PREFACE

The brutal colonisation of their lands has led to the destruction of collective identity of the Native people in Canada. This dissertation aims at looking into the issue of the Native Canadians' loss of identity and their attempt to reconstruct one mainly from the psychological, social and cultural perspectives as revealed in the fictions of Jeannette Armstrong, Ruby Slipperjack and Tomson Highway.

Since the sixties, this has become an explicit theme for the Native Canadian literary expression to deal with the fundamental issue of the Native Canadians' loss of identity. The thesis points out how the adaptation of the Native way has been regarded as the solution to the problem. The historical overview reveals the relationship between the dominant white population and the Native Canadians and the dynamics of the individual, institutional and cultural racism as they are evident in the policies and practices of the traditional, mainstream human service organisations. The thesis also examines how the process of decolonisation helps the emergence of a self-awareness. With self-awareness comes self-expression. The three authors under study use literature to solidify through criticism and celebration the emergence of a new national identity.

Identity, however, itself is a contested area that can be defined by plural connections such as class, race, gender, religion etc. The thesis documents the nature and different dynamics of identity and also how identity politics fits into the socio-political landscape. Of late, the self, belonging and identity ranging from the micro level nature of individual construction to macro structures of international, trans-national and post-national have undergone a drastic change. In this ambivalent situation of international shift, the Native's quest for an identity proves to be an unending circular journey, constantly projecting the possibility of imaginary identity construction determining the politics of cultural affirmation.

The prime focus of the thesis has been to study in detail the various manifestations of the Native Canadians' loss of identity and their attempt to rebuild one in the framework of the five novels proposed under study. A study of existing literature on the three novelists and their works encompass a wide variety of approach. However, the survey of critical works also revealed the possibility of re-reading these authors in a different way paving way for a new insight into areas remaining unexplored so far.