A nation is not conquered
Until the hearts of its women
Are on the ground
Then it is done, no matter
How brave its warriors
Nor how strong its weapons.

(Cheyenne proverb).

Native American women, like their Arab, Asian, black and Latina sisters, have also struggled in naming their own identities. They were the first people to experience the violence, racism and sexism the English, Spanish, French, Dutch, and Germans brought with them from Europe. Previously this was not the case with them. Native American women in the past were very powerful. In Native American culture women were held in high respect and they had power, autonomy and equality. The tribal life was centered on women. In tribal tradition women were having the power to make important decisions. Women were considered to be wise and hence they were allowed to make decisions because they would think about the well being of others instead of just themselves. Indians believed that women were wise leaders naturally. Molly Brant born in 1736 is the best example. The Aboriginal people called her degonwadonti. She was a member of a prominent Mohawk family. She lived in the Ohio Valley. In 1759, she married Sir William Johnson, who was the Superintendent of Aboriginal Affairs in the province of New York and was a
powerful figure in that colony. She was well-educated and was a persuasive speaker. Molly and her brother Joseph played a leading role in persuading the Iroquois confederacy to support Britain during the American Revolution. Molly Brant was a remarkable woman. In her lifetime she commanded respect from both Aboriginal people and white people too. She served her people with dignity, honor and distinction as a wonderful mother and a superior leader. (Molly Brant - From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia)

Another woman, Lozen was an intriguing, courageous and extraordinary Native American woman. Lozen was born into the Chihienne band of the Chiricahua Apache in the early 1800's. She was a warrior who rode and fought alongside Geronimo and her older brother Cheif Victorio in the Apache wars in the late 1800's. It is said she could detect the movements of the enemy by raising her hands in the air which made her extremely valuable in battles. Lozen was a skilled warrior and a prophet. She was also a gifted midwife and healer. According to legends, she was able to use her powers in battle to learn the movements of the enemy. It is said that as a child Lozen learned to ride at the age of 7 and was a gifted horsewoman. All these qualities are found in Native American women and we find these qualities in almost all female characters of Native American writers. (Lozen -Woman warrior of the Chiricahua Apache).

Women are more compassionate than men. Hence they can represent many people in this communal life. In traditional Iroquois society, women enjoyed economic and political power and were the owners of the land and
what it produced. While women did not perform the same tasks as men, the tasks they did perform were generally as equally valuable as men’s tasks. The status of women in many Native American societies was such that women and men could and should have balanced roles. Women were considered to be powerful in tribal life but in dominant culture females are considered to be as the weaker sex. They think that women depend on the help of males. They are confused by over-sensitivity and uncontrollable emotions. The themes of Women writers were about the inequalities and injustices in women’s social condition. as mentioned earlier Pueblo culture is female-centered. Native American women make up the backbone of the family. They had political, spiritual, medicinal power. The descent was matrilineal. No doubt the Chippewa tribe seems to be male dominated, as it is the men who run the tribal council, but at the same time women too are very strong. For example in Erdrich’s *Love Medicine*, though Nector is the tribal leader, Marie Kashpaw, married to the chairman of the tribe Nector, proudly says that she has made her husband what he is and her children know that it is true. Marie and Lulu are strong matriarchal figures. Lulu Lamartine, runs her family with equal strength though she doesn’t maintain good relation with any of her husbands. Despite the fact that they have lived very different lives, Marie and Lulu have a great deal in common. They are both very proud women who are strong matriarchal figures. Marie feels pride in her position as Nector’s wife and the respected mother of many children and foster children. Lulu brings up her eight sons
without any help from the men in her life. Thus these two women are strong matriarchal figures in Love Medicine.

Native women’s community in the past was traditional. Women used to gather together to honor life, to honor one another as sources of life and healing. In native tradition grandmothers played a significant role. In Silko’s Ceremony Tayo’s blind grandmother plays an important role in curing Tayo out of his temporary ailment. Marie and Lulu are the powerful grandmothers of Erdrich’s Love Medicine. Native women’s religious gatherings gave significant roles to grandmothers where women spoke very little. They smiled, laughed, sung, kissed and hugged one another during the ritual. They possessed rich traditional knowledge. They continued their tribal tradition through childbearing and through transmission of cultural values in stories. Mothers bear the enormous responsibilities of family relationships. It is of utmost importance to the Native Americans. Native American mothers have their own problems yet they provide the sense of continuity to the children. Though Marie’s mother Leopalda had rejected Marie, Marie becomes a good mother. She follows Indian tradition where an Indian is equal to being a mother. Marie had children and also she adopted many orphans. Marie and Fluer depict how Native American women have contributed to the survival of their people and culture. Native American women are instrumental in the survival of the community and identity of their people. The family joins the individuals living together in one house. Marie takes care of her unfaithful husband though she was well aware of his affair. She takes care of her husband’s mother, Rushes
Bear, in her old age. Marie struggles hard to hold her family together. It includes spiritual kinship and clan membership. Euro American concept is of nuclear family whereas Native American idea is of kinship. The traditional knowledge helped them to understand the importance of land, environment and fellow being along with spirituality and kinship. They believed that if nature is protected their native society will be safe and protected. Nature and women were interrelated. Thus all native women writers depict the aspect that all women struggle to protect the nature, land and preserve families. With this traditional knowledge native people lived peacefully until the Europeans arrived on their land. Within land based system of labor, the working of native men was never considered to be more valuable than the working of native women. Native women were oblivious to the public/private split that the Europeans brought with them. The incoming European division of labor trapped native women within the limitations of the Western domestic role. Such a system, in which men were to go out and do the work, while women had to play a secondary, supporting and inherently less important role in the home made no sense to native people. They enjoyed equality with men but these Women were made weak by European Colonizers. Their power and identity was destroyed. Contemporary women were not found in grandmother’s gathering but were busy in lesbian bars where they clung one another as family. The original gatherings where women talked among themselves, performed ceremonies and rituals, slowly disappeared. Their friendship changed into rivalry, jealousy, hatred etc due to colonialism. Erdrich’s Love Medicine very
clearly depicts this aspect where the two powerful grandmothers, Lulu Nanapush Lamartine and Marie Lazarre Kashpaw are intense rivals throughout most of the novel. In Allen’s *The Woman Who Owned Shadows* again the aspect of grandmother and mother is discussed. The complex relationships are seen between grandmother, mother, and daughter. Ephanie is the character through whom Allen tries to prove that catholic influence leads to confusion and depression and cure is possible only through native tradition and ceremonies. When Ephanie’s husband abandons her she becomes self-alienated. She is unable to care herself or her children. Ephanie has her self-realization when she discovers her roots and re-establishes her relations with the myths of her own culture. Erdrich’s another novel *Tracks* too discusses the contrasting loyalties to assimilation and tradition by the two important characters Pauline and Fleur. Thus the powerful women groups of past are depicted as isolated women in Erdrich’s novels. Paula Gunn Allen connects women’s communal power to the waning Native Power.

Europeans wanted to force Christianity on tribal government. United States government appointed men and made tribal government male centered. The tribal government which gave equal status to women due to colonial effect became patriarchal. Women were not allowed to attend meetings on Indian government relations. Men signed the treaties with the government. Since the European invasion Native Americans were pushed off their land and forced to sign treaties that reserved only a small piece of their homelands for them and still today Native American reservations have some of the highest crime and
poverty rates in the country. The role of women was changed from a tribal leader creator and farmer to caretaker of children. The clan system was shifted to the nuclear family system. Matriarchal dominance was replaced by patriarchal dominance. This effect fell on their religion too and hence female deities like White Buffalo Woman and Grandmother Spider were replaced with a male creator. Thus colonization destroyed the power and identity of Native women. Recent literature by Native American women on the subject of feminism and gender roles reveals that in pre-contact and pre-reservation Native American societies this was not the case. The stories told by Native American women prove that the women are gaining more power than they have held in traditional western societies and they because of their power will not cause the world to come to an end. Native women of the past were respected and valued for their contribution to the survival of their families. Their knowledge of plants, their ability to cure and preserve food and their opinion in political matters was all valued.

In Western patriarchal community women are inferior to men whereas in tribal community women have always enjoyed equal positions. Native women writers through their writings try to depict the inter relation between traditional values and new lifestyles. Ultimately they conclude by proving that native people can establish their identity only through their own ceremonial tradition and culture. They draw themes for their writings from female tribal traditions. Hence cultural context is essential in understanding Native American literature. Native American literature is nothing but Native American
Native American people perform ceremonies for celebration and healing. Leslie Marmon Silko’s male protagonist, Tayo of *Ceremony* and Paula Gunn Allen’s female protagonist, Ephanie of *The Woman Who Owned Shadows*, are cured of their psychological breakdown through religious ceremonies. Paula Gunn Allen is a scholar and literary critic, who has worked to encourage the publication of Native American literature and to educate others about its themes, contexts, and structures. Almost all her writings have the woman-centered structures of traditional Pueblo society. Allen writes from the perspective of a Laguna Pueblo woman from a culture in which the women are held in high respect. The descent is matrilineal where the children first belonged to their mothers and then to their fathers. In such societies women owned houses, and the major deities were female. A major theme of Allen’s work is delineation and restoration of this woman-centered culture. Her work abounds with the mythic dimensions of women’s relationship to the sacred, as well as the plight of contemporary Native American women, many of who have lost the respect formerly accorded to them. She is concerned with women’s ritual and women’s spirituality. Allen’s *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* is the story of a mixed-blood woman whose survival depends, in part, on the strength she derives from Spider Grandmother, a powerful figure in ancient tribal mythology. Allen's achievement has been compared to that of Leslie Marmon Silko and Louise Erdrich, who also explore the role of women and family in Native American culture. She is active in American feminist movements and in antiwar and antinuclear organizations. In Allen’s *The
*Woman Who Owned Shadows*, Ephanie is an outcast, shunned by the Indian community for her mixed blood as her grandmother and mother had married outside the community. Ephanie was exploited as an alien by whites in San Francisco where she flees with her children to start a new life.

The importance of lesbianism is also discussed in Allen’s writings. Actually in 1970s itself some black women challenged the women’s movements as failing to acknowledge non-white concerns. Feminists challenged the women’s movements to reconsider their attitudes toward the nuclear family calling upon women to become lesbian. Allen's *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* proves that lesbianism is very important because it is representative of woman's self-love. Ephanie is able to find balance and harmony in a lesbian identity. Ephanie at the end of the novel “enters into the song of the Double women, the women who defy men and love women, who hold and use female power”(196). Ephanie's childhood exploration with her friend Elena involves play that is normally expected only of boys. Ephanie is repeatedly warned by her Catholic community that "a twelve year old girl shouldn't be acting that way. That she might get hurt, she might fall and break something"(197). Like the Mythical Sky Woman, however, Ephanie has physical power and endurance. Like many two-spirit females, she rejects girls' clothing and wishes for male play. While her budding sexual relationship with Elena ends suddenly, Ephanie's sense of self depends far more on her gender expression than on her homosexuality. Her alternative gender behavior continues up until the day when, shaken by a dangerous fall from a rope jump,
she abandons her sense of her identity. Just as Sky Woman is pushed into the abyss by her jealous husband, who feels threatened by her power, Ephanie is dared by her timid cousin Stephen to leap from a rope jump he has constructed in an old apple tree. Actually that tree was planted by Ephanie's white grandfather and it is symbolic throughout the novel of Ephanie's mixed-blood heritage. Ephanie was sure of her own strength and agility, and thus she takes the dare, thinking, "If he can do it, I can" (201). But this effort makes her to break her limb break ribs and a puncture lung. Ephanie gives in to community pressure and blames her masculine behavior for the accident. When she is released from the hospital, Ephanie's behavior, speech, and appearance are restricted, signifying the loss of her alternative gender identity: The old ease with her body was gone. The careless spinning of cowboy dreams.... Instead high heels and lipstick.... Instead full skirted dresses that she'd scorned only weeks before. Instead sitting demure on a chair, voice quiet, head down.... Curling endlessly her stubborn hair. To train it. To tame it. Her. Voice, hands, hair, trained and tamed and safe. (202-03). Ephanie begins to be like other girls, adopting feminine attire and behavior and restricting her movements to keep them within Catholic ideals for female gender behavior. Ephanie marries a man and bears two children attempting to take on a female gender identity but she does not succeed. After marriage she grows progressively more depressed. When her husband abandons her, she is unable to care for herself or her children. In the beginning of the novel we find her in self-alienation. When her husband leaves her she depends on the assistance of Stephen for day to day
survival. But later she tries to find her own identity and becomes successful at the end.

Allen has elaborated on the roles and power of Native American women, in her "Who Is Your Mother: Red Roots of White Feminism" which was published in Sinister Wisdom in 1984. In this amazing article, Allen has expressed that Native American contributions to democracy and feminism, countering a popular idea that societies in which women's power was equal to men's never existed. She has restored the place of gay and lesbian Native Americans in the community. These ideas were first published in 1981 in her innovative essay Conditions, "Beloved Women: Lesbians in American Indian Cultures." Allen wanted to affect the consciousness of Euro-American women rather than men because, until the last ten years or so, the women in her culture were never considered weak, and she wants others to know that women were not held down in all cultures. Allen feels the feminist movement of Euro-American women personally hurt not only her feelings but also the feelings of other Native women too. In Allen’s family, the woman-centered tradition was so strong that her grandfather wanted to name her mother Susan B. Anthony. In her 1991 Grandmother of the Light: A Medicine Woman's Source-book, Allen expands her interest in the ritual experience of women as exhibited in the traditional stories. She traces the stages in a woman's spiritual path using Native American stories as models for walking in the sacred way. Like Allen, Erdrich and Silko too depicted the importance of Native American tradition power where women held important positions.
Paula Gunn Allen’s *The Sacred Hoop*, published in 1986, is a collection of several essays, tribal stories, and poetry. She covers many topics in this book, such as Indian literature itself, the Indian view of the universe, tribal feminism as experienced by Native Americans. She also discusses about the duel cultural problems that Indian women and mixed bloods face. Allen discusses the ways in which Silko draws upon the Laguna Pueblo people’s “gynocentric” creation myth and subsequent understanding of the land as feminine in her celebration of female strength, courage, and sexuality. A major theme of Allen's work is delineation and restoration of this woman-centered culture. Allen says that her focus on women is intended to affect the consciousness of Euro-American women rather than men because, until the last ten years or so, the women in her culture were never considered weak, and she wants others to know that women were not held down in all cultures. Her novel *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* contains skillful portraits of feminine relationships. The loving childhood friendship between Ephanie and Elena who are inseparable companions best describes feminine relationship portrayed by Allen. They are so close to one another that they are forced apart by Elena's mother and a school nun who fear the girls' physical affection for one another. Again in adulthood, Ephanie meets another female Teresa, who is psychic and who helps her find her way back to Keres deities. In the therapy sessions Ephanie takes the roles of grandmother, mother, and daughter. This shows that Ephanie’s identification with the female characters and deities is much stronger than with the male. Initially Ephanie feels a close relationship with her brother,
but later she recognizes that he smothers her, without allowing her to be real. Apart from giving important role to Ephanie Allen has depicted the Keres deities who are feminine. Allen uses Keres myths to demonstrate the parallelism between the mythic experiences of Keres deities and those of Ephanie. Ephanie is also a spiritual descendent of Ts'its'tsi'nako, called Thought, Dream, or Spider Woman like Keres deities. Native Women writers believe that Ts'its'tsi'nako is the origin of all creation. Whatever she thinks, is created. She creates two sisters, Uretsete and Naosete, to assist her in making the world. All feminine characters are seen in making this world. Allen identifies Ephanie with Iyatiku, Corn Woman, one of the most sacred Keres deities, and also with Kochinninaku, Yellow Woman. Yellow woman is the heroine of Keres abduction tales in which she is carried off by a stranger. She becomes pregnant, and returns to her village with twin sons who become a rejuvenating force in her society.

The mythical figures of Allen’s *Almanac* are found in Silko’s and Erdrich’s works too. In contemporary Native American fiction the female protagonists manage not only to survive but also to prevail and prosper. In Silko’s *Ceremony*, different roles are attributed to women. Silko’s use of Native American myths and celebration of female sexuality have led some critics to compare her work including “Yellow Woman” to similar work by other contemporary women writers. Yellow Woman is perfect example to reflect native women’s strength. Yellow woman took care of her family and supported them always. During times of famine everyday she used to travel
miles away to provide water for her husband and children. This shows her love and dedication to her people. Native Americans are very good hunters. Yellow woman was also an excellent hunter. She learned to shoot a rifle at the age of seven and killed a mule when she was thirteen. This proves that she had a heart of courage. These factors can also be found in Erdrich’s character Fluer, of *Tracks*. One of the critics Catherine Lappas has compared Silko’s compelling combination of myth and autobiography to that of Chinese-American writer Maxine Hong Kingston. Susan Castillo has compared treatments of gender and ethnicity in Silko’s work to that of Louise Erdrich, who is of a Chippewa descent. Even though many feminist theorists have seen myth as regressive, women authors have frequently used myth to subvert oppressive structure. *Ceremony* is a story which is written by a woman. She has created it and it is told by a woman. This story at the end we come to is already known by a woman. Tayo’s grandmother. Thus as Laura Coltelli opines in *Winged Word*, *Ceremony* is a novel which stresses woman’s role and important in the Pueblo society. Almost every Native American character in this novel can be read as a mythological being in disguise. They all have dual functions, especially the female characters. These female characters are women of strength and power. (Leslie Mamon Silko http://english.emory.edu/Bahri/Silko.html)

Three women important in the novel are Night Swan, Ts’eh and Betonies’s grandmother. Silko’s narrative *Ceremony* is focused through a female deity, Ts'its'tsi'nako, Spider Woman, who is the weaver of ideas and source of discursive authority. The women in the novel own land and they have
magic magical power, and it is they who are largely responsible for the cure of the male protagonist, Tayo. This shows clearly how Native American society attributed important position to their women. Thought Woman is attributed with creation of the universe, and the Pueblo believe that it consists of the world we live in, earth, and the four worlds below where the spirits of the dead go. Allen talking about *Ceremony* says that this novel is all about the feminization of a male. In pueblo society God is a woman and hence all the important deity besides Thinking Woman Iyatico, Earth Woman, and Corn Woman are women. Corn Mother, or Corn Woman, is synonymous with Mother Earth, and represents growth, life, and the feminine aspects of the world. She reflects the importance of corn as the staple crop of the Pueblo, and ritual corn dances are performed to bring rain, increase fertility, and assure abundant corn crops. Pueblos believed that if the balance is maintained on the land then only the people will be happy. All the people, be it men or women should learn to nurture and maintain peace and harmony and prosperity making things grow, taking care of things without thinking about destruction. If land is healthy then only she can bear. Tayo who is disturbed psychologically is cured through religious ceremony only after he returns back to the native tradition. He moves in the direction of Pueblo manhood, which is to walk in balance in a mothering sense that is feminine sense. He learns how to nurture and how to be a mother. In *Ceremony*, Ts’eh is a figure who helps Tayo in his ceremony. Ts'eh appears at three moments in Tayo's journey to help him with the cattle and to teach him about wild herbs, love, and evading his pursuers. Tayo
discovers a woman living on the rim of a rock, who is still in touch with the old ways, and lives in close contact with nature. She teaches him the traditional ceremonies of ritual offering and the healing power of many plants and other natural objects. She is a symbol of Corn Mother herself, and loves Tayo as he has never been loved, and gives him the power. When Tayo was just four years old his mother abandons him. She could not bear to raise a child that has brought the reservation shame due to her mistake. But Tayo’s auntie raises him and tries to play the role of the mother figure he lacked. She willing accepted to take him, not due to love but only to “conceal the shame of her younger sister (29)”. Auntie was always hesitant towards Tayo as he was not her real son and was also a half-breed. For Tayo, this only added to his feeling of displacement and emptiness. He realizes that he doesn’t have a place and that he is not invisible to everyone and his surroundings. But this feeling is removed from Tayo’s mind with the help of Montano who helps him to become more in touch with his Indian side and to feel the strength and power from the earth who is their mother. She teaches him the importance of certain plants, flowers, and ceremonies and how they are significant to Indian culture and survival. When he is not with her, instead of the nightmares, she fills his dreams. When she finally leaves him, he is able to go on living and remembering all that she has taught to him. Silko depicts the aspect of modern culture in her novel _Almanac of the Dead_ where the roles attributed to women are different when compared to the women of past.
In *Almanac of the Dead* Silko introduces Lecha and Zeta in their kitchen which, "because of recent developments" (20), is piled high not with food, but with guns and drugs. Black dye, not soup, simmers on the stove. The implications of this are endless until, near the close of the novel, we realize that the twin sisters' kitchen is one of many headquarters for the war preparations undertaken by the people's armies. Only by completing the book do we detect that organized political revolution to win back the continent has been its centripetal force all along. Yoeme tells the entire story to Lecha through whom we read the story and now retell it in turn. We also know that Yoeme, Lecha and Zeta, along with another character Seese, are the transcribers of the almanac fragments and earlier transcriptions in the form of notebooks. All the women characters want to preserve their land.

In Erdrich’s *Tracks* Nanapush tells about the Chippewa struggle to preserve their land and culture. Native people struggled mainly for land and survival. Native Feminist theories are complex and different from the theories of Non Native feminist theories. Among many Native American groups, women in traditional narratives were accorded both power and authority. However, in contemporary America, when Native American women were marginalized by traditional patriarchal structures not only because they were women but also because they were Native American. Hence it is often the case that the texts they produce portrayed women of power, though not necessarily of authority. Pauline Pulayat is an important character in Erdrich’s novel *Tracks*. Pauline tries to assimilate into mainstream America and hence she uses
her immense power towards negative and often self-destructive ends. Marie is the daughter of Napoleon Morrissey and Pauline is also very powerful character. But mainstream America doesn’t give Pauline and Marie any authority though they are powerful. As Marie cannot become authoritative she makes her husband Tribal chairman, a man of authority. Native women writers’ view about the struggle against sexism both within Native American community as well as in the mainstream society and about the importance of working in alignment with non Native Women is different. They don’t consider sexism to be the primary factor. Struggle for survival is more important than sexism or domestic violence in native women’s writings. Understanding of the land as feminine itself gives female strength, courage, and sexuality in Native American culture. The main concern of feminism is related to women’s inferior position in society and discrimination encountered by women because of their female position. As we know the main struggle of tribal women is biculturalism, they have two cultures both Indian and white as they have both blood that is mixed blood. The individual is made to live in two different worlds. The mixed blooded Indian is forced to sort out these opposing beliefs. Hence they get confused and they feel isolated from both cultures. In Silko’s *Ceremony* Auntie’s misunderstanding of both Native American and Christian traditions is the result of the same clashing of cultures that affects everyone in the novel. Auntie is one of the most negative characters in the book. In addition to embracing some of the more destructive elements of white society, Auntie also adheres to Native American tradition in a destructive manner. Similarly,
she neglects the spirit of Native American traditions, leading her to condemn completely any relationship outside of the community. In addition to this blind adherence to Native American social mores, Auntie is a devout Christian who thrives on a narrow interpretation of the concept of martyrdom. In Auntie's understanding of martyrdom, she will gain the respect of her peers if she is seen to suffer for the sins of others. It is in this spirit that she raises Tayo, rather than out of any love for him or any sense of the Native American concept of family, which is not limited to nuclear units. Night Swan, Josiah’s girlfriend is a strong, smart, sexy, self-aware woman. She is the first of two Mexican women who appear in the novel to represent an aspect of the contact between white and Native American cultures. Erdrich too in her novels discusses about the duel cultural problems that Indian women and mixed bloods face. In novels by other Native American women writers, we can encounter similar portrayals of Indian women as figures of strength and power. She shows how in her community women and children are abused. The main character of the novel Love Medicine June is abused when she is a child and beaten by her husband after her marriage. Men accept the domination of mainstream on them and also accept their values. As they are frustrated they try to use their power and authority on women and children of their community. White men use Native women just to satisfy their physical needs. They are sexually abused. Hence Albertine says: "to these types, an Indian woman's nothing but an easy night" (9). June has allowed herself to be picked up by so many white men that she finally gives up and walks into a snowstorm to her death. Native women in the
present are experiencing a distinct loss of that respect and value from within their culture and from outside of it. They are experiencing increased abuse at the hands of their husbands. Women are also losing respect for themselves as indicated by their increased addiction to drugs and alcohol and by the disrepair of their families. Tayo’s mother Laura in Silko’s Ceremony unable to negotiate the conflicting lessons she learned at home and at school, becomes a victim of the contact between white and Native American cultures. Consumed by alcoholism, she conceives Tayo with an anonymous white man. Another character Helen Jean represents all of the young Native American women who went to the white towns looking for a good job and end up being dragged into prostitution and alcoholism. But there is a strong effort being made by Native Women to improve their futures as well as to improve the futures of their children and spouses. Louis Erdrich, Chippewa Native American women novelist has written about the plight of native female characters in her novel Love Medicine. Erdrich educates others about Native American themes, contexts, and structures. Like all other female Native American writers she too gives women the central position. Women hold all aspects of reservation life together through good and bad times and bear the responsibility of an extra mouth to feed. In addition to housework, baking bread, washing diapers, skimming milk, looking after the children women often have many works like: milking the cows, helping with the cattle, assisting the men on slaughter days etc,
Two other important female characters in this novel are Marie Lazarre and Zelda Kashpaw. Marie is the illegitimate daughter of Pauline Puyat. Margaret more or less takes care of the house by cleaning and cooking. She, like Nanapush, is older and thus knows things that the younger characters do not, things that help the family survive. She has a very strong resolve and it is Margaret who pulls the family together and decides that the family will work hard to raise the land fee. Fleur was believed to possess some magical abilities. “Even though she was good-looking, nobody dared to court her because it was clear that Misshepeshu, the water man, the monster, wanted her for himself. He’s a devil, that one, hungry with desire and maddened for the touch of young girls, the strong and daring especially, the ones like Fleur” (11). Erdrich here depicts the magical power of Native American women through the character Fleur. But, when Fleur wins cards with men they cannot digest. They are jealous of her strength and hence rape her which shows native men’s violence on native women.

Native American women, like all women of color in the United States, have historically been forced to choose whether their primary fight is against racism or sexism. Possibly because women already had some political sway within their own communities and had rights that were denied to most white women, many Native American women chose primarily to fight for their rights as natives. Native women don’t call themselves feminists. They feel the term feminist is suitable to white women. Native feminist politics is also different from politics of other communities. When feminism evolved in the U.S., the
first battle was for basic rights of citizenship and then feminists worked to secure more legal rights and now it is evolving into more of an emotion revolution. Tracing back the long periods of history, we find that women were denied the vote in Western democracies. Women were excluded from formal politics and women even at present are underrepresented in formal political institutions and decision making bodies worldwide. Politics thus continues to be a male dominated activity. Many political theorists and philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau so on and so forth, argued that men were naturally more rational than women. Hence they felt that men suited to politics and public life whereas women were suited to the emotional family life. In the early 18th century women were confined to the home. But in the 1870s social purity feminism emerged arguing against alcohol, violence and sexual abuse that threatened women and families. Women were supposed to be chaste and were meant to look after children and family. This made feminists to quest on the tyranny of men over women. Actually the French Revolution challenged social inequalities and it encouraged women’s fight for equality. Women achieved suffrage claiming that they were equal to men and were equally as rational and capable of taking part in politics. In spite of having the right to eligibility and the right to vote women even at present are underrepresented in most parliaments and governments throughout the world. They are not given equal opportunities with men in other elected decision-making bodies, both local and national.
In traditional culture women gathered together and interacted with each other. They compared their concerns which were common. But Christian influence divided them. Women were kept isolated in their individual homes related more to men than to each other. But again women’s clubs and organizations were formed which taught women political skills which finally led to spread of suffrage movement. This female tradition was very soon replaced by western modernism. Contemporary women were not found in grandmother’s gathering but were busy in lesbian bars. They clung one another as family in bars. The original gatherings where women talked among themselves, performed rituals and ceremonies slowly began to disappear. Revolting against such changes many Native American women began to write their own texts where they portrayed women of power, though not necessarily of authority. Professional organizations and associations continued to struggle for social change and women began to get involved in political parties and unions. Women in the 1940s and 1950s acquired increased education. In 1991 the term feminism was first used. Women were found in all the fields such as political, medical etc. They were given nationality independent of the husband’s. Feminism means to strive for equality and to recognize and resist systems of patriarchal oppression. According to Jennifer Baumgartner and Amy Richards (2000), authors of Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future: “feminism [is] a word that describes a social justice movement for gender equity and human liberation”. Bell hooks (2000), also provides a well-
known definition of feminism as “a movement to end sexism, sexual exploitation and oppression”. (The Waves of Feminism by Emilie Hayes)

The Female Eunuch (1970) an important text in the feminist movement written by Australian feminist Germaine Greer, became an international bestseller. The term "feminism" in English is rooted in the mobilization for woman suffrage in Europe and the US during the late 19th and early 20th century. But efforts to obtain justice for women did not begin or end with this period of activism. Mary Wollstonecraft’s, A Vindication of the Rights of Women (1792), Olympe de Gouges and Theroigne de Mericourt’s fighting for the extension of the rights promised by the French Revolution to women show that women’s rights movements is not a new phenomenon but is as old as human civilization. Mary in her book argues against domestic tyranny. She says that women’s financial dependence on men is legal prostitution. She wants the difference between the sexes to be abolished. Later in 1833 Lucretia Mott and others formed the Female Antislavery Society. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott state that all men and women were created equal. After much struggle by different Societies and Unions, women were given property rights which helped women to own property and land. Sojourner Truth in 1851 delivered a historic speech to American feminists which made women of other races to propose alternate feminisms. In the mid-1800s the term ‘feminism’ was used to refer to "the qualities of females", and it was not until after the First International Women's Conference in Paris in 1892 that the term, following the French term ‘féministe’, was used regularly in English for a
belief in and advocacy of equal rights for women based on the idea of the equality of the sexes. Feminist critics are concerned not only with how women characters are represented in literature, but also with women’s writing. The American literary critic and feminist Elaine Showalter describes the phased development of feminist theory. The first, she calls "feminist critique", in which the feminist reader examines the ideologies behind literary phenomena. The second Showalter calls "gynocriticism", in which the "woman is producer of textual meaning" including "the psychodynamics of female creativity; linguistics and the problem of a female language; the trajectory of the individual or collective female literary career and literary history". The last phase she calls "gender theory", in which the "ideological inscription and the literary effects of the sex/gender system" are explored". This model has been criticized by the scholar Toril Moi. She feels that this model is an essentialist and deterministic model for female subjectivity and for failing to account for the situation of women outside the West. (Feminist Theory: Feminism)

Elain Showalter’s “Gynocriticism” depicts that concerns of the women as writer are central. Thus we very clearly see that Feminism emerged when women started questioning their inferior status and demanded an amelioration of their social position. The main concern of feminism is related to women’s inferior position in society and discrimination encountered by women because of their female position. Feminists demand, changes in the social, economic, political or cultural order, so that, women can eventually overcome this discrimination. The themes highlighted by women writers were about the
inequalities and injustices in women’s social condition. They were campaigning to change it. The body, class and work, disability, the family, globalization, human rights, popular culture, race and racism, reproduction, science, the self, sex work, sexual discrimination, stereotyping, sexual objectification, oppression patriarchy etc., are the important topics for feminist theory and politics. Feminism helps us to understand the nature of gender inequality. It is aimed to establish equal rights and legal protection for women. Feminism has changed many areas within western society from culture to law.

Feminism is found in four different divisions such as First World Feminism, Second World Feminism, Third World Feminism and Fourth World Feminism. In the beginning feminist theories were lead predominantly by middle class white women from Western Europe and North America. Feminism fights for women’s legal rights, abortion rights, reproductive rights, for protection of women and girls from domestic violence sexual harassment and rape. It also fights for workplace rights like maternity leave and equal pay. First World Feminism deals with the problems encountered by women in once colonized countries or those living in Western societies with ancestral connections to those countries, migrants and their descendents. Women’s movement in the US occurred in "waves". First wave feminism emerged in a time when women were supposed to be emotionally and physically different from men. Women’s natural sphere of endeavor and influence was within the home. The first feminist wave was in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the second was in the 1960s and 1970s, and the third extends from the
1990s to the present. On the wave model, the struggle to achieve basic political rights in United Kingdom and in United States during the period from the mid-19th century until the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 counts as "First Wave" feminism. Originally "First Wave" focused on the promotion of equal contract and property rights for women. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, activism focused primarily on gaining political power. Women secured the right to vote in 1918. Despite the achievements of first wave feminists in acquiring the right to vote, women’s preoccupation remained in the home and family and the political victories of first wave feminists did little to change women’s role in the home. Mary Wollstonecraft’s, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), written in the wake of French Revolution is still read as a seminal text. Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) and Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) lay foundation to the second wave Feminism. Woolf introduced a unique woman’s voice and writing and idea of female bisexuality whereas Beauvoir the notion of otherness saying that woman was considered as second sex in patriarchal society.

The first wave disappeared soon after, the second wave of feminism which emerged in the 1960s. How women write and rewrite myth has been the subject of studies beginning with the second wave of the women's movement. Robin Morgan’s *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970) is the first second-wave publication. Educated and strong-minded women formed a radical feminist group in 1960 to 1970. It was short lived but has given many expressions that
have become household words in the United States such as Sisterhood is Powerful, consciousness raising, The personal in political, the politics of housework, the pro-woman line so on and so forth. In this second wave, feminists pushed beyond the early quest for political rights to fight for equal opportunities in employment, in education, in access to childcare and abortion, and the fight for violence against women in the workplace, and at home. The women in this wave strongly believed that women could collectively empower one another. Second-wave feminism is continuing to the present, and it coexists with third-wave feminism. Second wave feminism is largely concerned with issues of political and cultural equality, such as ending discrimination, other than suffrage. The feminist activist and author Carol Hanisch coined the slogan "The Personal is Political", which became synonymous with the second wave. First wave feminism focuses on fighting against political inequalities whereas second-wave feminism describes a newer feminist movement that focused on fighting social and cultural inequalities. Thus home and family was the main theme they discussed and struggled for. But this was not so in case of women of color, poor women, lesbian women, and minority women who claimed that their experience as a woman was quite different than the white, middle-class woman. They suffered more and their struggles centered on much more than just the home and family. More recent transformations of feminism have resulted in a "Third Wave". This new wave of feminism believes that naturally women and men were not different, but that these differences were socially constructed. (Feminism from Wikipedia)
Third wave movement is the contemporary movement which began in the early 1990s in the USA, as a response to perceived failures of the second wave. This movement was supported by Black women abolitionists, such as Maria Stewart (1803-1879), Sojourner Truth (1797-1883), and Frances E. W. Harper (1825-1911). They agitated for the rights of women of color. Despite the connections between the women's and civil rights movements, some tension arose during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Non-white women argued that feminism was predominantly white and middle class. Feminists of this first wave did not understand and were not concerned with race issues. Similarly, some women argued that the civil rights movement had sexist elements and did not adequately address minority women's concerns. These criticisms created new feminist social theories about the intersections of racism, classism, and sexism. This gave birth to new feminisms. Third Wave feminism is of conscious female activism. Black feminists in third wave voiced their concerns in organizations formed by them. Black Woman Organized for Action (BWOA) and the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) were the two organizations that worked for the issues of gender, race, poverty, health, etc. this aspect is discussed in Valerie Smith’s *Not Just Race, Not Just Gender: Black Feminist Readings* (1998). Third Wave feminists often debate with Second Wave feminists for their lack of attention to the differences among women due to race, ethnicity, class, nationality, religion etc. Second wave feminists over-emphasized the experiences of upper middle-class white women. Hence third world feminists who believed that there are no inherent
differences between the sexes and contend that gender roles are due to social conditioning started debating with second world feminists. Third wave feminism gives an impression that equality has been achieved and hence feminists can now focus on something else entirely. Third wave feminism is also known as Post Feminism. Third-wave feminism challenges or avoids deems the second wave's definitions of femininity. Third-wave feminists often focus on "micro-politics" and challenge the second wave's paradigm as to what is, or is not, good for women, and tend to use a post-structuralist interpretation of gender and sexuality. Apart from these feminist movements we have many more theoretical groups of feminisms like Liberal feminism, Marxist or Socialist feminism, and Radical feminism. Liberal feminism asserts the equality of men and women through political and legal reform. They focus the point that women have the ability to maintain their equality through their own actions and choices. Socialist feminism connects the oppression of women to Marxist ideas about exploitation, oppression and labor. Marxist feminism felt that when class oppression was overcome, gender oppression would vanish as well. Then we have Radical feminism which considers male controlled capitalist hierarchy as sexist and is defining feature of women’s oppression. Radical feminism has many sub-types such as Cultural feminism, Separatist feminism and Anti-pornography feminism. Cultural feminism considers the difference between women and men to be psychological and considers it to be culturally constructed rather than biologically innate. Separatist feminism feels that men can’t make positive contributions to the feminist movement as they
replicate patriarchal dynamics. This feminism does not support heterosexual relationships. (*Three Waves of Feminism* From Suffragettes to Grrls)

Native literature was very different from mainstream literature. Feminist literary criticism of the past decades has often pointed to powerful women figures in Mainstream Literature. In mainstream literature from Hawthorne's Hester Prynne to Alice Walker's Meridian we can find many images which are quiet opposite to the stereotype of the clinging, submissive, and self-sacrificing woman. These powerful women were depicted as courageous, independent of judgment and as intelligent as any man, without becoming egocentric or losing their sense of interpersonal relationships. However, little attention is paid to male figures that are sensitive instead of ruthless, gentle instead of heroic, community-conscious instead of individualistic. It is especially important to find such images in Native American literature. There are lot many other differences between Native American feminism and mainstream feminism, apart from those concerning the divergent origins of the respective movements. The abundance of recent publications by both non-Indian and Native American authors reveal significant differences between discussions about women and gender roles by some Native American women, and what the mainstream would call feminism as a theoretical practice. Because of these differences, it becomes apparent that the two different discussions are not necessarily about the same thing, and that discussion of mainstream feminism that is applied to Native American feminism all too often misrepresents Native American philosophies and theories. Many such aspects paved way to the fourth world
literature. As discussed earlier in the Introduction part, the term Fourth World was originated by George Manuel at the inaugural meeting of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) of which he was the first president. The term Fourth World originated in the written form in his book *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* (1974). He traveled to many countries and realized that Indigenous people of the world had much in common in the elements of culture and tradition. He supported Aboriginal people and taught the world that Aboriginal people hold power to shape the future of the world. Thus to through light on works of native people he introduced the concept of ‘The Fourth World’. Through this he wanted to introduce and describe Indigenous minorities throughout the world. Vine Deloria wrote introduction to Manul’s book where Deloria says: The Fourth World is a reality because it describes most eloquently the nature of the world as we now confront it… The aboriginal people can only argue the morality of their case, overwhelmed by the European peoples; they cannot look forward to a day when they regain control of their lands.

The Experiences of women during different periods varied from country to country and from colony to colony. Women of all times whether in American society or in tribal society throughout history were oppressed. Native women faced Double oppression. First, because they were Native Americans, who were colonized by United States of America and Second because they were women. Many works about Indian women are brought out in the form of anthologies and are edited by famous Native American women writers like
Rayna Grenn, Paula Gunn Allen, Patricia Albers, Beatrice Medicine etc. Anthologies of Native American women have recorded stories from tribes across the country about remarkable and heroic women. Popular and scholarly writing about Indian women were reviewed by Rayna Green in the bibliography, Native American Women. What is the place of women in Indian society and literature is very clearly depicted in Paula Gunn Allen’s *The Sacred Hoop*. Allen here argues that the role of Indian women has been subverted or ignored by non-Indians. Patricia Albers and Beatrice Medicine have edited *The Hidden Half* an anthological and ethno-historical approach to the topic which contains a fine collection of studies of Indian women. Thus emerged the fourth world literature where native people describe their own world which explored the threatened present condition and political history. Carolyne Thomas Foreman’s *Indian Women Chiefs* is about the leadership role played by Indian women. Jane Holden Kelly explores the lives of four women in Yaqui Homes which depicts the role of women in Yaqui culture. Women’s roles, duties, pleasures, sacred and secular representations of their life are examined in Marla N Power’s *Oglala Women*. Apart from these anthologies Rayna Green has edited *That’s What She Said*, Linda Hogan, *Native American Women* and Paula Gunn Allen *Spider Woman’s Granddaughters*. Beth Brandt minority women are included in *The Third Woman* edited by Dexter Fisher. In her work *A Critique of Post Colonial Reason* (1999), Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak addresses the rise of the post colonial studies in the United States, though not specifically with a First World Indigenous focus when she writes,
(The) Third World cultural studies impulse began to infect the U.S. Academy. This impulse, with its immense potential for crisis management through production of knowledge, housed the colonial subject as post colonial turned informant… I am only trying to account for the sudden prominence of the postcolonial informant on the stage of U.S. English Studies. The postcolonial informant has rather little to say about the oppressed minorities in the decolonized nation as such, except, at best, as especially well-prepared investigator. (360)

This lack of voice or representation, within postcolonial studies of those oppressed minorities who remain within “decolonized” nations is rooted in the basis refusal of the United States and additionally of many academic dialogues to acknowledge the continued colonial positioning of U.S. based Indigenous peoples. Uma Narayan addresses in Dislocating Cultures (1977) that, to view Indigenous people through a postcolonial lens is to deny their experience of ongoing othering resulting from continued colonial occupation. Historically, the Indigenous person is often seen from the vantage point of the colonizer and the rights of Fourth World peoples’ claim to self is denied in this way. This psychological reality is addressed by Uma Narayan where she critiques her own positioning within border spaces as a “third world woman” as an “immigrant”, as an “academic”, as a “person of whom” and as an “other”. This pattern of othering builds on the observation of Franz Fanon in his book African man that “his customs and sources on which they were based, were
wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him” (110). Fanon’s focus may have been on the experiences of “black” people and those of African origin; more particularly and even more specifically “black men”.

Native American feminism which is Fourth-world feminism focuses on the power relationships between colonizers and colonized people that is native people. This feminism argues against the process of colonization, whereby native cultures are stripped of their customs, values, land, and traditions and forced to adopt the colonizers’ ways of life. Feminism believes that all women cross – culturally share the same oppression. But Fourth world feminism embodies Aboriginal women’s conceptions of human nature, their political philosophy and their strategy for social change and liberation. Many Euro-Canadian feminists consider that the only source of oppression for all women is nothing but male domination. They don’t give importance to racism or national oppression as source of oppression for aboriginals or black women. The Aboriginal women find themselves oppressed not only because of gender but also because of large and more dominant Euro-Canadian immigrant settler society. Marxist feminism concentrates on feminist social protest and class analysis. Women in upper class exploit women in lower class. Double oppression: one being native and the other being female.

While women did not commonly perform the same tasks as men, the tasks they did perform were generally as valued as men’s–something very different from the way women’s work is valued in modern American society.
The status of women in many Native American societies was such that “suffragists regularly cited their status as evidence that women and men could and should have balanced roles.” (Day 5- Native American Women’s Activism
By feminist activist)

Native American women, like all women of color in the United States, have historically been forced to choose whether their primary fight is against racism or sexism. Possibly because women already had some political sway within their own communities and had rights that were denied to most white women, many Native American women chose primarily to fight for their rights as Natives.

Susette LaFlesche Tibbles (1854–1903) was a well-known Native American writer, lecturer, interpreter and artist of the Omaha tribe in Nebraska. Susette LaFlesche was a progressive who was a spokesperson for Native American rights. She was of Ponca, Iowa, French and Anglo-American ancestry. Susette La Flesche Tibbles, an affluent woman of mixed Ponca, Iowa, and French descent, fought for the rights of Native Americans as a reporter and interpreter during the case of Standing Bear v. General George Crook in 1877 when, for the first time, Native Americans “were legally recognized as human beings.”[9] This landmark ruling was a major step forward for Native Americans, but legal recognition as human beings did not necessarily result in more humane treatment by the U.S. government.

In contemporary Native American fiction the female protagonists manage not only to survive but also prevail and prosper. In Leslie Silko's
Ceremony, different important roles are attributed to women. Silko’s use of Native American myths and celebration of female sexuality have led some critics to compare her work, including “Yellow Woman” to similar work by other contemporary women writers. For example, Catherine Lappas has compared Silko’s compelling combination of myth and autobiography to that of Chinese-American writer Maxine Hong Kingston and Susan Castillo has compared treatments of gender and ethnicity in Silko’s work to that of Louise Erdrich, who is of Chippewa descent. Even though many feminist theorists have seen myth as regressive, women authors have frequently used myth to subvert oppressive structures.

It seems that discussion of traditional Native American gender roles by Native American women usually places women in a balanced partnership with men, rather than placing women at the center of importance by themselves. This is often very different from the mainstream feminist discussion about gender roles, the latter usually making statements about woman power, and telling women that they can have it all. Some very prominent mainstream feminists have admitted openly in the last decade that even if we can have it all we probably shouldn’t. Chief among these was Hillary Rodham Clinton. In an interview that she gave that appeared in the December 1998 issue of Vogue magazine (Vol. 188, Issue 12), Ms. Clinton expressed her concern that rather than gaining the range of choice that women were seeking concerning careers and family life, women are now expected by society to work outside the home. The consequence of this expectation has been that women who choose to stay
at home with their children are seen as not doing real work, or doing work that is considered by society to be of little value. It is probable that that devaluing of the very important work of mothers was an unintended or unforeseen outcome of the feminist movement; but as so many armchair philosophers have said, If you shoot for nothing, you will hit it every time. The mainstream feminist movement has achieved quite a lot more than nothing for women, but in not having a specific vision of what would be the optimum balance of power with women as participants, to date they have achieved nearly as many negative outcomes as positive, and are still in hot pursuit of the solutions to the original problem as well as the many new ones that have arisen in the quest.

In contrast, Native American feminism seems to have a vision of what the optimum situation for women would be because they have not been removed from that position long enough for it to have slipped out of all collective memory. Kim Anderson points out in her book A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood that men worked outside the community as hunters and warriors and women within, in the areas of childcare, agriculture, food preparation and housing. These divisions accommodated the work required for a land-based lifestyle. In the words of trapper Kaaren Olsen: The divisions of labour were based on practical needs. Because women are reproducers as well as producers, their labour consisted mainly of work at the home. It was the men who procured the necessary items which were then turned into food, shelter or clothing [by the women]. (p.59, Anderson) Anderson further states that, although men and women had their
spheres of work, they were not restricted from engaging in each other’s work, if it became necessary (p.59, Anderson). That model seems to provide for more flexibility than the one that has been achieved to date by mainstream feminism. Additionally, Anderson asserts that that model provides for more equity in the work community, and also places particularly high value on the work of women:

The discussion of mainstream feminism frequently overlaps into the discussion of Native American feminism but as mentioned previously, these feminists are talking about exactly the different things. The mainstream feminists speak for the Native American feminists, as if they know what the latter should want. But the discussion of Native American feminism cannot be held within the confines of mainstream feminism. However, to force that fit is to continue a cycle of assimilation that would, in this case, make Native American women more like dominant-culture women in theory and thought. After going through all the issues of different feminism we can come to a conclusion that western feminism is different from Native American feminism. As no feminist concentrated on Native American philosophy, theory and thought separate discussion of feminism related to natives was attempted by different Native American feminists under fourth world feminism

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