CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

More than any other particular segment of American literature, Native American literature has been routinely marginalized. Till a few years ago, it was thought that Native American literature, if it exists at all, is at best rudimentary, consisting mainly of folklore, fit for children. Only by the 60s critical opinion has turned to the richness of Native American literature and with the publication of fiction by major writers like N. Scott Momaday, James Welch and Leslie Marmon Silko, Native American literature has moved to the centre stage and taken its legitimate place in American literature.

Native American literature grew out of an oral tradition passed on from generation to generation. Oral literature has assumed mainly the forms of ritual dramas, songs and narratives. Although ritual drama or ritual is the current term most commonly used by scholars to denote ceremonial complexes, tribes usually use the terms chants, chantways or ceremonies. Ritual can be defined as a procedure, the purpose of which is to transform someone or something from one condition or state to another. In tribal traditions people, beasts, the sun or corn are ever in a state of transformation and that process involves the ritual cycle of being born, growing, ripening, dying and being born again. For the transformation from one condition or state to another to be accomplished, the prior state or condition must cease to exist. Thus a healing ritual changes a person from an isolated or diseased state to one of
reintegration or health. A solstice ritual turns the sun's path of a northerly direction to a southerly one or vice-versa. Participation in rituals unites tribal members with one another and enables them to control natural and supernatural forces. Ceremonies are used for many communal and personal purposes. While some are performed seasonally as part of rituals for renewal of the earth or good crops, others mark communal events such as entrance into a tribal society. Purification ceremonies are performed for those held captives by other tribes or for war veterans—for protecting the tribe from possible contamination. Many pertain to special occasions in one's life, such as receiving a name, the onset of puberty, marriage and death. The purpose of most of the Navajo chantways is to cure illness and the use of rattle is a requirement for them. Communal rituals are conducted in kiva, an underground house, by priests or shamans or special religious cult societies. Through the participation in ritual dramas or ceremonies the tribal members renew themselves in the rich culture that has sustained the tribal life for centuries.

Songs constitute the largest part of the Native American oral literature as songs are central to all aspects of Native American life. Songs are composed both communally and individually. Yet, even the personal songs are not purely personal expressions, because they embody, articulate and share the personal reality of the composer in an attempt to bring all the individuals of the community into harmony and balance with the universe. Thus the songs always have a communal nature. Sacred songs often celebrate the major events in human life, birth or naming, arrival of puberty, healing or purification, death and burial. Songs are also part of fertility rituals that ensure the survival of the tribe.
Story telling has been one of the major ways of entertaining and educating Native American children in the beliefs and history of the tribe. The stories are traditionally told by grandparents to children during the cold months. These traditional stories help them to learn about the world and their place in it—how to behave, how to live harmoniously with nature. These stories belong to two main divisions, myths and tales. Myths describe a primal world, peopled by animal spirits more or less in human form. The myths usually include stories about the creation of the world, origins and migrations of the tribe, culture heroes and trickster-transformers. Emergence myths describe the ascent of beings from under the surface of the earth to the surface and their subsequent settlement. Also widespread are stories about the culture hero who is of divine birth, frequently with the sun, wind or stone for a father and a lesser being for a mother. Often an orphan, the culture hero possesses the power to shape the world and give it its character. Usually the culture hero is a sly trickster who relies on cunning deceptions and mean tricks to reach his goals. The plots of the tales are compressed and episodic, settings are simple and style is terse. The tales often contain inconsistencies of time, logic and detail which are simply accepted by the listeners as artistic conventions. While myths are considered true stories of the pre-historic past, tales may be true or fictional and are usually set in the historical period.

With the coming of the whites, historical and biographical recordings became an integral part of Native American literature. Indians often told their life stories to anthropologists or white settlers through interpreters. D. Chief Eagle’s Winter Count and John G. Neihardt’s Black Elk Speaks are the important works in this category. These works reflect Indians’ despair in losing their freedom and land to the whites. While recounting the massacre of several hundred Sioux at Wounded Knee, South
Dakota, Black Elk says, "the nation's hoop is broken and scattered. There is no center any longer, and the sacred tree is dead" (Neihardt 230). By the 19th century, Indians had been placed on reservations and were forced to "adjust" to a new form of existence. At this time Indians were also beginning to write down their own histories in the white man's language. And by the 20th century, creativity in English language became a prevalent form of literary communication.

The 1960's witnessed a revivalism of Native American identity. Many organisations emerged to serve as effective advocates for Native American causes. The battle for justice for Native Americans has increasingly been fought in the Congress, the state legislatures and the courts. Native American activism was stimulated by the American Indian Chicago Conference of 1961, after which many young Native American activists formed the National Indian Youth Council to mobilise "Red Power". The revival of Native American pride led to a renewed interest in tribal languages, customs and religions. This ushered in an era of creative writing whose quality and quantity were unequal in the history of Native American literature written in English. It was the Kiowa author N. Scott Momaday riding the crest of 1960's enthusiasm for Native Americans and all things "earthy" triggered what is called the renaissance of Native American literature by winning the 1969 Pulitzer for his brilliant novel, House Made of Dawn. Here, critics discovered, was a novel that displayed the craft and ambitious complexity expected of the major writers of modernism, a work by a Native American author who brought formidable skills to bear upon the subject of Native Americans.
Prior to HMD, most fiction about Native Americans had been written by non-Indian authors in a process that resembled literary colonisation. Early 19\textsuperscript{th} century writers like James Fenimore Cooper presented the Native American with the halo of romanticism. The “noble savage” gave way to the “vanishing Indian” of American literature later in that century. Queequeg in \textit{Moby Dick} represents one of the best known examples of this doomed figure. Mark Twain’s tortured and torturing mixed blood, Injun Joe in \textit{Tom Sawyer} represents a pathological “breed”, the painful conclusion of the earlier cliché. In the twentieth century, modernists view the Native American as the quintessential naturalistic victim and William Faulkner’s \textit{Chief Doom} illustrates this view. The Native American represented in these novels reflects the psychic cravings of the colonialist and for the most part bears very little resemblance to the real Native American as these writers were simply writing out of their experience.

In more than a century of Native American novels—novels written by Native Americans—an evolution has taken place in the way Native American writers approach their subjects and the way these novels fit into the mainstream of American literature. The first novel published by a Native American is \textit{Joaquin Murieta} in 1854 by John Rollin Ridge which portrays the mixed blood, Murieta as a “noble outlaw” who turns to crime after he is driven off his land by the greedy whites. He devotes his life to vengeance against his oppressors after his brother is killed by the whites. He is a gallant gentleman to women and a courageous leader to his men, a good man driven to violent deeds by injustice. The novel reflects native response to invasion and conquest. Nearly three-quarters of a century later Mourning Dove wrote \textit{Cogewa} (1927) which reflects the “bitter romantic” atmosphere that surrounds the
Native American in much American literature. The novel's heroine, the half-breed woman Cogewa longs for a place in white society and views the traditional ways of her grandmother with scorn. She marries a white man rejecting her mixed blood cowboy suitor. The white man has his eyes on Cogewa's ranch and after the marriage he nearly murders her. Finally Cogewa returns to her tribal traditions and to the spirit world and marries her faithful lover. The novel in its focus on the anguish of a half-breed introduces a theme which dominates Native American fiction of the 20th century.

The romantic atmosphere in the early novels begins to disappear from the Native American novel in the 1930's by the appearance of fiction by John Joseph Mathews and D'Arcy McNickle. Mathews's Sundown (1934) vividly portrays how Osag culture was affected by life on the reservation, by the assimilationist policies of the government. The protagonist of Sundown is a passive young man who rejects his ancestral past. His white education and experiences in World War I have cut him off from his cultural roots. He finds refuge in alcohol unable to cope either with the traditional world or the white world. McNickle's The Surrounded (1936) movingly describes the disintegration of a tribe as a result of the destruction of their religion and values and the loss of Indian lands to the whites. McNickle's Wind from an Enemy Sky, posthumously published in 1978, begins with the construction of a dam which, in the traditional view, kills the water and ends with the murder of the traditional leader of the "longhair band" which has been holding out against accepting white ways. The white man whose company builds the dam has earlier bought the Feather Boy medicine bundle of the people. The people have been hoping for the return of the medicine bundle but at the end of the novel they discover that the white man has lost
it. In both the novels, the primary conflict is between Native Americans and whites and both are mainly concerned with cultural extinction as the inexorable fate of the natives. Despite the subtle invocations of sacred geography and patterns out of the oral traditions, both of which hint at continuity and survival, the novels of Mathews and McNickle too depict the Native American as a tragic victim. These novels mainly deal with the chaotic disorganization of tribal life since invasion and colonization. They portray Indians as tragic heroes beset by an unjust and merciless fate.

The next generation of Native American novelists begins with Momaday, the spiritual father of today’s Native American writers. These writers pick up where Mathews and McNickle leave off. Their protagonists are alienated and fragmented, dislocated from the land and cultural roots. They cannot articulate their Native American identity. But the modern Native American novelists take the crucial step; they bring their protagonists full circle back home and to a secure knowledge of themselves. Most of these contemporary novels draw on traditional rituals for their structure, theme, symbol and significance even though they use an overlay of western narrative plotting. They are the novels most properly termed Native American novels because they rely on native forms, themes, and symbols far more than on non-Indian ones. In these novels the stress is not on race but on a vision peculiar to a race.

The experiences and the traditions of Native Americans are complex and diverse rather than simple and unitary. Although commonly tribal in outlook and culture Native Americans and their traditions are a multitude. At the time of white contact the native peoples of North America were divided into more than three
hundred cultural groups and spoke two hundred different languages plus many
dialects. Divided into numerous cultural and linguistic groups, they practised many
different religions and customs. However, there are some perspectives that many
Native American groups shared and continue to share. Central to Native Americans
traditional way of life is the belief that human beings must live in harmony with the
physical and spiritual universe, a state of balance vital to an individual and communal
sense of wholeness and beauty. This theme pervades Native American oral literature
and modern fiction as well.

Native American’s desire for harmony is reflected in their deep reverence for
land, another recurrent theme in their oral and written literatures. To them land is not
a tangible property to be owned, divided and alienated at will. It is their Mother Earth
from which they are born and on whose breasts they are suckled. Momaday compares
an old native farmer’s sense of the land with that of a white man in HMD. The Native
American hoes by night, knowing the depth of the row by “the feel of the blade
against the earth” and “the touch of the [corn] fronds and tassels on his neck and
arms” (66). In contrast, the white farmer’s response to the land is hatred: “[He] began
to hate the land, began to think of it as some kind of enemy, his own very personal and
deadly enemy” (123). For the Native American the land is alive, and the farmer
interacts with the environment: the corn tassels reciprocate. For the white man the land
is objectified, alien and dead. Europeans have long assumed a serious split between
man and nature. They perceive the Native American as living in a “primitive” union of
man and nature that is the antithesis of civilization. However, when the Native
Americans imagine man and nature joined they assume that the combination is
civilized. Henry David Thoreau is said to have died murmuring, “Moose. Indians.”
But to the Native Americans, Mother Earth is not wild as the words of Luther Standing Bear illustrate:

We did not think of the great open plains, the beautiful rolling hills, and winding streams with tangled growth as wild. Only to the white man was nature a wilderness... When the very animals of the forest began fleeing from his approach, then it was for us the Wild West began. (26)

Animals are not symbols in Native American writings. Nature is not subordinate to humans and animals have their own rights and individuality in life and art. Cows, bats, mosquitoes, black birds, coyotes and magpies act with individuality in Native American works. Elderly people listen to magpies and deer in Native American tales. Native Americans consider animals as their brothers and so accept their individuality and whimsicality. Chief Plenti-coups after a tale of bloody wars says, “All my life I have tried to learn as the chickadee learns, by listening—profiting by the mistakes of others, that I might help my people” (Linderman 1962:307). The interconnectedness of all living forms is emphasised by Black Elk when he says that his story is not his own but everyone’s; “It is the story of all life that is holy and is good to tell, and us two-leggeds sharing in it with the four-leggeds and the wings of the air and all green things; for these are children of one mother and their father is one spirit” (Niehardt 1). Black Elk’s insistence upon sharing rather than dominating is indicative of a major difference between Euro-American and Native American approaches to non-human nature. The European attitude to the non-human world can be traced easily from the domination motif of the Old Testament. As Cecilia Tichi points out Puritans in New England used biblical authority to justify land
appropriation and development (36). White willingness to wage environmental war was shocking to the Indians as Pretty-Shield says: "kill all the buffalo. Even the Lakota, had as their hearts were for us, would not do such a thing... yet the white man did this, even when he did not want the meat" (Linderman 1974 250). Killing a man who could kill you was understandable and honourable; killing the harmless and useful animal brothers was a senseless action. Momaday tells the story of an expectant father who refuses to hunt deer, even though he and his father are hungry. The man explains, "It is inappropriate that I should take life just now when I am expecting the gift of life" (1976 82).

The Native American’s reverence for nature can be compared to the pastoral vision found in most mainstream American literature, but the two visions contain essential differences. The white heroes fail or are unconvincing because their relationship to nature has been more fantasy than history and because they are conquerors and violators. Native Americans can return and rediscover because they have a vision of nature which they have never violated as individuals or as people. Often, a Native American’s sense of self is connected intimately to a specific landscape. This pastoral vision is different from its white counterpart; it cannot be easily negated. Because their tribal origins and histories are associated with specific places, Native Americans have a strong sense of the sacredness of these places. Momaday emphasises the bond between man and landscape in The Way To Rainy Mountain:

Once in his life a man ought to concentrate his mind upon the remembered earth, I believe. He ought to give himself up to a particular
landscape in his experience, to look at it from as many angles as he can, to wonder about it, to dwell upon it. He ought to imagine that he touches it with his hands at every season and listens to the sounds that are made upon it. He ought to imagine the creatures that are there and all the faintest motions of the wind. He ought to recollect the glare of noon and all the colors of the dawn and dusk. (1969 83)

In an interview, Silko reveals the importance of cultural landscape when she describes how the river that runs through Laguna Pueblo influenced tribal stories and her own work:

These stories about goings-on, about what people are up to, give identity to a place. There's things about the river you can see with your own eyes, of course, but the feeling of the place, the whole identity of which was established for me by the stories I'd hear, all the stories...(Evers 29)

Linked to reverence for the land and the inhabitants there on is the emphasis on directionality and circularity. For many tribes, the number four representing the cardinal directions, seasons and stages of human life, is a sacred number often incorporated into the content and form of their literatures. Multiples of four and the number six, representing the cardinal directions plus directions above and below the earth are also sacred. The circle symbolizes the sun and its circuit. It also represents the cycle and continuum of human life as it passes through infancy, childhood, adulthood and old age. Unlike Christian culture, traditional Native American culture is characterised by a cyclical rather than a linear view of time. The vision of the
Lakota spiritual leader Black Elk, as it is outlined in chapter three of "Black Elk Speaks" amply illustrates this. "You have noticed that everything an Indian does is in a circle and that is because the power of the world always works in circles, and everything tries to be round" (Neihardt 198). Circularity and cycles are incorporated into the structure of narratives. For instance, mythic heroes or heroines may leave the community only to return after many trials and adventures. Modern Native American novelists often structure their novels based on the traditional perception of the symbolic significance of the directions and the circle.

Most of the tribes share a belief in a distant past. They believe that "Back in time immemorial things were different, the animals could talk to human beings and many magical things still happened" (Silko 1977 99). Elders, especially grandfathers and grandmothers, are in touch with a tradition tracing from a distant past and they extend this connections to the young ones. Tribal reality is profoundly conservative; "progress" and "a fresh start" are alien to them. The tribe always appeals to the past for authority. Severed from the past the present is meaningless. Respect for the past is linked to respect for authority, respect for parents, elders and customs. The growth of the ideals of free enquiry has undermined respect for authority in Euro-American society. Emerson's "Thou art unto thyself a law" is the exact opposite of Native American belief. The aging Crow Chief Plenty-coups spoke to Linderman in 1930 about how their elders had inspired and guided the young ones:

This talking between our mothers, firing us with determination to distinguish ourselves, made us wish we were men. It was always going on—this talking among our elders, both men and women—and we
were ever listening. On the march, in the village, everywhere, there was praise in our ears for skill and daring. Our mothers told before us of the deeds of other women’s sons, and warriors told stories of the bravery and fortitude of other warriors until a listening boy would gladly like to have his name spoken by the chiefs in council, or even by the women in their lodges... The pleasure which thoughts of boyhood had brought to his face vanished now. His mind wandered from his story. "My people were wise", he said thoughtfully. "They never neglected the young or failed to keep before them deeds done by illustrious men of the tribe. Our teachers were willing and thorough. They were our grandfathers, fathers, or uncles. All were quick to praise excellence without speaking a word that might break the spirit of a boy who might be less capable than others. Those who failed at any lesson got only more lessons, more care, until he was as far as he could go. (Linderman 1962 8—9)

Euro-American society is fascinated with the isolated and autonomous person evident in the western notion of the solitary hero. To the whites the individual is often the ultimate reality and therefore individual consciousness is the repository and arbiter of knowledge. In sharp contrast, for the Native Americans knowledge is formed and validated tribally. The Native American vision quest amply illustrates this. For the vision the young man had to fast and punish the body alone for days seeking the hallucinatory dream, to realise his identity and his spirit helpers and special animal henchmen. But the meaning of the vision was always determined by the tribe. Native people tend to see themselves first as members of family, clan and tribe and second as
distinct individuals. They are more concerned with the group than with the individual. Tribes often stress co-operation and good relations within the group demonstrated in communal rituals, work, play and decision making. One’s happiness and wealth is measured by one’s relatedness, one’s family and one’s clan. To be alone would be abject poverty and misery in Native American view. Paula Gunn Allen in *The Sacred Hoop* quotes a song which exemplifies the traditional sense of oneness with community:

I add my breath to your breath

That our days may be long on the Earth

That the days of our people may be long

That we may be one person

That we may finish our roads together

May my father bless you with life

May our Life Paths be fulfilled. (1986 113)

Traditional Native American self-conceptions are thus often defined by community. In many cases this identity is also dynamic; that is, it is in process, not fixed. Native American stories often tend to tell a transitional experience. Tribes emphasise on “becoming” in contrast to the western stress on “being”. Margot Astrov points out that Navajo is a language of the verb in contrast to English which relies chiefly on the use of the noun. She describes the “concept of motion” as “the perennial current on which Navajo culture is carried along” and discusses the importance of this
"concept of motion" in the language, myths, chants, curing ceremonies and daily lives of the Navajo (1950 45). Gary Witherspoon has worked out some 3, 56, 200 varieties of the verb "to go" in Navajo. He points out:

The principal verb in the Navajo language is the verb 'to go' and not the verb 'to be', which is the principal verb in so many other languages but is of relatively minor importance in Navajo. This seems to indicate a cosmos composed of processes and events, as opposed to a cosmos composed of facts and things. (49 )

In many tribes evidence of a sense of a "self-in-process" is seen in the many names an individual takes or receives during his or her lifetime. As individuals mature they take new names to reflect their important accomplishments and changing identities.

Language for Native Americans is sacred. To speak is not a casual affair but a holy action. They hold thought and word in great reverence because of their symbolic power to alter the universe for good or evil. Because of their power and because words spoken can turn back on the speaker, thoughts and words should be used with great care. Words not only describe the world but actively create and shape that world. The creation myths of many of the tribes, for instance, emphasise the sacred and powerful nature of thought and language. The world is created by the thoughts of the gods made manifest in "speech, song and prayer". Momaday in an article entitled "The Story of the Arrowmaker" interprets the Kiowa legend of the arrowmaker as a story essentially about the power of language. For the arrow maker, says Momaday "language is the repository of his whole knowledge and experience, and it represents the only chance he has for survival"( 1969 2). Margot Astrov emphasises the Native
American’s belief in the power of language. “The word, indeed, is power. It is life, substance, reality. The word lived before earth, sun, or moon came into existence” (1969 19). The power of thought and word to create and continue the oral tradition from the mythic past of the Laguna to the present is beautifully demonstrated by Silko in the introduction to her novel *Ceremony*:

Ts’its’tsi’nakó, Thought-Woman

is sitting in her room

and whatever she thinks about

appears.

Thought-woman, the spider,

named things and

as she named them

they appeared.

She is sitting in her room

thinking of a story now

I am telling you the story

She is thinking. (1977 1)

Traditional Native American thought emphasises a holistic vision. For them God is known as All-Spirit and all of life partakes in the life of that Great Mystery. All creatures share even in the process of creations according to many Native American origin myths. They acknowledge the essential harmony of all things and do not make any distinction between living and non-living beings or between what is
material and what is spiritual. All things have equal value in the scheme of things and are sacred. All are offsprings of the Great Mystery and essential parts of an ordered, balanced living whole. To them wholeness is beauty, health and goodness. This concept of wholeness probably stems from the Native American concept of a circular, dynamic universe represented in the idea of a medicine wheel or sacred hoop among many tribes. Disease is deemed as a condition of division and separation from the harmony of the whole. A witch is called a ‘two-hearts’: one who is split at the centre of the being.

Healing chants or ceremonies emphasise restoration of wholeness. Through them the isolated individual is integrated with the community and the universe. To the Native American, the universe is a dangerous place balanced precariously between good and evil. Evil should be acknowledged, feared, and avoided. But it cannot be destroyed. Balance and harmony among natural, human and supernatural elements should be maintained. It is through the power of thought and word that this delicate balance is maintained. Paula Gunn Allen quotes a prayer of the Navajo Night Chant to illustrate how the chant aims at making a person whole again by emphasising the unity of the universe and one's relationship to all life:

Happily I recover.
Happily my interior becomes cool.
Happily I go forth.
My interior feeling cool, may I walk.
No longer sore, may I walk.
As it used to be long ago, may I walk.
Happily, with abundant dark clouds, may I walk.
Happily, with abundant showers, may I walk.
Happily, with abundant plants, may I walk.
Happily, on a trail of pollen, may I walk.
Happily, may I walk. (1986:118)

Before the 'corruption' into the written form, Native American texts were oral and communal. The concept of a single author for any given text made little sense to pre-Columbian Native Americans. For the traditional story teller each story originates with and serves to define the people as a whole, the community. Within traditional Native American literatures speaker and listener are co-participants in the telling of a story. The emphasis in traditional story telling falls not upon the creative role of a story teller but upon the communal nature of the stories, with the outcome of each story already being known to the audience. In Navajo story telling the phrase, "it is said", appears frequently. It removes the teller from the role of author to the role of mediator. The story is passed along from those who came before, not created by the story teller on the spot. The story teller does not merely quote or paraphrase the text but may even improve upon it, describe a scene which it does not describe, or answer a question which it does not answer. Thus, traditional story telling is a syncretic process. This reflects the adaptive, dynamic nature of Native American cultures—that quality requisite for cultural survival.

Modern Native American writers combine past and present genres, themes and stories, the spoken voice and the written word. They write more or less chronological narratives that centre on Native American themes and materials and adapt ritual
narrative structures while maintaining the unity of location, time and action and the conflict-resolution structure of western plot. Most of the stories focus on loss of identity, loss of cultural self-determination, genocide or deicide, culture-clash and the kinds of themes and plots that these engender. The majority of the protagonists in Native American novels are mixed-bloods or half-breeds. In recent fiction the protagonists are also participants in ritual tradition, a fact that symbolises the essential unity of a human being’s psyche in spite of conflict. This development implies integration in the midst of conflict, fragmentation and destruction. These novels derive many of their structural and symbolic elements from rituals and myths that are allied with these rituals. Monday chose Navajo and Pueblo ritual as the structural and thematic foundations of HMD; Silko in Ceremony used a combination of Laguna ritual literature such as the story of Tayo, the return of Reed Woman to the village and of Hummingbird and his way of avoiding starvation. Welch uses Gros Ventre and Blackfeet traditions such as the crying for pity ritual [popularly called the vision quest] for his novels.

Native American stories traditionally have three responsibilities; to tell us who we are and where we come from, to make us whole and healthy, to integrate us fully with the world in which we live and make that world inhabitable by compelling order and reality. True to this tradition, contemporary Native American novels represent a process of self-discovery, cultural recovery and re-articulation of an identity. For Native American writers, identity is the central issue and theme. Ethnic identity is always mixed, relational and inventive. That is why Monday writes that “an Indian is an idea which a given man has of himself” (1975 96). Modern Native American novelists confront inevitably and absorbingly the question of identity.
The problem of identity and authenticity and the consequent sense of alienation, while common to the inhabitants of the modern western world, is particularly intense for Native Americans. This is the result of centuries of colonization and the painful, forced assimilation of marginalised people into cultural mainstream. Native Americans have had several centuries of experience of their native languages ruthlessly suppressed. Punishment for speaking ‘Indian’ represents a common experience for Native Americans who have gone to school. The process of displacement was most rapid and intense in boarding schools. The white education they received led children to feel ashamed of their traditional roots. The apparent discrepancy between what they were told at home and what they learned from school left them confused and exposure to the white man’s religion further aggravated their identity crises and sense of alienation.

The Second World War and the post-war periods have been especially traumatic for Native Americans. People have been distanced from their own selves, their communities and land. During the war new economic opportunities attracted large number of Native Americans to the cities, apart from those who enlisted. After the war the majority of the returning veterans preferred to live in cities. During the 1950s the government pushed forward the Termination Policy which sought to end the privileges enjoyed by the Native Americans. Restrictions on sale of Indian lands were removed. Many urban Native Americans were eager to exchange their land for cash awards and soon they lost much of their valuable timber land and the money too disappeared as fast as the land had. The Relocation Policy of the government led large number of Native Americans to migrate to cities like Los Angeles, Seattle, and Chicago. In the alien surroundings, having no real support system to sustain a sense of
community and identity, many of them returned to their reservation homes, frustrated. Still the vast majority of them continued to lead alienated lives in cities. Andrew Wiget points out: "Native American novelists like Momaday and Silko captured the inner realities of displacement from the land and cultural alienation resulting from wartime experiences, relocation and urbanization, and offered hope for renewal" (82).

One of the major features of modern Native American writing is a preoccupation with the process of alienation, in its dimensions of isolation, powerlessness, meaninglessness, self-estrangement, lowered self-esteem and a sense of victimisation. Paula Gunn Allen points out that the majority of literary pieces in prominent anthologies of Native American writing touch on the theme of alienation. She cites examples of several modern anthologies. About one-third of the entries of The American Indian Speaks deal in some way with alienation. Twenty-seven out of forty-six entries in From The Belly Of The Shark deal with alienation while some 70% of the work included in The Remembered Earth deal with biculturalism and the rage and grief this process signifies (1980 4).

Alienation is a primary experience of all bicultural Native Americans, especially the half or mixed breed who constitute the majority of the Native Americans. The breed is an Indian who is not an Indian, that is, breeds are of both worlds and the consciousness of this makes them feel alien among Indians as well as among the whites. No one is exactly sure of the qualifying characteristics of an Indian. Norms on reservations are more stringent than those applied in urban areas. Traditional full-blood Indians insist on "purity" while the partial-bloods or acculturated full-bloods are lenient in their norms. The standards fixed by the government are not the same as
those fixed by the tribes. What is very clear is that belonging is precariously dependent on norms of others. The pervasive sense of uneasiness, of having been shut out or disenfranchised informs the greater body of Native American literature.

A major reason for the alienation of the Native Americans is the conflicting world views of the whites and the Native Americans. The non-anthropocentric and ecologically oriented Native American world view is almost always in direct conflict with the dominant ways of Euro-America. Again and again in Native American fiction this conflict is epitomised through violence and through breakdown in communication and understanding, and failures in articulation. Confronted with the authoritative privileged voice of the whites, the Native American resorts to subversion or often falls silent. Tonguelessness, a dimension of alienation, comes up frequently in the works of Native American poets and novelists. The inability to speak is the prime symbol of alienation and powerlessness in the novels of Momaday, Welch and Silko.

It is the post-modern insistence upon alienation and the fragmented sense of self that catapulted Native American fiction to the centre stage in recent times. Like the European tradition out of which it primarily evolved, the American literary tradition by the 1960s had become characteristically post-modern in temperament. And while there is little enough agreement among critics about what that means, the role of existentialism in spreading the new temperament is generally acknowledged. Irving Howe in his famous 1959 analysis blamed the phenomenon on a "collapse of social consensus"—a general loss of faith in the institutions of western civilization triggered by the existential proposition that all such institutions were finally arbitrary and the shattering experience of the World War II(420—36). John Barth in his 1967
Atlantic article “The Literature of Exhaustion” called attention to the element of self-reflexivity—of “novels which imitate the form of the Novel, by an author who imitates the role of the Author” (33). What Barth pointed out has since become recognised as one of the most characteristic qualities of post-war fiction.

Other critics, while attempting to define the salient qualities of post-modern fiction emphasise thematic concepts like anti-realism, the anti-hero and the impenetrable surfaceness of the phenomenological world. All such attempts are based on the existential proposition that the human condition disallows any discovery of meaning or value because the human entity is fundamentally estranged from the world as “Other”. Alienation is the human condition and consequently all statements of meaningful relationship between the individual and anything/everything else are necessarily fictitious. As several critics have noted post-modern American fiction generally speaking is a “literature of illness” and the illness from which the protagonists of this fiction suffer is essentially the illness of alienation, —a sickness for which there is no cure, given the tenets of existential thinking. Novels of Bellow, Kessey, Updike, Barth and Pynchon amply illustrate the point.

The Native American novels treated in this study—Momaday’s HMD, Welch’s WB and Silko’s Ceremony— and also address this post-modern disease and in this respect fit neatly into the flow of the American literary mainstream. Each of these novels opens with its protagonist suffering from acute alienation, physically as well as spiritually sickened in the post-war era. The difference is that while the post-modern protagonist goes on either to propagate the disease or succumb to it the protagonists of these three novels acquire the blessing of a cure. Repeatedly in Native
American fiction we are shown the possibility of recovering a centered sense of personal identity and significance. Momaday, Silko and Welch present characters who truly find themselves between realities and wondering which world and which life might be theirs. But these writers move their protagonists through narratives towards a unification of the past and future with the present, towards a personal identity dependent upon a cultural identity. While post-modernism celebrates the fragmentation and chaos of experience, literature by Native American authors like Momaday, Welch and Silko tend to seek transcendence of such ephemerality and present the recovery of eternal and immutable elements represented by a spiritual tradition that places humanity within a cyclically ordered cosmos. They acknowledge alienation and cynicism as the starting point for fiction. But as post-modernists they do not accept the fragmentation and chaos of the present world as an immutable condition of things, but invoke deeper patterns of order and meaning often rooted in the themes and images of tribal oral traditions as a means of restoring wholeness.

William Bevis calls attention to the “homing plots” of these novels. (580-618). A considerable number of American classics like Moby Dick, Portrait Of A Lady, Huckleberry Fin, Sister Carrie and the Great Gatsby tell of leaving home to find one’s fate further and further away. The Bildungsroman, or the story of a young man’s personal growth became in America the story of a young man or woman leaving home for better opportunities in a newer land. The ‘home’ one leaves is not only a place; it is a past, a set of values and traditions and parents. The individual advances with little or no regard for family, society, past or place. Four centuries of colonial expansion and the American emphasis on individual freedom lie behind these plots. In marked contrast, in Native American Novels coming home to a place, a past where
one has been before, is the primary story. The three novels under discussion tell of a wanderer in the white world coming home. Bevis observes:

In Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1966), an Indian serviceman comes back to the reservation, drinks and kills, drifts in Los Angeles, and finally returns to the pueblo to give his grandfather a traditional burial and participates in the annual healing race, which his grandfather had once run. In Welch's *Winter in the Blood* (1974), a thirty-ish Indian who has quit his job in an Oregon hospital returns to the ranch in northern Montana, to a desperate round of bar hopping that leads, finally to discovering his grandfather, pulling out of his lethargy, and throwing the traditional tobacco pouch in his grandmother's grave. In Leslie Silko's *Ceremony* (1977), an Indian serviceman returns from Japan to his Southwest Laguna tribe, and slowly breaks from a pattern of drinking and madness to participating in a healing ceremony guided by an old medicine man, a ceremony that begins with a quest for cattle and ends with an amended story and rain for the desert land.(584)

In every case a traditional tribal elder who is a relative with whom the protagonist forms a new personal bond precipitates the resolution of the plot.

Each of the novels treated in this study has at one time or other been hailed as a master work of the "Native American Renaissance". The three novels discussed are those most frequently read by non-Native Americans, remarkable works that are "currents" in the "mainstream". All three of these writers have gone on to publish novels—Momaday's *The Ancient Child* (1989), Welch's *Death of Jim Loney* (1979), *Fool's Crow* (1988), *Indian Lawyer* (1990) *The Heart Song Of Changing*
Elk (2000) and Silko's Almanac Of The Dead (1991)—that are important works of an emerging Native American fictional tradition. Still, these three novels have come to be generally regarded as indisputably major Native American novels, and hence they have been chosen for this study.

Each of these three novels qualifies most obviously as a work of Native American literature because its author is a Native American. Beyond Native American authorship, all three works feature native protagonists, settings that include Indian reservations and a distinctly Native American texture deriving from the incorporation of and allusion to various tribal traditions. What distinguishes these novels from the mainstream is their common point of view and their structural and thematic affinity to traditional oral narratives.

Despite the critical assumptions of formalism and structuralism, there is a general presumption among non-Native American readers that these classic Native American novels are inaccessible to them as they are culturally alien to the “subtext” in these works. Consequently, much of the interpretative criticism available on these works deal with relatively unfamiliar, tribally-centered, mythic and oral traditional materials of these works with an aim to provide the non-Native American readers entry into these works. The present study does not presume “ethno-centric criteria” for apprehension and appreciation, it seeks the essential humanity beneath the cultural or tribal specifics in these novels, not ignoring “Indianness” but transcending it.

The concept of harmony is central to the traditional Native American thought. Native American view of life emphasises a holistic vision. It acknowledges the essential harmony of all things and does not make any distinction between living and
non-living things or between what is material and what is spiritual. It insists on the
human beings living in harmony with the physical and spiritual universe. Individual
finds his identity and fulfilment in integrating himself into the tribe. To the Native
Americans, wholeness and harmony is beauty, health and goodness. Disease is
deemed as a condition of division and separation from the harmony of the whole. The
study shows how Momaday’s HMD, Welch’s WB and Silko’s Ceremony offer a
possible transcendence of disease countering meaningfulness with significance,
dislocation with place, blindness with sight, inarticulateness with voice and
fragmentation with harmony.

The introductory chapter traces the evolution of Native American fiction and
proposes an analogical study of Momaday’s HMD, Welch’s WB and Silko’s
Ceremony and to explicate how these novels emphasise wholeness, balance and
harmony and show how this common point of view derives from a vision that
originates in the shared Native American experience of their authors.

Chapter II, III and IV make close studies of HMD, WB and Ceremony
respectively and show that despite their European form and stylistic devices the
central motif in each of these novels is the protagonist’s journey from chaos to
harmony.

The fifth and concluding chapter sums up the thematic and structural
similarities of the three novels and shows that these striking similarities spring from
certain basic perceptions in Native American world view. The chapter also touches
upon certain differences in these novels and attributes them primarily to the tribal differences among the authors. The chapter highlights that one of the chief features of these novels is that they represent a movement from chaos and alienation to wholeness and harmony.