Chapter Five
Conclusion

The present study has been an attempt to scrutinize the complex ways in which Native American worldview is used as a reference point to create various critical positions in the Native Indian poetry of Paula Gunn Allen, Joy Harjo, and Sherman Alexie. The thesis presents the patterns of response at the point of contact between the Native Indian worldview and the Western worldview, which take the two contrasting and completely opposite positions, from the perspective of the poets mentioned above. The study examines questions of voice, form and stance in the poems of these poets, critiquing their poetic oeuvre in the framework established in the research design. The three poets represent their worldview that gives equal significance to all creatures in the Universe.

A postcolonial perspective was unavoidably essential to such a study as the literary scene of Indian America is marked with the poets’ individual responses to the demands of their colonized state. The thesis has adopted a Bhabhalian lens, emphasizing his notion of hybridity and mimicry. We have seen how the three poets as figures are caught up in the colonial encounter. They are all themselves mixed-blood poets, hence hybridity is an inherent feature of their personality. However, as this detailed analysis shows, their hybridity is completely different from, and in the case of Allen and Harjo, in contrast to, the Bhabhalian concept of hybridity. In Bhabha’s hybrid state, the codes of both colonizer and colonized are mobilized and the result is a depoliticized and
dehistoricized hybrid entity. Interestingly, the poetry of these Native poets presents a sharp contrast to this widely accepted notion.

As detailed throughout each chapter, the poets embrace the state of hybridity in a liberating way which anchors them to their lost, ignored, or subordinated context. Far from getting mixed up with the colonizer, Allen and Harjo, in particular, write in order to revive their matrilineal system which has been silenced by the colonial patriarchy. Accordingly, the main argument of the project is presenting the delimitations of the postcolonial theories when applied to poetic works of Native Americans. Such limitations become manifest when the fulcrum of the study is the Native American worldview. Native American Worldviews are based on their traditional lifestyle and relations with the whole Universe. These are divergent as well as complex.

Paula Gunn Allen is a mixed-blood poet who devotes her poetic career to the revival of her matrilineal worldview. This accounts for the centrality of women’s role and voice in almost all her poems. Moreover, the other important concern of this poet is her ecological care which mixed with her feminism makes her an ecofeminist. Allen’s ecofeminism serves her two main objectives: on the one hand, she retains the centrality of woman’s position in the concourse of nature, and on the other hand, she deconstructs the colonial patrimonial claims asserting their authority over nature. Allen’s main concern is reviving her tribal traditions, predominantly matrilineal in character, where nature forms the core of existence. She is well aware that she is located at the interstices of the colonial encounter and she knows hybridity is unavoidable. Her ecofeminism revives the matriarchal tradition which has been
marginalized and subordinated by the West’s imposed worldview. Yet far from embracing such hybridity and its homogenizing hold, she returns to her traditions. This does not mean that Allen acts like a nativist. On the contrary, she functions as a world citizen respecting every nation’s traditions and giving them due respect. She opts for a multicultural co-existence, which respects diversity and heterogeneity of all cultures, as opposite the homogenizing patterns of the West. Her poetry is marked with this utopian vision of the world in which no one single culture or tradition rules over many others. Thus she receives ism such as globalism quite cynically as she finds her own tribe having fallen victim to its imperial/colonial allurements. Unlike the other two poets, Harjo and Alexie, Allen is not concerned with issues and intricacies of poetic style; thus her poetry is marked with the least possible experiment and innovation. She regards her poetry mostly as the bearer of her thematic concerns.

Harjo’s poetry, like Allen’s, is marked with her ecofeminism. Like Allen, Harjo seeks to restore her matrilineal system by giving centre space to women. Her poems are either by or about a mother, grandmother, wife, or girl. Unlike Allen, Harjo deals mostly with the mythical aspects of her tribal identity; this justifies her mytho-traditional themes and style. Stylistically, Harjo endows her poetry with such central mythic structures as the circle in order to first deconstruct the hierarchy-based linear structure of the male colonial, and second, to restore the lost but coveted balance to both poetry and life. Therefore, her volume of poetry, *She Had Some Horses*, starts with fear and ends in fear; it begins with dread dominating the female speaker and ends in the speaker having overcome
that sense of fear which has debilitated her and her people. Such a circular structure is endowed with a mixture of prose and poetry which is itself another stylistic strategy, which can be seen as Harjo’s attempt to create a sense of balance, lost to her people since the arrival of the White man.

Thematically also there are many similarities between Allen and Harjo which could be summarized from the ecofeminist lens. However, Harjo is more concerned about the mythical dimensions of her tribal life; this trend makes her poetry more symbolic than Allen’s poetry. Taking the comparison further, Harjo’s political resistance is more strongly voiced in her poetry. Like any other poet of resistance, Harjo is aware of the dangers of her hybrid state, being herself a mixed-blood. While Bhabha welcomes hybridity as a depoliticizing and depolarizing state, Harjo has her resentments against its homogenizing sweep. Thus, while she knows mingling with the colonial cannot be avoided, she adopts a resisting gesture and thereby seeks ways to deconstruct the colonial hold over the Natives. Like Shakespeare’s Caliban in *The Tempest*, Harjo learns the colonial language in order to learn how to insult the master and to communicate her resentment. For this reason, she goes for naming the enemy. By naming the enemy, Harjo believes, one can recognize him and this recognition is crucial to any resisting force. Stylistically, Harjo employs a cynical tone not just to target the colonial enemy; she is well aware of and suffers from her own people having given up to the colonial assimilating forces. Among the many sordid symptoms of colonization, Indians’ lives have mostly got damaged by their alcoholism. Drinking is one of the main issues that Harjo picks up against her own people, putting
under question their so-called newly gained ‘identity’. While this makes her utterance more forceful, it imbues her poetry with some pessimistic tinges which are missing in Allen’s poetry.

Harjo’s other concern is the question of language and communication. Of the three poets studied here, Harjo is the poet who most directly addresses this issue. This trend is not only reflected in her naming-the-enemy attempts but also in her stylistic hybridization of prose and poetry. Such a hybrid structure gives each one its due space and simultaneously deprivileges either. Blurring the distinctions between prose and poetry is Harjo’s objective which signifies her strategy to restore balance to man’s language.

Alexie is the most experimentalist Indian poet of the three. Like Allen and Harjo, Alexie is a mixed-blood, but unlike them, he is less concerned with the traditions of his tribes. Linguistically also, he does not communicate in his Native language, unlike Allen and Harjo. From a Bhabhalian perspective, Alexie is a mimic man who has acquired the rationalizing tools of the colonial and thus attacks parts of his tradition which, according to him, give his Native people an illogical, at times savage vision.

Alexie’s experiments with language and poetic styles are different from the stylistic features adopted by Harjo, which could be interpreted politically as her poetic endeavor to destabilize the colonial demarcating discourse. Alexie’s experiments can be interpreted as merely his stylistic experimentations without pursuing any specific political aim. What Alexie seeks after is variety, multiplicity, and plurality in his poetry.
While Harjo regains balance in her hybridization of prose and poetry, Alexie’s mingling of the two does away with balance as in some poems, giving more space to one or the other. Alexie could rightly be described as a postmodern Indian poet whose stylistic features are different from the structured experiments of the other poets.

Like Allen and Harjo, Alexie is a feminist; he cares for the central status woman used to cherish in his tribe but now is totally lost to them. Like Harjo and Allen, he calls for restoring their lost respect in society but this is not the main topic in his poems. His main speaker is a male figure, usually a son, a father, grandfather, and at times, a man. Unlike the other two poets, Alexie strikes a sense of intimacy with the reader by bringing on his poetic stage his personal life including his wife and son. While Harjo goes to myths and Allen opts for traditions, Alexie goes to his everyday life, and picks up daily matters with which his male figure grapples without outcome.

As a mixed-blood poet and a hybrid figure in the colonial encounter who shows affinities with Bhabha’s notions more than others, Alexie is far from being a depolarized mimic man. A deeper analysis of his poetic endeavour reveals his Native worldview which roots him in his tribal origins. This feature which marks his thematic concerns in most of his poems countersigns Bhabhalian hybrid man who is supposed to be depolarized.

Like Harjo, alcoholism finds a critical treatment in his poetry; this harsh treatment has roots in his personal life as he suffered a disintegrated family due to his father’s alcoholism. Unlike Harjo who takes the colonial
as her enemy, Alexie strikes a sort of friendship with the enemy, accepting his strong points and discarding negatives like sexism and racism. Rather than returning to his tribal society like Harjo and Allen, Alexie prefers to stay in his modernized city life enjoying the facilities the white settlers have created. By the same token, he runs against nativism and rejects it as a myopic worldview for the Indians. Such a stance motivates him to counter argue critics like Elizabeth Cook-Lynn whose point of reference is “the tribal community or nation” and whose criterion is “how far any writing promotes its history and continuing values” (Porter and Roemer 79). For Cook-Lynn, cosmopolitanism of some Indian writers like Alexie is demoralizing as they have allowed themselves to be assimilated by the white forces. Alexie, however, attempts to denounce such a view by presenting how a cosmopolitan poet could serve and reflect his tradition and simultaneously retain his tribal identity. He is a hybrid figure, but not in a Bhabhalian way. He is a poet who is aware of his politico-ideological stance and is far from being a depolarized man.

As postcolonial poets, each one of the poets discussed presents the Native American worldview from his/her particular standpoint. The present study views the poetic career of these poets as resisting attempts against the colonizing/imperializing forces and this interlinks them to poets and writers from all over the globe whose works have stood their stance.