Chapter One
Introduction

The present doctoral thesis attempts a comparative study of Native American worldview in the selected poetry of Paula Gunn Allen (New Mexico/ Languna Pueblo), Joy Harjo (Creek), and Sherman Alexie (Spokane/ Coeur d’Alene). Native American literature has its firm roots in its context and is marked not only by multifarious views on land, man, history, spirit, and the universe on the whole, but also by a history of racism, sexism, and colonialism. Understanding and engaging with such great literary texts necessitates acquainting oneself with their historico-traditional background. Suffering racial discrimination and the agonizing process of marginalization, subordination, and denigration, Native American literature has aptly responded back to the oppressive forces in an attempt to secure its long distorted identity. Writing on this literature without taking into consideration its colonial history and the resultant postcolonial resistance would not do justice to the politico-historical significance of the concerned literary figures; this negligence homogenizes the major contributions of these poets with the survival of their native traditions and which in turn leads to a flattening out of these unique voices. This study takes an analytical journey into the depths of the traditional contexts of the poets mentioned above, and locates their roots in an attempt to unravel their Indigenous worldview. With an eye on this fact, the present study compares the poetic reaction of Allen, Harjo and Alexie to the colonial assimilating policies and racial atrocities. It detects how these poets react and respond in their confrontation with the
West and its worldview, which is marked by modernity and its overemphasis on temper, logic, written word and sequential time view. This comparative study shows how Gunn Allen and Harjo recoil from the unavoidably hybrid conditions in the colonial encounter and thereby try to revive their endangered traditions, while Sherman Alexie celebrates this hybridity and votes for new horizons where Native American tradition and Western worldview get mixed together to mould a new perspective pertinent to the arising generation in a race- and gender-free setting.

The West has been subordinating Indians for more than five hundred years under the pretext of civilization. Singling out themselves and their race as the superior, the Westerners have resorted to the most visible signs like whiteness of their skin, predominant masculinity of their voice, and scientific achievements crystallized in their modernity. The immediate effects of this sense of superiority have been silencing the racially and sexually ‘Other’ and whitewashing the traditional worldview by means of dominant Western imagery and symbols. Modernity has put modernism in contrast to traditions; the culture of Native American society has not been left impervious to the sordid aftermaths of this confrontation. The confrontation of tradition with modernism has been accompanied with colonial claims of civilization. Therefore, the study of the Native American literature cannot be other than a contextual and thereby a politicized one. Craig Womack accentuates the idea that Native literary aesthetics must be politicized and that autonomy, self-determination, and sovereignty serve as useful literary concepts. [. . .] a literary criticism
that emphasizes Native resistance movements against colonialism, confronts racism, discusses sovereignty and Native nationalism, seeks connections between literature and liberation struggles, and, finally, roots literature in land and culture. (11)

Ryan goes so far as claiming a politically charged perspective and contextualizing texts as concepts already belonging to Native American worldview (Hollrah 10). The common concern that interlinks the three concerned poets together is the use of their traditions as a counterforce against the stereotypes imposed on them by the colonizer. Native American traditions, culture, worldview and epistemology are revived, hence this can be termed as a Native American Renaissance. Kenneth Lincoln sees the literature of what he calls this Native American Renaissance as “a written renewal of oral tradition” (Porter and Roemer 77). Though many scholars in this field have pointed out the inevitable intertwining of the text and the context, Donald Fixico’s declaration sums up the argument most cogently and evocatively: “Obtaining a tribal worldview, a Native feeling, and the other side of history, and then thinking like an Indian and putting yourself in that other position, is mandatory for teaching and writing a balanced history of Indian-white relations” (quoted. in Bloom 25).

These concerns impel the present study to approach the poetry of the aforementioned poets as sites of political power struggle. The thesis takes the poems as the sites in which the two different and opposing worldviews clash. On the one side, the dominating and assimilating
discourse of the West hails the Indians to procure their approval through conformity and on the other side, their traditional perspective exhorts them to reclaim their roots of identity. In such a confrontation, each poet reacts differently. This comparative study explores the differences and similarities in the reactions and interactions of Allen, Harjo, and Alexie with reference to their poetic oeuvre. Accordingly, the study of the worldviews of these poets can never be innocent of the political element. The politicized and politicizing atmosphere of their contexts presupposes a cognizance of various political contexts and nullifies any so-called impartial interpretation in the process of analysis. In the present thesis, the emphasis is on the meeting points of two different worldviews in the selected poems and determining where the poet stands in terms of his/her belief system and response to forces of acculturation and assimilation.

The other point shared by Allen, Harjo, and Alexie is their feminisms which valorize the Native worldview against its Western counterpart. The maleness of colonialism is countersigned by the matrilineal social system of the Indians. Besides, mixing their feminist trends with traditional care for the environment has procured for these poets the status of ecofeminists who take issue with the devastating forces of modernity against nature. Condemning the West for having distorted the nature for more exploitation and surplus, Allen, Harjo, and Alexie represent their traditional worldview that gives equal significance to all creatures in the universe. This is the other point of concern for the present thesis in its comparative study.
Contextual background

A summative glance at the politico-historical background out of which Alexie, Gunn Allen, and Harjo have emerged would be pertinent for better appreciation of their contributions to the literary scene. The limited scope of this comparative study would not allow a detailed narrative of the history of the land; what is aimed here, however, is to provide a general scope of the colonial conditions of the Indians under the rubric of civilization.

What is specific about Native Americans is that long before Christopher Columbus’s ships landed in the Bahamas, America was discovered by a different group of people: “the nomadic ancestors of modern Native Americans who hiked over a ‘land bridge’ from Asia to what is now Alaska more than 12,000 years ago” (History.com Staff). Thus historically speaking, these people have the true right to cherish full claim of land ownership. A glance over their history shows how they have been deprived of this claim by colonial forces. Native American tribes stricken by the idea of the “vanishing red man” have suffered a history of colonialism under the reign of the West, particularly America. The history of these people goes back to Columbus who called them “Indios- meaning people of India”. The point of contact between the Native Indians and white man is the point where their victimization begins. The Native Indian world-view is informed by close contact with nature, while the white man’s worldview is based on taming and exploitation of nature. Thus the Puritans who landed on American shores assumed that the Native Indians were consorting with the devil in the forest. White expansionists branded them [Indians] ruthless warriors.
Even their nineteenth-century defenders often described them as ‘noble savages’”. Besides, Native Americans have suffered an ambivalent relationship with America. As Pritzker rightly comments, “Native Americans have sacrificed their lives in defending the United States from its enemies in order to maintain their right to be both American and Indian” (8). In this light, the historian refers to such historical events as the World Wars, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, etc.

The colonial history of Native American world begins with the belief of outsiders in the inevitable extinction of the ‘inferior’ race. Besides the many losses that Indigenous people underwent due to different epidemics, their territories were transgressed both in the United States and Canada and the Native population were either destroyed or driven inland. Contra responsive to the acculturating forces of the colonials both in Canada and America, they recoiled from being assimilated into the dominant American culture. This is well presented in the 1871 speech of a senator who stereotypically proclaimed, “The Indians cannot be civilized; they will not be civilized; they do not want to be civilized. . . . We must treat them as savages” (McNickle, 1993, 8). Not surprisingly, few Indian tribes were announced as having been extinct; this implied their insistence on their tribal identities as against acquiescence to new hybrid identities consequent upon the sweeping wave of Westernization.

The issue of land ownership, vital to the Indians and crucial to the colonials, ignited vast extermination of tribes by Spain in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. McNickle aptly refers to the contrast that lies between “the Indian system of common ownership . . . never understood
or accepted by the white men and . . . white man’s . . . system of private property in land” (79). The northern colonies had to face the English monarchs. When America gained its independence, voices of complaint were heard against the many disturbances the colonialists made for the Natives on their own lands. The bloody Yamassee War of 1715 is an evidence of the denigrating treatment of the Indigenous people by the outsiders (McNickle 1993, 35). The colonial history of Native America had witnessed temporary treaties that the British had to have with different tribes as their allies in order to defend the territories of their colony against other invaders like France. Yet none of these treaties won any advantage for the Natives who were still regarded as the inferior race. This point is well expressed in an Iroquois message to Washington’s Secretary of War: “Your commissioners settled everything as they thought would best suit them and be most conducive to their interests” (McNickle 51). Even different land treaties made well into the twentieth century in recognition of the Natives’ land ownership proved fake. The true nature of such attempts is obvious in Chief Justice Marshall’s observation,

> It is said that treaties are nothing more than compacts, which cannot be considered as obligatory on the United States, from want of power in the Indians to enter into them [. . .]. Is it essential, that each party shall possess the same attributes of sovereignty, to give force to treaty? . . . on this ground, very few valid treaties could be formed. (McNickle 56)

The same stands true for Canadian treaties which were “so-called treaties of peace and friendship” (McNickle 57). After 1780, more and
more lands were acquired which was accelerated by the discovery of minerals on the shores of Lake Huron and Lake Superior. Although each treaty left aside some land for the Indigenous people, practically the promised land reserves were never set aside for them; upon the discovery of gold mines on the mainland in the Fraser River district, the colonists captured lands even without entering any bargain or caring for land cession negotiations (McNickle 60). The gold mines attracted signs of modernity and industrialization such as railroads for transcontinental transportation. The sordid aftermath of this change was the further removal of the Indians. Unable to resist the intrusion of the white settlers, the Indians yielded their lands stubbornly. The Indian Removal Act of 1830 isolated the Indian tribes in their own country. By 1890, most of the 250,000 remaining Indians were confined to living on reservations holding just a fraction of the land owned by them previously. The protest of many tribes which formed alliances with the South during the Civil War was retaliated by forcing them to surrender the western half of the territories guaranteed by President Jackson to be theirs (McNickle 75).

After the Second World War the situation of the natives steadily deteriorated. The rise of America’s colonial and imperial power led to the widespread displacement of large groups of the Indigenous people who had by then got disarmed against the oppressive forces. The physical displacement was accompanied by the painful loss of their traditional and cultural roots, the agonizing process of losing their own culture, and the inflicted urge of acculturation. All these were accelerated by the unavoidable speed of urbanization and modernity. Industrialization and the forthcoming modernity ensued the West’s search for cheap raw
materials. In McNickle’s words, “Any political power that was not prepared to override scruple where native people were concerned might find itself out of the race for pre-eminence in the market” (46). This market-oriented competition led to more reckless and oppressive dominance over the Indigenous. Indians planted their lands only to eat, while the white men farmed in order to exploit a market.

By 1909, two-thirds of the land retained in separate allotments had passed out of Indian ownership, following the Allotment Act of 1887. In Pritzker’s words, this Act “mandated that American Indian nations sell much of their territory to white farmers and use the proceeds to farm on what was left of their homelands” (11). Extreme deprivation, overpopulation, and joblessness inflicted the Indian tribes counter wise to the prospering condition of the American nation. Besides these, one can refer to the deculturating aspect of the agenda in the form of the federal boarding school program which required all Indians to attend schools to get away from their Indian culture and acculturated in the non-Indian lifestyle (Pritzker 11). In the 1920s, inhuman treatment of Indian affairs became notorious and publicized. The public came to know about the plights of the Indians whose status, in McNickle’s words, was “neither that of a citizen nor that of an alien. They were prisoners of war when no state of war existed” (91). As an acknowledgement of the Indians’ contribution to the American army in World War I, all Indians were conferred citizenship. An objective report of the terrible conditions of Indians cited the failure of the government in its role as trustee and mentor. The report entailed the government to provide the requisite education to all to become appropriate Americans. This in itself was a
threat to the tribal system and its traditions. But The Roosevelt administration in 1933 accepted the fact that the Natives were not heading toward extinction.

The enactment of the Indian Reorganization Act of June 1934 conferred upon the tribes such freedom that they had never had before. The Act recognized the residual rights of Indian tribes to have government of their own and establish business corporations for the management of their resources (McNickle 94). Consequently, the Indians’ lives gradually prospered; by help of credit money, they farmed the lands which they had formerly leased to white men for lack of money. Gaining a relative sense of welfare, they began to form inter-tribal organizations, and finally in 1944 representatives of forty-odd tribes came together to form an all-Indian body, the National Congress of American Indians (McNickle 96). The Indians in Canada, however, were subjected to Indian Act of Canada based on the ruling opinion that they lost their independence and turned into subjects of the King. While the American Indians had the right to bring legal action to compel the United States to grant redress for wrongful acts, in Canada the Crown held legal title.

However, further progress of the Indians was precluded by Congress in 1953 which paralyzed community action and angered the Indians as it came as a threat to Indians’ autonomy within their own territories. After some years of debates, the Indians embarked on widespread protests; this was accompanied by public sympathies for the Indians. By far, urbanization had become rife and influenced the Indians; some remained faithful to their tribal lifestyle; some others who were urbanized did rarely cut off themselves from their traditions; few others
adopted an intermediate state commuting between the traditional world and the urban impersonal world. Gradually a group of college students who resented their elders for having kept silence against oppression became known as “Red Power” in 1963 and asserted their commitment to political action (117-18). Wiget rightly notes “Native American ‘Red Power’ was a militancy with a decidedly spiritual and environmental base” (298), hence its difference from the militancy of black America. The immediate cultural impact of the Red Power has been entering Native American literature in the academic literary canon. Politically, this resistance led to “the federal government’s rejection of Termination policies in 1970” (Pritzker 12).

The adoption of the Economic Opportunity Act in 1965 revived the Indians’ frustrated economic state. With the establishment of the Indian Community Action Program, technical services and financial assistance were brought into Indian reservations helped Indian communities take control of their own advancement especially in schooling. English language was given a secondary status after full acquisition of the mother language. The publicity of Indians’ life conditions found expressions in the messages of Presidents Johnson and Nixon. In 1968, President Johnson refers to their relations with Indians not as paternalism, but as partnership (McNickle 124). Similarly, Nixon’s message in 1970 confers autonomy to Indian tribes being free to lead their tribal life style as they wish: “we must make it clear that the Indians can become independent of federal control without being cut off from federal concern and federal support” (quoted. in McNickle 1992, 125).
Literary Context

Out of such a background, the dominant form of literary creation could be nothing other than protest writing. Native American literary writing was originally oral; only when the Indians were educated in white-run schools did the Indians learn to express their stand in written form. Those Indians who learned to read and write mostly did with the help of the church and the only works thought to be publishable were those that were consonant with Christian teachings. Thus the Christian Indians were the first who could get their works published. What is interesting is that these works were almost always addressed to a white readership. *An Indian’s Looking-Glass for the White Man* (1833) by William Apess is a work that shows a shift from the white man to his Native people in an attempt to raise their political consciousness and condemn the white man for his atrocities to the Indians.

Native American writers differ whether they are full-blood like Simon Ortiz who speaks his native language as his first language, or Luci Tapahonso, who writes in Navajo and English, and others like Sherman Alexie who write from a mixed-blood position and have less knowledge of an Indian language. Despite all these differences, Arnold Krupat rightly insists that “in varying degrees, all verbal performances studied as ‘Native American literature’, whether oral, textualized, or written, are mixed, hybrid; none are ‘pure’, or strictly speaking, autonomous. Native American literature in particular is an intercultural practice” (quoted. in Porter and Roemer 70; Krupat 1996, 21). Jace Weaver is the Indian critic who criticizes what he calls “gymnastics of authenticity” by which “white critics have denigrated the idea and importance of Native identity and
cultural specificity in favor of a universalism” (Porter and Roemer 80). Universalism is suspected not only because of its homogenizing sweep but also for its Eurocentrism. Thus eighteenth-century Enlightenment universalism is charged with having attempted to keep control of the criteria by which Indian literature is judged.

Most nineteenth-century Indian prose works were protest literature, ethno-histories, and autobiographies in response to the curtailment of Indians’ rights and their forced removal from their homelands. Their autobiographies aimed at acquainting the audience with Indian traditions as well as ill-treatment of Indians by whites. Moreover, autobiographies had important political significance as they were attempts at reshaping or reconstructing their traditional identities as counter-hegemonies to the colonial assimilating discourses. Literary scene of the second half of the nineteenth century reflected the new threats in Indians’ lives due to the discovery of gold mines in 1849, destruction of Indians’ food supplies (buffalo and the stored winter caches), and enacting policy of assimilation by the General Allotment Act of 1887. Sarah Winnemucca (Paiute) is the first Indian woman writer whose personal-tribal Life Among the Piutes (1883) chronicled the impact of westward migration on tribal life. This life also witnessed the emergence of Indian novels, the first of which is John Rollin Ridge’s romance The Life and Adventures of Joaquim Murieta (1854). In Andrew Wiget’s analysis, “the novel portrays how whites’ unjust treatment of a Metizo protagonist causes him to seek revenge against the race that oppresses him” (1994, 144).

The few Native American poets of the nineteenth century were influenced by Romanticism. The first poet to publish her poems was Jane
Johnston Schoolcraft (Ojibwa) whose poems appeared in a literary magazine founded by her husband. E. Pauline Johnson’s *The White Wampum* (1895) gained critical acclaim in Canada and Britain for its Indian subjects. As tribes established newspapers, Native Americans became journalists. In 1826 the first journal, Cherokee Phoenix, appeared by Elias Boudinot. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the literary scene of Native America witnessed the development of autobiographies which accentuated ethnohistory of their tribes and their adaptations to life on reservations. Charles Eastman (Sioux) is the most widely read autobiographer of the period for his *Indian Boyhood* (1902) which depicts the years before the reservations; also his *From the Deep Woods to Civilization* (1916) chronicles his adjustments to reservations and his experiences in white boarding schools. He also wrote several books on Indians like the *Soul of the Indian* (1911) which explains Native American beliefs. Besides, he wrote short biographical sketches of Indian tribal leaders in *Indian Heroes and Great Chieftains* (1918). The most important Indian ethnohsitorian is D’Arcy McNickle (Cree/Flathead) whose seminal work, *The Indian tribes of the United States* (1962) added a long missing Indian perspective to Native American history. The beginning of the century witnesses many Indian writers turning to fiction. Mostly, their novels focused on quests of identity in a pluralistic context and the survival of tribalism. McNickle’s *The Surrounded* (1936) powerfully depicts the dilemma of a mixed-blood inadvertently caught up in unpremeditated murders committed by his mother and girlfriend. Todd Downing is the most prolific novelist who wrote nine detective novels in the 1930s and 1940s. These novels contain allusions to Indian beliefs,
like *The Cat Screams* (1934), *Night over Mexico* (1937). But few Indian poets published in the first half of the century.

American modernism underwent a tilt toward Indian works which gave them a renewal of community, spirituality, and land-oriented sense of the essential power of art and literature (Wiget 372). At the time that many Native American writers were publishing, colonial modernists got fascinated by Indian “primitivism” and embraced it as a redeeming worldview which could give a reawakened vision of modern man’s relationship to the cosmos. Such a gesture to Indian lifestyle has not been away from its stereotypifying urges. Speaking from a postcolonial perspective, one could say that the attraction of colonial self toward the Other mostly reaffirms the discrimination by giving the colonial self the new role of patrimony. Infantilizing the Natives as primitives, virgins unravished by modernity, simple beings enjoying their stupidity, all lie beneath the colonial ‘tendencies’ toward Indians. Such a stereotypical approach has not been without its degrading outlook with respect to the Other. Despite all these, the inclination has not been without some positives for the Natives. This trend led to a positive attitude toward Indians and their literary productions; hence the first anthology of American Indian poetry, *The Path on the Rainbow* (1918), was published. The interest and exploration of Indian literature and culture reached its pinnacle in the Ethnopoetics movement of the 1960s and 1970s. This is the time which marks the “Native American Renaissance” with N. Scott Momaday’s Pulitzer Prize winning work, *House Made of Dawn* (1968). There were some other literary achievements before Momaday, yet as Wiget properly analyzes, “Momaday’s highly visible success and the
ways in which that success influenced publishers to open their doors to other Native writers – in particular through the publication of American Indian anthologies – would be significant factors in the formation of a community of new Native American writers” (296). Caught up in the conflicts between traditional ways and his modern world, the protagonist of Momaday’s novel opts for a return to a spiritual path lit by the continuance of tradition. As interpreted by Murray, “only with Momaday’s work and what follows do we have a real expression of Indian worldviews” (Porter and Roemer 77). It is a path that later protagonists in other novels by Leslie Silko, James Welch, Paula Gunn Allen, and Janet Campbell Hale either take and gain redemption or miss and face destruction.

Peter Blue Cloud’s editing of *Alcatraz Is Not an Island* (1972) was his most important work as a poet and editor. Blue Cloud’s poem, “Alcatraz Vision” appeared in the earliest Native American anthology by Brother Benet Tvedten in 1971. All literary works of the early 1970s bear the tone of political resistance that marked militancy of Red Power. Despite the trend of American writing to become apolitical, as Wiget rightly compares, Native American literature continues to embrace political writing “as an integral ingredient. . . . American Indian writers maintain that traditional respect for the power of the word and the ‘political’ role of the artist” (Wiget 299). The roots of political awareness in contemporary Native American writing have been strengthened by the last three decades of political activities such as the take-overs, the fish-ins, the Longest Walk, and other demonstrations of Native unity and purpose. This close embeddedness of literature and politics determines
the theoretical framework within which the present project carries out its comparative analysis of the poetry of Alexie, Harjo, and Gunn Allen.

**Theoretical Framework**

As the brief contextual sketch and literary scene shows, the history and literature of Native Americans is intertwined inextricably with a history of colonization and a literature of resistance. The present study draws on the theoretical notions of Homi K. Bhabha, the seminal postcolonial theorist. The reason for selecting this lens is the applicability of Bhabha’s theories to the comparative analysis of Native American worldviews in the poetry of Gunn Allen, Alexie, and Harjo. This perspective opens up new horizons on the poetic achievements of these poets and simultaneously opens up the space for better appreciation of their common worldviews in contrast to their Western counterparts. This study argues that Native American poets retain their tribal traditions and simultaneously adapt themselves to the Western modern world in which they have been situated. Hence, their works become a site of signification of traditionalism within a modernized context. This perspective is of great significance for its politically depolarizing potential keeping in view Bhabha’s theories of hybridity and mimicry.

Highly inspired by Franz Fanon, Bhabha mingles poststructural psychoanalysis with his anti-colonial views. As Fanon defines, the colonized are those “in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality” (quoted. in Loomba, 24; Fanon 1967, 18). Based on this definition, the colonized are the sites of forced deculturation and acculturation. Creating an inferiority
complex in the Indians makes them internalize the values of the whites; this internalization paves the way for the painful process of deculturation during which the Natives begin to look negatively at their own people and tradition. Acculturation happens when the non-whites, allured by the whites’ values, adopt their cultural codes. Bhabha deals meticulously with these processes which are most blatantly attended to by Allen, Harjo and Alexie, each in his or her own special way.

Such notions as hybridity and mimicry are Bhabha’s main poststructural contribution to the postcolonial debate. Contradistinction to Edward Said, whose *Orientalism* (1978) argues homogenizingly for the necessary demarcation of East from West, Bhabha takes issue with the barrier Said puts between East and West and instead votes for the transactional nature of the colonial encounter. He criticizes Said for presenting colonial discourse as fixed and for polarizing East and West. Furthermore, Bhabha charges Said for having focused on the imposition of colonial power rather than on resistances to it. Doing so, Said specifies power to the colonial and leaves no room for any change or negotiation (Bhabha 1983, 200; Loomba 49). In Aijaz Ahmad’s words, Said never thinks about how Western representations “might have been received, accepted, modified, challenged, overthrown or reproduced by the intelligentsias of the colonised countries” (Ahmad 172). Contra responsive to Said, Bhabha deals with the colonized and how the colonized resists and/or negotiates the colonial force.

Bhabha deploys Lacanian notion of alienated subjectivity to discuss the split of the colonized in the face of the colonial discourse. He mixes postmodern psychoanalysis with Derridean poststructuralism that
deals with alterity; Bhabha decenters West’s monolithic discourses by paying attention to the “others” that Eurocentric discourses ignore or marginalize. Bhabha’s stance resembles Derrida’s dismantling of binary oppositions and reveals the underlying ambivalence beneath any apparently fixed and assertive subject position. His psychoanalytic approach casts into doubt any colonial discourse of assimilation by pinpointing its inevitable ambivalence. In Chapter IV of *The Location of Culture* (1994), he contends that the degenerating objectives of the West in the colonial encounter are never fully met. This is so because the colonial discourse moves simultaneously at two opposing directions. On the one hand, the colonial approaches and stereotypifies the colonized as the West’s Other, hence stress on the Other’s strangeness, barbarism, savagery, femininity, and eccentricity. On the other, however, the West tries to domesticate the colonized’s alterity and abolish their Otherness, hence emphasis on assimilating policies. Fluctuating between locating the colonized “inside” or “outside” Western scheme characterizes the colonial discourse with ambivalence. In Bhabha’s terms, “colonial discourse produces the colonised as a social reality which is at once an ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible” (pp. 70-71). Accordingly, the colonized are always in motion, sliding ambivalently between the polarities of similarity and difference. Thus stereotypes are deployed to arrest this ambivalence, to freeze the colonized in static terms and images. In Bhabha’s psychoanalytic interpretation, stereotype is “an idea whose iteration masks its producer’s uncertainty” (Hiddlestone 117). Bhabha interprets the West’s repetition of the stereotypes as the sign of their failure in fixing the colonized.
What happens in the colonial encounter is not the simple assimilation of one and negation of the other. Bhabha sees a drastic process of mobilization of codes in the encounter. He then proposes his notion of the Third Space which highlights the intermediate space in which the codes meet and are mobilized. In Acheraiou’s words, Bhabha “insists on the interdependence of the colonizers’ and natives’ structures of power and meaning. He argues that cultural systems and discourses are articulated from the ‘third space of enunciation’ where the subject can speak of itself and the Other in terms that transcend ‘the politics of polarity’” (Acheraiou 2). The unmappable and unidentifiable Third Space is the liminal realm in which the interstices between sign and referent are named. Bhabha conceives this as a locus of cultural ambivalence as well as productivity:

The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code. Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People. (1992, 37; quoted. in Hiddlestone 115-16).

The ambivalence of which Bhabha speaks as the inherent characteristic of the Third Space is Lacanian and has its own depolarizing force by instigating a sense of indeterminacy. Lacan defines identity based on self - other relation; it is the construction of self through the
image of the Other. He argues that identity is constructed in the gaze of the Other where splitting and doubling occur simultaneously. Both the colonizer and the colonized undergo this ambivalent process. The colonizer splits “his presence, distorts his outline, breaches his boundaries, repeats his action at a distance” (Hiddlestone 117); similarly the native wants to occupy the authoritative position of the colonial and concurrently wants to differentiate himself from the colonist.

While stereotype and stereotypification indicate the force of ambivalence on the part of the colonizer, mimicry represents the same on the part of the colonized. Mimic men are “natives by birth who have taken on tastes, attitudes and beliefs of the colonial culture” (Hiddlestone 118). The other Bhabhalian term associated with the destabilizing force of ambivalence is mimicry which happens to the colonized in the colonial encounter. Mimicry, as defined by Bhabha, is not sameness, but “a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite” (Bhabha 1994, 86); hence imitation and mimicry always introduce slippages and traces of alterity. In Murray’s words, mimicry is “the interplay of identities and the turning back upon the dominant group of its own ideas of identity through imitation, and shown how the play and exploration around similarities by whites depends on an implicit and underlying idea of difference” (Porter and Roemer 75). The ambivalence of mimicry lies in the fact that on the one hand it ensures the control and regulation of the native, and on the other side, it injects difference in the dominant discourse of the colonial power. Such ambivalence undermines the colonial dominance and reveals its limitations and authenticity. As John McLeod analyzes, “In his work on ‘mimicry’, Bhabha explored the
possibility of reading colonialist discourses as endlessly ambivalent, split and unstable, never able to install securely the colonial values they seemed to support” (24).

Besides, mimic men instigate in the colonizers a threat which arises out of the colonized’s resemblance to the colonizers. This threatens to collapse the Orientalist structure of knowledge conveyed through denigrating stereotypes. While Fanon and Naipaul argue against mimicry, Bhabha regards it as a de-totalizing force in the colonial encounter.

The shared Third Space where all the codes in the colonial encounter are exchanged renders the colonial encounter hybrid. Unlike Said, Bhabha embraces this hybridity and its resultant heterogeneity as a resisting force against the authority of the colonialist. Using Derrida, Bhabha explores how a colonial text “does not occupy a simple place” (quoted in Bhabha 1994, 108). The dissemination of the text was supposed to assimilate the natives, but in fact it recreates the colonial culture as hybridized and different from itself (Hiddlestone 120). In Bhabha’s own words, hybridity “displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination” (1994, 112). Hybridity is an effect that starts with assimilating the natives but ends in subverting the colonial claim over the natives. In keeping with Bhabha’s theories, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin write: “Hybridity and the power it releases may well be seen to be the characteristic feature of the postcolonial, allowing a means of evading the replication of the binary of the past and developing new anti-monolithic models of cultural exchange and growth” (1995, 183; quoted. in Acheraiou 2). In their highly impressive work, The Empire Writes Back:
Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature, Ashcroft et al. contend that the colonized’s literature is fundamentally concerned with challenging the language and culture of the colonial power, unlearning its worldview, and producing new modes of representation. In a prescriptive rather than descriptive tone, Ashcroft et al. draw upon Bhabha’s notion of hybridity; they posit that postcolonial writing was always written out of “the abrogation of the received English which speaks from the centre, and the act of appropriation which brings it under the influence of a vernacular tongue, the complex of speech habits which characterise the local language” (39). The hybrid policy of abrogation and appropriation is highly ambivalent which undermines the colonial claim to superiority.

Contra responsive to the depolarizing and depolarized dimension Bhabha and Ashcroft et al. accord to hybridity, the present study takes hybridity not as a balanced feature of the Third Space; rather the interests of the comparative analysis of the three Native American poets lie with those of Acheraiou. This postcolonial critic deftly argues against neutralizing the Third Space and its hybridity, stating:

My argument is that hybridity, as both a theoretical tool and historical occurrence, is not a linear, flat narrative of cultural exchange and balanced competition, as we tend to think, but a twisted, multilayered imperial tale of forced encounters and unequal relationships. Strictly speaking, hybridity concentrates multiple, contradictory forces involved in shaping cultures and identities. It represents a site of incorporation and rejection in which cultural difference is at once inscribed as sameness and continually disavowed. (2)
The view that in the hybrid both incorporation and rejection, or what Ashcroft et al. call abrogation and appropriation, occur proves the ambivalence of the site marked with concurrent sameness and difference. Moreover, taking the Third Space as an imbalanced site justifies the different reactions and interactions that each poet reflects in his or her poetry. Thus, while Harjo and Allen take cynically and thus avoid the hybridity to which they are exposed, Alexie welcomes it as a productive field for the betterment of his generation.

**Bhabhalian Postcolonialism and Native American Writing in English**

Although Bhabha’s views have been harshly criticized for his ignorance towards the material effects of colonialism on the colonized (Hiddlestone 171-2), this study finds his notions quite revealing because its scope is narrowed down to the Native’s worldview vis-à-vis its Western counterpart in their poetic texts; hence textual culture is the main concern here. Moreover, as Scott Lyons (Ojibwe - Bullhead Clan) states, the cultural violence against Indigenous peoples “was in many ways, located at the scene of writing” (quoted. in Archuleta 2006, 92; Lyons 2000, 449). In this light, Indigenous writing itself is politicized as it becomes a resisting strategy, not merely a “writing back to the empire”, but a liberating gesture to the Indigenous. Although for Ashcroft et al., writing back to the empire is regarded as a resisting strategy, their emphasis on the colonial classical works parodied and ironized by the colonized implicitly reiterates the colonial textual power and claim of superiority over the colonized. Moreover, it calcifies the literature of the colonized in only one mode, a gesture to the colonist. This is the point that Arun P. Mukherjee raises against Ashcroft et al.’s prescriptions in
The Empire Writes Back. In his 1990 essay, “Whose Postcolonialism and Whose Postmodernism?” Mukherjee criticizes Ashcroft et al. for leaving “us only one modality, one discursive position. We are forever forced to interrogate European discourses, of only one particular kind, the ones that degrade and deny our humanity. I would like to respond that our cultural productions are created in response to our own needs” (quoted. in McLeod 28). The needs of which Mukherjee speaks vary from age to age, tribe to tribe, and gender to gender; yet all of them are the sordid impacts of colonialism against which the writers and poets voice themselves.

Envisaged as such, Native American writing is less concerned with “writing back” than with the liberating act of “writing” itself as a political performance. In their collection entitled Reinventing the Enemy’s Language (1977), Joy Harjo and Gloria Bird see writing in the colonial language as an act of politico-cultural assertion. In Murray’s words, “‘Reinventing’ in the colonizer’s tongue and turning those images around to mirror an image of the colonized to the colonizers as a process of decolonization indicates that something is coming into focus that will politicize as well as transform literary expression” (Porter and Roemer 77). Harjo herself embraces the enemy’s language to “tell our truths, to sing, to remember ourselves during . . . troubled times” (quoted. in Archuleta 90). A writer like Lee Maracle utilizes her powers at writing texts at the service of women who are still afraid to speak, helping them to recognize the roots of their fear of the trauma of colonization (Archuleta 2006, 91-2). Tiffany Midge (Lakota) describes her writing as a personal journey that leads to healing, “In a very true and literal sense,” she says, “my writing became the center of my salvation. I’ve found
much peace through the creative process by risking to speak of the stories that strike hard into the locked internal landscapes . . . of my being. Through releasing them, I’ve learned the true meaning of forgiveness” (quoted in Arculeta 95; in Harjo and Bird 211-212). Acoose uses English to convey Indigenous people’s worldview; she writes in English because she finds it “encourages [the] recreation, renaming, and empowerment of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples” (1995, 37). For Archuleta, “Reinventing the enemy’s language signals our refusal to be defined by anyone but ourselves” (91).

All Indigenous women writers opted for writing as a means to hold dialogues with one another with the aim of sharing their experiencing, giving voice to themselves as both sexual and racial Other, and encouraging one another toward a future of emancipation. Laura Tohe (Dine) writes to reclaim herself and the power her culture offers women because “the act of writing is claiming voice and taking power” (Archuleta 2006, 99; in Harjo and Bird 41). Emma LaRocque (Plains Cree/ Metis) began writing in eighth grade out of her need to express herself because, as she says, “there was so much about our history and about our lives that . . . has been disregarded, infantilized, and falsified” (quoted in Archuleta 99; LaRocque 1999, 176). In the preface to Jeanne Perrault and Sylvia Vance’s edited collection, Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada, LaRocque bemoans Native languages having been silenced, marginalized, and discarded. She states, “To a Native woman, English is like an ideological onion whose stinging layers of racism and sexism must be peeled away before it can be fully enjoyed” (xx). Her argument that the newly created “english” may remain “a mode
of internal colonialism for native peoples, whose language, representations and values are dismissed as parochial to the nation defined largely in the white settlers’ terms” (McLeod 125).

Instead of renouncing English as the colonial language imposed on them, LaRocque votes for stripping it of its racist and sexist discourses to make it suitable for their use; thus she takes using English language as “the birthright of contemporary Native peoples” (xxvi). Similarly, Janice Gould uses writing in order to actively engage in a process of self-definition: “These days I feel a kind of urgency to reconstruct memory, annihilate the slow amnesia of the dominant culture, and reclaim the past as a viable, if painful, entity” (quoted in Archuleta 100; Harjo and Bird 52). Harjo, Alexie, and Allen share with others the same urges, each in his/her own way.

This textual involvement, which lies at the core of the present study, aims at displaying the inevitable hybridity and ambivalence that runs through the poetry of Harjo, Alexie, and Allen as the signs of their resistance to and subversion of colonial textual assimilating policies. Besides, the unavoidable exposure to Western culture has rendered Native American writers and thinkers ambivalent as figures situated on the liminal Third Space or the cultural interstices where national identities are liquidated, put in a constant process of formation and deformation, construction and deconstruction. In his reading of a poem by Adrienne Rich, Bhabha calls attention to subjects whose differences are constantly negotiated. As rightly explained by Hiddlestone, “Subjects do not necessarily belong to one group or another and, indeed, the individual and the group, singularity and solidarity, are no longer pitted against one
another” (123). Such a vision of subjects is in fact a reification of Native worldview which believes in the complete harmony and unity between human and the whole universe. In a way, one can claim what Bhabha and the defenders of human rights in this globalizing world are seeking already exists in Native American worldview. One of the objectives of this comparative study is highlighting this aspect of Indian poetry as revived and coveted by the aforementioned poets.

**Native American Worldview**

Worldview comprises the ideas, beliefs and values people in groups agree to use as the basis for understanding reality. Native Americans hold their worldviews based on their traditional lifestyle and relations with the whole universe. These worldviews are as diverse as complex. The significance of worldview lies in that it provides the lens through which identity is constructed. Worldviews sometimes differ from one tribe to another; however, in general points they are almost the same. Native identity is determined by the tribe one belongs to and who one might be related to. What interlinks different tribal worldviews together is their sharp contrast with Euro-American worldview. As aptly referred to by Thomas C. Gannon, “The Euro-American worldview is one of belittlement, distance, difference; the Native attitude, one of kinship and positive regard” (201). Here the study refers to the general points the understanding of which proves illuminating in the course of comparison.

In Native American worldview, man is composed of four interrelated dimensions, namely, spiritual, mental, emotional and physical. This four-part structure is called the Medicine Wheel concept.
The equal development of each dimension renders an individual balanced. “If an individual concentrates on only one aspect, the other three suffer. . . . When off-balance, the individual is not considered to be whole” (Native Studies 44; Harte, Michael Anthony 1996, 66). In contrast to this view, the Westerners believe that man is composed of four humors and the balance of man depends on the balance between these elements. The humors are not interrelated the way the Indian dimensions are and furthermore the individual is influenced by these humors and has no role in controlling them; whereas in Indian worldview the individual is said to have complete authority over the four dimensions of his being. In Western religious discourse where there is mention of the spiritual, mental, emotional and physical, there has always been emphasis on one, mostly the spiritual over the others, believing that man’s redemption lies in that. History of the West shows that during different epochs the stress shifted from one aspect to the other and not all dimensions together were given equal due attention. Hence in the Enlightenment, the mental dimension was given voice over the other three; the Romantic period witnessed the emphasis on the emotional; and the twentieth century paid attention to the physical. This explains the loss of the spiritual, the mental and the emotional during the modern age. Logically enough, the failure of each worldview in its own age and the frustration of man in each period is an indication of the loss of balance which, according to Indian worldview, is due to the loss of balance in all four dimensions.

Indian Americans represent the interrelatedness of the four dimensions of man’s being in a circle; the circle provides the foundation of the spirituality, the family structure, gatherings of people, meetings,
songs and dances. The circle is the heart of their value, philosophy, and religion. In their worldview, changes happen in circles or patterns. The Medicine Wheel Circle takes all races on the earth as each other’s siblings: black, yellow, white, and red. The circular form gives equal significance to all races; this runs in contrast to the European claims to civilization and superiority of the male white over the non-whites. The West also celebrates completion in the form of circle and gives great importance to cyclic events in nature and man’s life. However, there is a sharp contrast between the Western perspective and the Indian. While in the Native worldview, man is situated on the same scale as all other creatures, the West crowns man by according him the unique position of the center. The Western cycle completes when man preserves his centrality; even in the modern era when in Yeats’s apt words, “the centre cannot hold”, man suffers fragmentation and paranoia due to the loss of this centrality. This lamentation hints at the belief in the central position of man which is endangered in the modern age and lost in the postmodern era. In contrast, the Indians do not believe so and thus they find themselves in harmony with their natural environment. It is due to this belief that man’s relation to nature is one of respect and care rather than an authoritative force. Man in Indian perspective has an interdependent relation with the universe, while in the Western outlook man is seen as the lord of creatures and is to be respected and served by the whole universe, hence his destructive exploitation.

There are four related ways to develop the spiritual aspect. The first way is responding to non-physical realities like dreams, visions, ideals, spiritual teachings, goals and thoughts. On the significance of
dreams, Jeanne Perreault writes, “dreaming constitutes a semiotic field in which realities are made in naming” (1994, 120; quoted. in Nixon 18). Second, developing the understanding that such non-physical realities can develop one’s potentials or help her/him be different from what s/he is. The third step is expressing these dreams, visions, and spiritual teachings by use of language, mathematics, and the arts. The last stage is using these symbols to guide one’s future actions. In contrast to these, the West discards the spiritual and dream visions as illusions and thus takes man out of his balance. The fundamental feature of tribal worldview was and continues to be that all life is a manifestation of spiritual reality. “We come from spirit; we live and move surrounded by spirit; and when we leave this life we return to a spirit world” (Native Studies 116). The West disregards the spiritual dimension of man’s being, resorting to science and scientific achievements. Relying on man’s power to rationalize, which dates back to the Renaissance, the Western view does away with the spiritual and cognate discourse as superstitions. This nullification has led to branding the Indians as the inferior race; that they are simple-minded, naïve, and savage and thus in need of urgent civilization and “proper” education.

In the Native American worldview, man has no superiority over other creatures and elements of the nature. Man is an equal and integral partner in nature’s cycle. Stating that “Earth is larger than humans in size and consciousness”, Harjo concludes, “We’re guests on this earth. Humans are just part of a larger creation” (Harjo and Winder 19). The nonlinear and nonhierarchical philosophy of Native Americans accords great significance to the cycle and cyclic forms. Living in balance
requires being cognizant and respectful of one’s place within the entire spectrum of being, hence a common respect for the environment. In Chief Seattle’s apt words, “The Earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the Earth. . . . Man did not weave the web of life, he is but a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself” (Oakes, J. R., Riewe, K. Kinew and Maloney, E., 1988, 337). In contrast to this view, the West has always held man as the lord of all creatures and thereby has nourished claims of superiority over the environment and nature. This worldview is most obvious in the eighteenth-century philosophy of the Great Chain of Being which in a monopolising and myopic manner situates man at the center of the universe due to his mental powers. Although this philosophy attempts to keep man in check, the centrality it accords to man has imbued in him an authoritative outlook which is one of the reasons for his colonizing urges all over the world. Based on this false faith in authority of self over “other” men and nature, colonialism reached its highest point in this century.

For Native Americans, showing respect is a basic law of life. Respect means “to feel or show honour or esteem for someone or something; to consider the well-being of, or to treat someone or something with deference or courtesy” (Native Studies 246). In the West, however, respect is class and gender-oriented; and in the colonial encounter it also becomes race-based. While for the Indian Americans, the hurt of one is the hurt of all, in Europe, the hurt of non-whites is normal, and sometimes it becomes a must. The other related ethical code concerns receiving the others: “Receive strangers and outsiders with a loving heart and as members of the human family” (Native Studies 248).
West’s ill-treatment of the other is well manifested in the long duration of colonization. Besides, applying the same code of manner to the colonizer upon the first colonial encounter has led to a destructive misinterpretation on the part of the colonists. Indians received the intruders with a loving heart, serving them as their own family members; but the Westerners interpreted this as the Indians’ assertion and affirmation of their superiority. Toleration of the intruders’ disrespectful manners on the Indians’ lands culminated in the prolongation of their settlement and forcing the hosts back in their own lands.

Indians distinguish discourse \textit{generically} (dreamsongs and rain songs, myth narratives, ceremonial rhetoric, et cetera) but not \textit{categorically} (literature, history, philosophy, science, fiction, nonfiction, et cetera). Thus there is no Indian “literature” as such for Indians. (Wiget 314). Oral narratives in Native American worldview include myths and legends which function as a means of understanding the world and explain the mysteries of the universe. The story-teller, who is a woman, is of vital importance in preserving and transferring the culture of the tribe from one generation to the next. The stories do not have real beginnings and endings, hence a cycle. This cyclic form gives the story-teller the freedom to narrate the stories every day. While Indians hold these narratives as essential to their lives and traditions, the non-natives regard them as childish, naïve interpretations of the on-goings of the universe. One of the pretexts to present the Indians as primitives has been misinterpretation of these narratives to denigrate them as being in need of European fact-based education. As Joy Harjo explains, “One of the first things the churches did was to change or destroy our narratives. Female
deities were turned into male, if they survived the destruction. A trinity of a father, son, and holy ghost leaves out any female presence or power at the beginning of creation. . . . Mary was always an afterthought, and was only there as a virgin . . . not as a female deity or power” (Harjo and Winder 19). Silencing the female voice as the story teller or doing away with any female participation in the process of creation is in line with the colonial androcentric dominion over the colonized.

For Indians, stories are either sacred, which contain ethical, religious and moral codes, or everyday stories that center on the daily affairs like hunting, harvesting, cultivating, net-making, building shelters, et cetera. These stories are not invented but retold. In order to evoke the feelings of the audience and open the mind and imagination of the listener, the stories have to be told in an impressive and creative way, using gestures, facial expressions, voice intonations, and imbuing a relative sense of humor.

The tribe is led by the Chief who is a wise man, skillful in hunting and speech, and has oratorical abilities to settle conflicts among the members. The problems of the tribe are addressed and solved at general community meetings. The end objective would be the general welfare of the tribe and greater respect is shown to the side that compromises. This runs in contrast to the governmental system of the West which usually thrives on the prioritization of some at the expense of marginalizing others. Moreover, compromise is regarded as a sign of defeat and retreat in the West; therefore, the settlers have always tried to force the Other to compromise in order to denigrate them. But for the Indians, the one that compromises procures respect. This contrast in perspective has been one
of the accelerating factors in the colonization project.

Land as the major source of food for the tribe is of great significance among Native Americans. Patricia Clark Smith and Paula Allen aptly explicate the significance of land for the Natives and how the land and people are interconnected. They assert, “American Indian people – even urban dwellers – live in the context of the land. Their literature thus must be understood in the context of both the land and the rituals through which they affirm their relationship to it” (1987, 176; in Nixon 19). The West also accords great significance to the issue of the land; however there is a great difference between the two worldviews. As detailed here, “Our way of making a living was with the land. The land was used for basic subsistence with small surplus, rather than for profit, and the use of land was marked with by an ongoing round of ceremonies, rituals and sacrifices . . . ownership was viewed as collective stewardship. The essence of holistic livelihood was sharing, giving, and receiving in an attempt to keep body, mind, emotion, and spirit in balance” (Native Studies 114). This outlook towards land runs against the Western possessive and exploitative approach that exhausts the riches of land for gaining more and more surplus. Furthermore, the tribal “collective stewardship” approach has never been understood nor respected by the colonizers. History of Native displacement stands as a proof to the imposed personal paper-based ownership of the West which has been a sign of disrespect to Mother Earth. As rightly put, “The idea that a human being should say that this piece of land or water or sky belongs to him has traditionally been a concept alien to the Indian. . . . They [Indians] viewed the reserved lands as lands that they kept not only for themselves
but for the generations to follow” (quoted. in McNickle 148). As analyzed well by Paula Gunn Allen, the concept of ownership has led to the terrible difficulties of the Native Americans in their dealings with the European transplants to this continent: “The Native Americans did not understand how a piece of land could belong to someone in some absolute sense by virtue of a piece of paper” (Allen 1998, 19). While for the Indians possession has been a matter of use, for Europeans it procured an eternal right. This became a pretext under which the Westerners subordinated the Indians as “savages, because they did not bow down to the idea of paper ownership, or of personal possessiveness, or of ownership of the many by the few, and justified their genocide in these terms” (Allen 1998, 19). The discourse of proprietorship brings with itself the issue of theft and robbery which stands as a counterforce to human cooperation. The system based on ownership thus feeds upon selfishness which leads to separation. Since the Industrial Revolution till just recently, when concern for ecosystem and environmental preservation for the future generation has come into focus, the earth has been exposed to centuries of man’s devastatingly exploitation of its natural resources.

In the Native American worldview, the whole clan stands for the individual; this is the sign of their integrity and unity as a tribe. In the Western worldview, however, it is the individual who stands for and represents the whole tribe. “The notion of advancing themselves as individuals rather than members of their group is alien to their culture” (quoted. in McNickle 1992, 146). As McNickle notifies, “inter-tribal alliances have not characterized Indian political experiences. The autonomous tribe, or band, or village . . . is a projection of the
autonomous individual. No Indian individual, even within his own family, speaks for another individual. No tribe presumes to speak for another tribe. To act otherwise is to act discourteously, if not indecently” (116). What united Indians, however, has been a shared experience, a sense of being under attack. The tribal fact that an individual can never speak for the whole group runs in contrast to the Westerners who have paternalistically spoken for the Other, either the powerful, the superior Other, or for the silenced, the marginalized Other, hence Kristeva giving herself the right to represent Chinese women.

The strong sense of belonging to the clan emanates from the vital role family structure plays in Native American worldview. Within the familial structure, everyone has his/her own role, duties, and significance. The tribal life already defines everyone’s place, giving everyone his/her due respect. Unlike the Western lifestyle which silences women and subordinates them to objects of man’s sexual pleasures, the tribe assigns key roles to women both within their families and the tribe. As clarified in Native Studies 10, “women could become warriors, hunters, healers or bearers of chiefly names and titles. . . . The role of the woman [. . .] was an equal role [. . .]. The woman’s role within the Elders . . .[was] almost like hidden leaders” (149). The literary scene of Native America is starred by women writers who try to voice themselves against the colonial sexist reign. It comes as no surprise that in the male-dominated colonial system the first women writers faced many difficulties in getting their works published. In John Mohawk’s belief, “European-Americans saw the world in such different terms, in terms of hierarchies, male force and control, that they were blind to the fact that Native cultures were, in fact,
community and woman-oriented and non-abusive in nature” (quoted. in Hollrah 17). Much of the literary works composed by women Native writers are endeavors to countersign the colonial patriarchy by reviving their traditional matrilineal system; the same endeavors runs through poetic woks by Allen and Harjo as well.

The other important aspect of Native American worldview which distinguishes it from its Euro-American counterpart is the former’s stress on space and the latter’s emphasis on time. As Paula Gunn Allen aptly explains, “the tendency of the American Indian [is] to view space as spherical and time as cyclical, whereas the non-Indian tends to view space as linear and time as sequential. The circular concept requires all ‘points’ that make up the sphere of being to have a significant identity and function, while the linear model assumes that some ‘points’ are more significant than others” (quoted. in Denis 20). Such a difference in the worldviews could be politically and contextually interpreted. As the tribal survival wholly depends on the land, the centrality of space is accentuated in the circular notion the Indians assign to it; whereas for the non-Indians progress, speed, and motion compacts the space and instead highlights the time span. While circular structure accords equal priority to all points in the issue of the land, the linear shape can easily prioritize some points at the expense of marginalizing some others. Circular structure survives on balance; whereas the linear form thrives on imbalance and subordination.

The Scope and Arguments of the Thesis

The present research project holds a comparative study of select poetry of Joy Harjo, Sherman Alexie, and Paula Gunn Allen. While Joy
Harjo’s and Paula Gunn Allen’s poems cherish a female perspective through which different dimensions of Indian worldview and their present status are presented, Sherman Alexie looks at his world through a male lens, albeit his viewpoint lacks all the stereotypical features attached to his masculinity. Harjo’s and Allen’s speakers in their poems are women, mostly mothers, while Alexie’s speakers are all men, mainly fathers. While the first two poets concern themselves with general, abstract aspects of Indian life both within and without tribe, Alexie deals most meticulously with the details of modern life to which Indians are displaced and exposed. All three poets write on Indians and their plight because of colonialism; yet Harjo and Allen’s relatively general, female perspective target colonialism from dimensions which are contradictory to the more particular and at times personal approach of the male poet. Alexie draws upon his own personal experiences in the modernized urban life to philosophize about Indians. His world is replete with technological devices like iPods, telephones, cell phones, television; and his scope mostly brings onstage his family, his sons and wife. In contrast, Harjo and Allen rarely involve their family or private lives which remain unheard in their poetry. Their poetry centers around their traditions and their sufferings under the colonial oppression. This difference renders Alexie’s poetry more narrative than Allen’s and Harjo’s. Besides, the dominant mood in Alexie’s works is a gloomy one which presents Indians corrupted in the colonial encounter, in a cynical tone and manner. His Indians are mostly idlers, drunks, gamblers, the dead, the forgotten ghosts, or the sick. Harjo’s Indians are mostly women of tribal or mythical significance, hence more symbolic. And Allen’s Natives are
mostly critical women who are not satisfied with their conditions but have not yet totally lost their traditional hints unlike Alexie’s who are totally lost to their past.

The Bhabhalian approach of the thesis gives these differences an organized scale. Here it is argued that being a mixed-blood, Allen is more aware of the hybridity which occurs in the colonial encounter. Her perspective is inevitably a hybrid one which most clearly depicts the Third Space emanating from the West-East encounter and its impacts. Her approach to this hybridity is not a welcoming one; she retains her reservations against this hybridity which has deculturated her kind. Likewise, Harjo has a pessimistic view on this hybridity and tries to stick more to her traditional life, hence she focuses on reviving traditions. By contrast, Alexie is the poet who cherishes his hybridity as an Indian; his speakers in the poems at times do away with their traditions, cast nativism off, and vote for mingling with the colonial as it is the most proper weapon against its oppression. Here the thesis argues that Harjo and Allen who rarely appreciate hybridity stand at one end of the line, while Alexie can be placed at the far other end. Thus as one moves from Harjo through Allen to Alexie, there is a line of development in cherishing hybridity. Accordingly, nativism in Harjo and Allen is at its highest point, and in Alexie it is totally denounced. This difference gives the three poets different features. Harjo’s and Allen’s poetry tends mostly to be symbolic and abstract, while Alexie’s poetry is concrete and detailed. Based on this argument, the present study starts with the most traditional poets, Harjo and Allen, showing their symbolism in form and content; it then moves to Alexie’s down-to-earth poetic lens.
Besides, another objective of the present study is to display the limitations of Bhabhalian notions of hybridity and mimicry as resisting forces in the colonial encounter. This study shows that being mixed-bloods, Allen and Harjo take the theoretical hybridity to its limits where it runs short of pinpointing the situatedness of difference itself. It is one of the aims of this thesis to show how poetry takes its roots deep into the context and history and thereby countersigns the homogenizing theories and undermines their authoritative/colonial claims. The fact that Harjo’s and Allen’s poetry resists the Bhabhalian notion of hybridity in the form of mimic men itself stands as proof against hybridity theorized as such, while simultaneously and paradoxically enough, they are themselves by blood and by culture prodigies of the very same hybridity. Even with Alexie who cherishes hybridity, one can detect how hybridity for him differs from its theorized and dehistoricized version. This comparative study aims to critically examine the different aspects of these theoretical positions as well.

**Chapter scheme**

The thesis comprises of five Chapters. Chapter One provides an introduction to the study. Since Native American literature is highly context-bound, the Chapter also presents a brief survey of the politico-historical landmarks of Native Americas. Besides, the Chapter dedicates a part to the literary setting out of which these poets have emerged. This part not only introduces the most attempted genres and trends in Native American literature but it also creates a framework for better appreciation of the poetic contributions of Allen, Harjo, and Alexie. This Chapter sets the scope and objectives of the study. It introduces the theoretical lens
through which the poetry of Allen, Harjo, and Alexie is to be compared. The chapter explains and justifies why a Bhabhalian theoretical framework has been chosen with its emphasis on the notions of hybridity, mimicry, and the Third Space. Providing a general outlook on the Native American worldview, the last section presents some major traditional beliefs and highlights their significance in contrast to their Western counterparts.

Chapter Two deals specifically with Paula Gunn Allen, a mixed-blood, as an ecofeminist and her poetic contributions. The Chapter takes her ecofeminism as her main concern to revive the matriarchal tradition which has been marginalized and subordinated by the West’s imposed worldview. Counterarguing the colonial sexist and racist voice, Gunn Allen focuses her poetic creativity at reviving the silenced female voices and thereby accentuating the lost or forgotten traditions within which they, as women of color, could detect their roots. The detailed analysis of the selected poems undertakes to demonstrate how Allen takes issue with the hybrid conditions in the colonial encounter, as she finds the asymmetrical power relations in the Third Space to be quite destructive and threatening to the Native traditions, explaining her recoil from such hybridity. Moreover, Gunn Allen’s particular attention to nature and the environment has roots in her traditional Native worldview. Finding the ecosystem threatened by Western modernity, the poet highlights the significance of nature in the face of colonial so-called “civilized” culture. Accentuating the destruction done to nature, she puts under question the very bases of Western worldview that justifies its “civilizing” mission.

Chapter Three revolves around the poetic endeavors of Joy Harjo, a
mixed-blood poet whose poetry shows her resentments against the colonial hybridity. Like Allen, Harjo is an ecofeminist and thus takes issue with the colonial sexism and racism. Unlike Allen whose poetry has a relatively optimistic mood, Harjo’s poetry is cynical and pessimistic. Like Gun Allen, she finds herself in the hybrid Third Space which is totally different from the hybridity she rejoices in and enjoys as a mixed-blood. Harjo concentrates mostly on language and human communications. She resents colonial Third Space which has endangered the Native traditions through its asymmetrical power relations. Harjo’s weapon in raising her ecofeminist voice against modernity is the colonial language. Naming and thereby identifying the enemy is her major strategy towards resisting the deculturating forces of the colonizer, who is exposed as the source of many atrocities against the Native way of life.

Rather than a mere gesture toward the colonial in writing back to the empire, Harjo addresses her own people and depicts the ways in which Native traditional worldview has been debilitated by such predicaments as alcoholism, gambling, and smoking. The Chapter deals with these cultural symptoms of the colonial legacies that have separated the Natives from their roots and traditional culture, left them open to various self-destructive patterns.

Chapter Four exclusively centers on Sherman Alexie’s poetry. Alexie, like Allen and Harjo, is a mixed-blood but has no roots in Native languages. Alexie is less concerned about his Native traditions and appreciates the hybridity in the colonial encounter. His poetry lacks the dominance of the female voice with which Allen’s and Harjo’s poetry is marked, but it is also more intimate as he brings onstage his family
members. In contrast to the other two poets, Alexie draws on his own everyday experiences out of which he reveals many insights into the Native American worldview. While Harjo’s poetry is replete with a mother’s or grandmother’s voice, the male voice in Alexie mingles with technological devices like his IPod, cell phone, laptop, GPS devices et cetera. Technology receives a welcoming treatment only from Alexie.

Chapter Five is “Conclusion” which offers an incisive summation of the poetic oeuvres of the three poets with reference to their politico-historical contexts as well as issues of form and voice in such literary utterances. The Chapter underscores the uniqueness of the respective visions of these three poets and how they liberate the boundaries of theoretical framework laid down in Bhabhalian concepts of hybridity and mimicry.