “The uniquely distinguishing feature of aesthetic experience is exactly the fact that no such distinction of self and objects exist in it….The two are so integrated that each disappears” (qtd. in Hagman 22).

It is not only the visual beauty that he aesthetically enjoys but the little and large movements of the plants, the howling or the roaring sound of the wind and the various sounds produced by the animals. He gives us a picture of ‘nature’ he has seen in the summer season:

The land settles onto the end of summer. In the white light a whirlwind moves far out in the plain, and afterwards there is something like a shadow on the grass, a tremor, nothing. There is stillness at noon, but that is illusion: the landscape rises and falls, ringing. In the dense growth of the bottomland a dark drift moves on the Washita River. A spider enters a small pool of light on Rainy Mountain Creek, and downstream, at the convergence, a channel of catfishes turns around in the current and slithers to the surface, where a dragonfly hovers and darts. Away on the high ground grasshoppers and bees set up a crackle and roar in the fields, the meadowlarks and scissortails whistle and wheel about. Somewhere in a maze of gullies a calf shivers and bawls in a tangle of chinaberry trees. And high in the distance a hawk turns in the sun and sails. (TN 14)
This is a classic passage that captures the multisensorial, yet unified, symphony composed by ‘nature.’ The richness of life in all its entirety is brought out in a sublime poetic manner.

Though the landscape appeared still in the noon time he listens closely and enjoys the different and numerous sounds of ‘nature.’ He records from the movement of the spider to the sailing of the hawk. According to Hagman not only does the appearance of the object appeal to the viewer aesthetically but also its many other aspects like the sound it produces.

Aesthetic experience involves a phenomenon (an object, event, sound or other perception) or a set of phenomena (a group of objects, a sequence of events, a melody, or a complex structure of perceptions) that is/are felt to possess perfection or ideal form. Aesthetic experience is fundamentally subjective, but also grounded in the objective qualities of the object. It may include affects such as joy, sadness, wonder, awe, or a calm sense of quiescence. The quality of self experience is also part of it; the individual feels whole, vitalized, more positive and largely engaged with the world. (15-16)

Hagman’s observations are relevant to understanding the experience of Momaday. Momaday feels ‘whole,’ ‘vitalized’ in the presence of the beauty of the land. *The Names: A Memoir* also starts with the description of the summer season, a natural phenomenon, as does *The Way to Rainy Mountain* with the description of the land.
A single knoll rises out of the plain in Oklahoma, north and west of the Wichita Range. For my people, the Kiowas, it is an old landmark, and they gave it the name Rainy Mountain. The hardest weather in the world is there. Winter brings blizzards, hot tornadic winds arise in the spring, and in summer the prairie is an anvil’s edge. The grass turns brittle and brown, and it cracks beneath your feet. There are green belts along the rivers and creeks, linear groves of hickory and pecan, willow and with hazel. At a distance in July of August the steaming foliage seems almost to writhe in fire. Great green and yellow grasshoppers are everywhere in the tall grass, popping up like corn to sting the flesh, and tortoises crawl about on the red earth, going nowhere in the plenty of time. Loneliness is an aspect of the land. All things in the plain are isolated; there is no confusion of objects in the eye, but one hill or one tree or one man. To look upon that landscape in the early morning, with the sun at your back, is to lose the sense of proportion. Your imagination comes to life, and this, you think, is where Creation was begun.

(TWRM Introd. 5)

This passage too brings out the beauty of ‘nature’ in all its vitality. It can also be noted that ‘nature’ is given a powerful and inclusive personality by Momaday here. Beauty, reverence, variety and dynamism are fused in a harmonious whole. Only such a state could have been the base for the beginning of creation. Like the Kiowas, Momaday also wants to journey into the quintessential essence of his beginnings.
There is a passage reminiscent of the one above in *The Names : A Memoir*. Momaday remembers his childhood days when he and his father used to go out. To express the “moments of peace and love” he had in his father’s company, Momaday portrays the surroundings: “There is whole silence on the earth – only here and there are surfaces made of sound, frogs purring at the water’s edge, a rooster crowing across the distance, the river running and lapping. And the plain rolls like water in the low light is like chalk on the ripples of the land; the slow, warm wind seems to ruffle the soft light, to stir it up like dust” (TN 41). Once again we witness the “flow” in ‘nature’ that does not reject or exclude but let things and creatures be. When Momaday does this, it is as if he is designing a model for human personality.

Though the Hindu concept of five elements is not part of the Kiowa belief, the folk stories suggest that ‘nature’ is sacred to them in whole and in parts. Momaday acknowledges the five basic elements of ‘nature’ from aesthetic and spiritual dimensions. Enjoyment of beauty of landscapes runs through all his works consistently to the extent of becoming motifs. All the changes that take place in ‘nature’ and environment are observed with a keen sensitivity. “The character of the landscape changed from hour to hour in the day, and from day to day, season to season. Nothing there of the earth could be taken for granted; you felt that Creation was going on in your sight.” And again acknowledging the plenitude of mother earth he says of water; “the angle of the Washita River and Rainy Mountain Creek points to the east, and the thick red waters descend into the depths of the Southern Plains.” About light he says: “The light there is of a certain kind. In the mornings and evenings it is soft and pervasive, and earth seems to
absorb it, to become enlarged with light. About the noons there are edges and angles—and a brightness that’s hard and thin like glaze. There is something strange and powerful in it” (TN 4). It is the light produced by the fire of the sun that he describes here. This light gives a divine appearance to the whole earth. In other words, the beauty of the earth will be lost to human perception in the absence of sun’s light.

About the air or wind also he has something to say. “At times the air is thick and languid, and you imagine that the world has grown very old and tired. At other times the air is full of motion and commotion. Always a hard weather impends upon the plains. In advance of a storm the plains are strange and beautiful thing to see, concentrated in random details, distances; there are slow, massive movements” (TN 4-5). Even the air has personality and fluctuates between moods. “Languid” and “tired” at one moment it becomes an agent of turbulent vitality the next.

On another occasion he describes the wind thus: “At times you can hear the wind, for it runs upon the walls and moans, but you cannot know it truly until you are old and have lived with it many years; so they say, who are old. It is the same wind that brings about the Chinooks in the old homeland of the Kiowas to the north, the bleak winters and black springs of the whole Great Plains. It is all at once the most violent and placid motion in the universe” (TN 43). Just because the wind is there for everyone, it is not as obvious as it seems. To understand the “wind” it takes years of experience and wisdom for, such is the meaning embedded in it. It also carries a paradox as it can be “all at once….violent and placid.”
Though the ‘sky’ or ‘ether’ is not counted as an element in the western perspective, Momaday recognizes it as an element as done in Hinduism: “There are many levels to the land, and many colours. You are drawn into it, down and away. You see the skyline, and you are there at once on your mind, and you never been there before. There is no confinement, only wonder and beauty” (TN 28). Sky is a liberating agent. It fascinates and invokes lofty emotions.

He not only acknowledges the beauty and holiness of ‘nature’ but also realizes that he too is a part of it. He says: “in the high country all objects bear upon you, and you touch hard upon the earth. The air of the mountains is itself an element in which vision is made acute; eagles bear me out. From my home of Jemez, I could see the huge, billowing clouds above the Valle Grande, how, even motionless, they drew close upon me and merged with my life” (TN 22). ‘Nature’ touches the soul of Momaday with all the finer aspects of its elements. As a writer he responds to ‘nature’ as a total person–body, mind and heart.

Momaday describes how the beauty of ‘nature’ enchanted his nephew James as well. “And later, on his way back, the moon was high and colorless, a perfect spot on the murky midnight. He stumbled in his joy and stupor, knowing not yet what he earned for, knowing only that he was alive to the night and strangely exhilarated” (TN 79). The beauty of the moon and moonlight took him to the peak of happiness. Gradually, he explores his own very existence in that vast landscape:

His laughter rang out, rolled along the black bank of the creek below, the grey grass, the undulant way to the Wichitas. Oh, God he thought,
the clamorous night! He could hear everything distinctly now, the rasping of the crickets and the frogs, the wind turning, leaves sliding upon leaves, a motor in the far distance, the echo of his laughter dying away, and beyond that the laughter of the God, God’s laughter. It was all so beautiful to hear. And he opened his eyes wide and looked all around, and everything shone in his sight, and it was all so beautiful to see (TN 79).

Momaday is able to understand what is happening inside his nephew’s mind based on his empathetic consciousness enabled by his organismic communion with ‘nature.’ He had felt the liberating force of ‘nature’ earlier and is able to recognize it when it happens in another person.

James is a Christian and to him God is a separate entity, apart from ‘nature.’ The concept of God is made to co-exist with the belief system of the Kiowas. Struck by nature’s immensity and beauty James utters the word God repeatedly to give expression to his wonder and spiritual ecstasy at the grand presence of ‘nature.’

He was involved in the light, enchanted. He and God, spoke the name of the God, laughing with his teeth clenched, and he felt himself whirling in the light. The light was like frost on the hills; it lay out in the great round hollow of the plains, as far as he could see, shifting and quaking slowly, tumbling like a fog. Then the beauty was too much, tears came out to his eyes, and he kept saying the name God, God, God, until he choked on it (TN 80).
If God created the earth and its living creatures then it is possible to see Him in ‘nature.’ The play of light brings out James’ sense of divinity.

Momaday wants to engage in the tribal consciousness and his ancestors’ past. He makes a thorough study of the folk stories and the historical notes and is able to find parallels in his life. The two books, *The Way to Rainy Mountain* and *The Name* are not novels but belong to the genre of memoir. The analysis of the memoirs and novels brings out the striking similarities of the experiences of Native American men in general. These two memoirs give us a working idea as to how Momaday progressed as a Native American finding his roots. Most Amerindians are at the cross roads today as neither can they completely adapt themselves to the culture of the White nor get back to the pristine Native American culture.

So, once the Native Indian starts moving centripetally in his search for identity, he realizes through the revived tribal wisdom that it is the all encompassing ‘nature’ that is the answer to all his questions. Once equipped to feel the omnipresence of ‘nature,’ Momaday seems to suggest, this centrifugal movement will inevitably occur in any Native Indian, through which he can merge his individual self with the cosmic self.

Analysis of the two memoirs throws light on the way the Indian makes his self by responding to, admiring and allowing a free play of emotions. His consciousness is created and sustained by his interaction with the objects and the phenomena in ‘nature’ and also by the reflective awareness on that interactive space. Animals, plants, rocks, mountains, creeks, canyons, rivers, the elements, the sun and the moon all these have
lessons for Momaday as seen in the memoirs. The importance and inevitability of
journeying to find one’s self and life is also depicted in the two memoirs. The experiences
of Momaday presented in the memoirs can help in understanding and interpreting the
protagonists in the two novels selected for study.