CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

American Indians was a group of people who came not less than forty thousand years before the arrival the Europeans in 1492 in America, were once the rulers of this virgin land, the land of plenty, the garden of Eden, now called the United States of America. However the moment the White Europeans arrived on the shores of America, the so called rulers were captured, tortured, slained, slaughtered or were befriended and subjugated. Their way of life, habits, customs, traditions, beliefs, faiths, rituals, religion, language, economy, polity, and culture were gradually but subtly taken away from them. Though the European invasion was political and economic, it ultimately, for American Indians, proved to be a cultural invasion. Superior in their weapons and military power, the colonizers crushed American Indians and turned them into subhuman beings. Thereafter, they were forced to face all kinds of tortures and debasement.

Though they were tortured, tormented or slaughtered individually and collectively, some of them still managed to survive through hardship and ill treatment meted out to them. However, those who accepted the superiority of European colonizers and their Christianity, they were not treated on par with
the Europeans. The colonizers motivated by commercial and political aims, grabbed the land of American Indians and terrorized them. Consequently after getting frightened, the American Indians moved to the inner most part of the dense forest and valleys; some of them died while making their way through the forest. Hence, they were treated as a substandard, sub-ordinate and subaltern people. Consequently, their continuous state of slavery, physical and mental torture implanted in them deadly fear for the whites and their culture. As a result, they became uprooted in their own land, lost their self and identity which generated inferiority complex in them. This led them to suffer from socio-economic, political, religious and cultural paralysis.

Though they appear to have accepted white man's ways and culture, there is always an anathema and feeling of rejection in their mind for the white culture and civilization. Consequently, they keep their beliefs, customs, traditions, social practices, rituals, religion and culture at the inner-level of their psyche and communal affairs. Therefore, when they get a chance to express themselves through art and literature, they pour out their anger and rebellious attitude vehemently and indicate total refusal and negation of the white values. Unlike ordinary American Indians, the American Indian writers are much more conscious of their own history which is full of suffering and inhuman treatment meted
out to them by the white people. Therefore, they unveil the cruel face of the so called civilized white rulers and try to reclaim their eroded selfhood and identity.

Basically, these writers have three fold sense of their past. They try to depict through their literature: 1. an era of happiness and glory before the arrival of white colonizers, 2. an era of their plight and sorrowfulness after the arrival of the white people and the way they were slain, slaughtered and treated as sub-human beings, and 3. an era in which they were sent to fight the World War II and Vietnam War which enabled them to understand their own roots.

All these historical experiences and memories of the past have been one of the resources of the literature of these people. Hence, through their literature, they try to express their anger and anguish, sorrowfulness and happiness and the feelings of uprootedness and try to reclaim their own lost selfhood and identity. They try to reveal who they are and why they are what they are. To project this effectively. They use images, symbols, myths, legends and resources of language and narrative strategies which are part and parcel of the American Indian tradition. However, the main purpose of their writings is to reclaim their lost selfhood and identity and to glorify their true, genuine and authentic self.
The most important and tragic part as per as self, selfhood and self identity is concerned, the Native American writers are forced to accept the language of whites not by will and wish but it is only a resource left for them as far as choice is concerned. Their historical pictographs, sketches, murals, and whatever material is available, in fact, is a mosaic pattern which these writers use on a large scale. In order to communicate self, selfhood, identity, myths, symbols, and cryptography these things are the products of historical past. As far as past is concerned it plays important role in the life and history of these creative writers of the Native Americans. These writers made use of pictograph, myths, symbols, murals and cryptography in their writing which are so identical for the contemporary writers.

Native Americans are a submerged group of people displaced and isolated from their own land, their gods, and their cultural moorings. Their angst and despair are delineated in the works of these respective writers. They sing about their loss of inheritance in their works.

The colonizers not only took away their home land but also subjected them to abject penury and made them outcasts in their own place. They also began to impinge on their god, their faith and their identity. The Natives suffered these losses with some kind of
protest; they also expressed their protest and loss in their songs and stories which pass from generation to generation. It was only in 1969 that a major voice of the Native sensibility emerged in the form of a novel called *The House Made of Dawn* by N. Scott Momaday. This novels heralded the renaissance of Native American literature. Momaday was followed by another writer of profound understanding named Leslie Marmon Silko. These writers made vigorous attempt to delve deep into their past for their identity.


Momaday makes deliberate attempt to transform American Indian culture, myth and sensibility into a special art form, in his literary work of art. It is very close to modern Anglo novel as a vehicle for a sacred text. In this connection Paula Gunn Allen writes that, “as the mythic structure of *Moby Dick* is the Bible, so the mythic structure of *The House Made of Dawn* is Beauty way and Night Chant.”¹
The House Made of Dawn is about Abel, a young Pueblo Indian and World War II veteran, who knew where he was. Why he had lost his way and how he wondered to the end of the earth. It is a novel which reels on the edge of void. Being at the center means living and moving in an appropriate relationship to language, landscape and lineage. Spatially, the novel moves through four sections: 1. The Longhair, 2. The Priest of the Sun, 3. The Night Chanter, and 4. The Dawn Runner are compactly interlinked together to convey the theme of the novel. All these sections move in a cyclic form especially in Native American perspective.

Despite of his strength, Abel is not an exemplary Native American: he is, according to his acts, a dysfunctional person, he is a drunkard, a womanizer, and a murderer. His dysfunction, however, comes from what is now called post – traumatic stress disorder, a psychological inability to connect with one’s environment which is full of repeated exposure to violence (in Abel’s case, during the war) and loss of (family member). Primary symptoms of this disorder are the inability for self expression or reflection as well as a vulnerability that resembles the posture of a victim. In other words, Abel catches the action and attitudes he fears most - violence, pity, and contempt.
Momaday with his father’s help gathered many of the fragment of Kiowa identity from Kiowa storytellers and printed the results in a privately published work, *The Journey of Tai – Me* (1967). Momaday worked on *The Way to Rainy Mountain* to realize the importance of his reclamation project. *The Way to Rainy Mountain* is the story of the journey of the Kiowa people from their mythological emergence into the world to Rainy Mountain in Oklahoma and their decline as a people. Momaday has tried to recollect this journey both on intellectual and physical level. His interaction with his Kiowa heritage accompany the mythical and historical narrative. Momaday, therefore, is able to validate the living quality of Kiowa identity.

The metaphor of *The Way to Rainy Mountain* is multifaceted. It includes: temporal / eternal (diachronic / synchronic) and spatial (geographical / cosmic ) coordinate; a recombining of sacred and secular element; an awareness of the profound interaction between myth and reality; and an understanding of the cultural (ancestral) demands for balance and continuity in the context that needs a radical change. Combining all these elements which are accomplished through a method of storytelling, he transcends generic boundaries. Momaday strives for physical, spiritual, and psychological goal in the place named–
Rainy Mountain. *The Way to Rainy Mountain* symbolizes the starting and finishing point of his quest.

Chronologically, *The Way to Rainy Mountain* records the rise and fall of the Kiowa tribe. The sections like “The Setting Out,” “The Going On”, and “The Going In” are enveloped by a prologue, introduction, and epilogue. They are framed by two poems: “Head Waters” and “Rainy Mountain Cemetery”. In many respect, this literary work records the passing of an old Kiowa order and the emergence of a people into appalling times.

In 1963 Momaday’s grandmother, Aho, invited him to come to Oklahoma with his father, Al, to view – Tai – Me bundle. This event was later transformed into *The Way to Rainy Mountain* into three sections, each constructed from a different epistemological orientation: The mythos (Historical), logos (Anthropological), and the ethos (Philosophical) of the events. The reconstruction of every event is vertical or synchronic in nature. The mythos, for example, is sacred narrative (Kiowa Scriptures) describing how Tai – Me comes to the Kiowa during the period of famine. A man, so the story goes, heard the cry of hunger from his children and walked four days in search of food. On the fourth day he heard a voice saying “Why are you following me? What do you want?” When
the man explains the plight of his family, Tai – Me volunteers, goes with the Kiowa and gives them whatever they want.”

Each of the twenty-four triads in *The Way to Rainy Mountain* could yield similar discussions. The mythos portion of “The Setting Out,” for example, records the story of the sacred family, father–sun, mother–earth and their son (who becomes twin as a result of his father’s aggression and mother’s death). The twins exploit bringing about the bi–polar or contingent nature of the mortal world as well as the possibility for healing those violent separations. Many of the tales are exemplary or cautionary in intent. Grandmother, Spider woman, guides the orphan twins in their sojourn. Typically the myths everywhere in the mythos section in *The Way to Rainy Mountain* record the genesis of many behaviour and practices among the Kiowa. In “The Going On” section Momaday’s ancestors assume mytho status and in the section “The Closing In” portion, the first paragraph also recounts the tragic error of particular Kiowa people-mistakes that contributed to their decline.

*The Names: A Memoir* has gained almost as much status as *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. It is a five – generation genealogical chart and an italicized philosophical revision. The family photographs accompany the four sections, each of them concludes
with a testament regarding transcendent qualities open to consciousness. It speaks of transitions from one state of being to another—the passage of rites of young artist. *The Names: A Memoir* is about the places whose imprint weaves through Momaday’s memories like elemental fibers. He celebrates the power of memory and imagination, as well as the energy gained from living in the presence of incomprehensible landscape.

In *The Names: A Memoir* Momaday, relates his experiences in Hobbs, New Mexico, and at Jemez Pueblo. He uses a stream of consciousness as a technique to record his memories of growing up as an Indian. *The Names: A Memoir* describes the end of Momaday’s childhood. While climbing down from the top of Mesa, he reports that he had a near death experience. When he returns to the consciousness on the valley floor, he realizes that he has been within an eyelash of eternity. Eternity, life and death, also mark the epilogue. In the epilogue Momaday through the power of his imagination, comes into the presence of past, the dead one.

Momaday’s another novel *The Ancient Child*, has not received critical acclaim because of its complex nature and abundant conjectures loaded within the work. Locke Setman (Set),
the male protagonist in the novel, is disillusioned and suffers from a nervous breakdown.

In this novel—the shifting between planes of reality is brought about through the guidance of a Shaman, Grey Koi – Ehmm – Toya, a woman of Kiowa and Navajo ancestry. Grey women must, however, go through a transformation from being an irresponsible Tom boy – who lives in her wild sexual fantasies of Billy the Kid – to being a Shaman, wife, and mother. These are preferred through her relationship and eventual marriage to Set, a marriage promising the continuance of the sacred circle. The notion of sexual ignorance plagues both Set and Gray. Set is susceptible to sophisticated groupies who exchange sexual favours for some attempt at intimacy with an artist.

Momaday’s version of eternal recurrence is firmly grounded in co-existent landscapes—the physical (ancestral and geographic), psychological (maturational), and spiritual (mythical) landscape of the Native American West.

In The Ancient Child, art moves from creative product to creative process. Indeed the four major sections—“PLANES”, “LINES”, “SHAPE”, and “SHADOWS”, are in all terms indicative to those images emerging from framed creative expressions. These terms also identify the mystery that exists beyond western
cognition. This enigma is not the cruel survival instincts of Billy the Kid; rather it is an acknowledgement of the human potential to live in good relationship to God, community, the land, and one’s potential. This human potential is still experienced as arising from the unconscious not as some kind of determinism but as infinite possibility for beauty and well-being.

The Ancient Child is not a rejection of western culture. Whether Grey relates to Set as the inferiority gender, she becomes doubtful if Grey’s midwifery can be accepted as an equally important soul to that of Set’s transformation into a bear man. Both Grey and Set are also grandly enhanced by their experiences with the arts. The Ancient Child is both a conversation with western and American ideologies and an invitation to consider what Native America has to offer to those who have been transplanted on her soil.

Through her works Leslie Mormon Silko has defined herself as a Native American writer, concentrating on ethnic themes, motifs and genres. She has already established a minor reputation as a short story writer when she published her novel Ceremony, which, alongwith N. Scott Momaday’s The House Made of Dawn, is one of the two most important novels in modern Native American literature.
Silko in her novel, *Ceremony*, focuses on a young American Indian who under some what similar circumstances, struggles to realign himself with the traditional Indian culture and reservation life after having been torn away. Tayo, Silko’s half-Laguna, half-Anglo protagonist, returns to his New Mexico reservation just after World War II. The horrors of war against the Japanese in the Philippine jungles have led him to the brink of insanity. He is admitted in the mental ward of veteran’s hospital. Back home, he is in constant danger of succumbing to mental illness as he faces sad and hopeless life. His half-breed status among his own people and the legacy of shame from his promiscuous mother, now dead, exacerbate the pain of living among disposed people who are constantly reminded of their lost heritage. He associates with fellow veterans who feel their meaningless life with a Kiowa’s and anecdotes about their sexual exploits among white women during the war. He observes Indian prostitutes and winos in scenes of skid-show squalor that reminds him of his own ruined mother. Guided by Betonie, an old medicine man, Tayo, finds a helpmet in a sort of Indian earth-goddess figure and gradually proceeds through the series of mystical ceremonies and rituals that will make him whole again, and in this process outwits the witchcraft of his evil antagonist Emo.
The *Storyteller*, an anthology of tribal folk fables, short stories, family anecdotes, photographs, and poems, demonstrates Silko’s continuing fascination with narrative. Her another novel *Almanac of the Dead* is massive and ambitious novel. This apocalyptic novel set in unspecified describes the collapse of White European–American civilization and the resurgence of Native American people. It is divided into six sections: “The United States of America,” “Mexico”, “Africa”, “The Americas”, “The Fifth World”, and “One World, Many Tribes”. The main action begins at a heavily fortified ranch near Tucson, Arizona, and focuses on character Lecha and Zeta, Sixty–year–old twin sisters of Mexican extraction and grand–daughter of Yoeme, a Yaqui woman escaped a death sentence for sedition in 1918. Lecha is a psychic with visionary powers. Zeta, with Lecha’s estrange son Ferro, directs an operation for smuggling drugs, illegal immigrants, and arms. The sisters inherit from Yoeme, an ancient fragmentary almanac of tribal narratives which, contain mysterious power, that would bring all the tribal people of America together to retake the land. The working out of prophecy generates the novel’s plot as a whole, and open ended conclusion. A series of bombing and murders in Tucson concluded with the gathering of shamans would lead to revolution. In Mexico an army of disfranchised Indians move more towards north. In developing this overall scheme, Silko views
together multiple interrelated tales and anecdotes, employing about seventy characters and wide range of settings—the overall movements towards the destruction of decadent western culture in North America. It is associated with the rapid decline of late capitalism predicted by Karl Marx.

As a Native American writer, Silko deals with usual dichotomies: white culture is cruel, artificial, dead, cut off from nature and based on greed, whereas traditional Indian culture is holistic, natural, and communal. However, Silko is by no means simple minded in working with this framework of values, and she is a close observer of both the worlds. Like many contemporary writers, Silko experiments with narrative line, weaving in and out chronological order as she explores the consciousness of her characters. However, her habitual use of what she takes to be the Indian concept of reality— at least one’s experience of reality as narrative (or myth) enables her to avoid the morbid extreme of self-consciousness that can result from an analysis of the narrative process. She begins *Ceremony* with a description of Thought-Woman, mythic character of knowledge, the spider, “sitting in her room / thinking of a story now / I’m telling you the story she is thinking”.

In the *Almanac of the Dead* the visionary or mystical mode of storytelling is represented by the almanac itself, as well as
by the visionary Lecha and by a character named Tacho, who offers prophecies.

The success of *Ceremony* was largely due to Silko’s ability to deal convincingly with Indian traditions and myths while recognizing the demands of psychological realism and her strict control over the narrative technique. *Almanac of the Dead* is an extra ambitious but uneven and finally unsatisfied as a work of fiction. Moreover, narrative control seems to break down towards the end of the novel as realism is sacrificed to apocalyptic vision.

On the one hand, Silko obliviously offers a powerful critique of the western “imperial” self that has worked towards the dominance and destruction of nature and native people. On the other hand, Silko has expressed biting criticism of fellow Native American novelist Louise Erdrich for her postmodern or so called experimental influences. Silko remains committed to the referential dimension of literary language and to the shade of communal experience.

One interesting development in literary criticism in recent years has been to place Silko and other Native American writers in the context of post colonial and postmodern literature. Silko is said to be searching in her fiction for an alternative to both traditional
western humanist discourse and the postmodern critique of that discourse (which denies the autonomous subject). From this point of view, her project as a Native American writer has been to model a “dynamic” identity and redefine multiple possibilities of the subject.

Both N. Scott. Momaday and Leslie Marmon Silko, project the world of Native Americans which is punctured and paralysed by the whites. Due to the multifaceted colonial interests and materialistic approach, the whites have pierced their tentacles in the mind and the spirit of the original inhabitants of this land. They are dominating not only on geographical area but also on thinking and feelings of the natives. The inhuman treatment and the brutal behaviour of the whites weakened them in all sense. Their heroic nature, faith in their traditional myths and religion have been taken away by the whites. Due to this they have lost their self, selfhood and self-identity. The European values and the so called materialistic growth is of no use to them. The way they were treated by the whites in the past and the treatment they are getting today has no difference. Their defeat on the socio-economic and political culture has resulted into the cultural mess. Therefore, they can not enjoy the life in white hegemonic world. Their recent past haunts them and the present is full of suffocation. Therefore, they are in search of their roots, originality
and their own identity. It is their inner urge which forces them to reclaim their own ancestral past which was free from any colonial power. They strive for the pre-European golden period where all the communities were living happily without any kind of fear. So, instead of living the life of assimilation, they are reclaiming their ancestral past as a real source of life. Therefore, all the protagonists and major characters created by Momaday and Silko are in search of their self identity. Momaday’s characters like Abel, in *The House made of Dawn*, is in search of his ancestral roots, in his past. At the same time a spiritual journey made by his forefather is depicted in *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. In the *Ancient Child* Locke Setman is able to get contentment after regaining in the bear figure. These are the best examples of their self recognition loaded with their ancestral values of the tribal world. Similarly Leslie Marmon Silko’s protagonists like Tayo, in the *Ceremony*, Yellow Woman in the *Storyteller* and the characters like – Lecha, Zeta, Yeome, Tacho, Angela are waiting for the Native prophecy of their original tribal world.

In connection with the plight of the Native American Indians, the late 1960s and early 1970s saw the influence of American Civil rights movement. In America, 1970s witnessed a remarkable explosion of creative writing by the Indians. However,
it was during 1980s that there was a great upsurge of literary creativity. A remarkable phenomenon was the emergence of younger generation of university trained native writers with a singular sense of purpose and commitment. They exhibited it in their writings with an amazing vitality and singular pride with aboriginal past.

The writings of these younger generation of Indian writers reflect the changing milieu. Indian life in America is changing rapidly. More and more Indians are leaving the reserves and moving to the cities. Though native writers are still concerned about their political and economic history, the problem that cities engender have become the new subject of their literature. Understanding themselves (self, selfhood and identity) is a new and challenging perspective in social context, is the aim of these writers.

***
REFERENCES:

