Chapter - III

The Discursive Narration
(In Search of April Raintree)

Beatrice Culleton’s *In Search of April Raintree* is hailed as the representative text for First Nations literature of Canada. The novel has carried the themes First Nations identity question, searching, abuse and violence and racism to the complete extent. Culleton as a First Nations writer has exposed the systemic and personal racism imposed on individuals by the society and colonialism. In contrast to the mainstream writers, First Nation writers do not depict racism as unidirectional system of exploitation. Culleton belongs to Metis culture. Born in Manitoba in 1949 to Mary Clara and Louis Mosionier, Culleton was the youngest of the four children. During 1964 to 1980, Culleton’s elder sisters Vivian and Cathey committed suicides. In order to avoid the pain of suicide of her sisters and with the objective of recording the experiences of discrimination in her life for being a Native and half breed, Culleton wrote the novel *In Search of April Raintree*. Considered as a semi autobiographical novel of Beatrice Culleton, it has become a classic in First Nations Literature of Canada.

Culleton considers that act of narrating her life is a process of personal healing and an opportunity to confront the past and resolve the issues that haunt her. On her personal lines, Culleton makes the narrator of the novel, April Raintree to narrate her life as a process of personal healing. Culleton began writing the novel after: “The second suicide of a member of family, I have two
sisters and a brother, both of my sisters committed suicide at different times …

So it was after the second suicide that I really thought, ‘why are my family members alcoholics? And why do we have so many problems?’ (Culleton in Lutz. 97-98). The decision to write her life had justified the character of Natives in story telling. This has become the process for identifying the self and self realization:

> If I write it (book), may be I can figure out some of the answers or something. At last rethink the way I have been living. Kind of blind, with my head in the sand or something. And eventually it came out as a book. As I wrote it wan’t going to be about a search for identity. But what I was writing that’s what I realized about myself that I had to accept my identity… (Culleton in Lutz. 98).

The novel recounts the process of identification of April Raintree from Metis to white to Metis. April in her quest for identity disowns everything including her parents and sister Cheryl whom she loves and admires. April and Cheryl are identical twins: “Could have been almost identical twins, except for our skin-colouring” (106). She disavows the Native identity for fear of being a mother of ‘brown skinned babies” (117). It is only towards the end of the novel April realizes the privilege of raising her ‘brown skinned’ nephew. Helen Hoy in the essay “Nothing But the Truth: Discursive Transparency in Beatrice Culleton” critically examines the issue of identity. Analyzing the issue of April’s claim for identity, she observes: “April’s final claim to have accepted her identity has less to do with some essence she discovers in herself than with her mobilization of
the relations, historic and present, in which she finds herself. She begins to deploy positively connections she has hitherto resisted” (177). It is pertinent to observe, April and Cheryl deploy identification to resist and liberate themselves from the negative identities imposed on them. The execution of identity sometimes proves to be futile. April finds it difficult to relocate herself after the brutal rape. Cheryl kills herself realizing that she is worthless as she cannot mother her son. The suicide note signifies the failures: “We have all the instinct to survive. If that instinct is gone, then we die” (207). At the backdrop of the culture where suicide is found to be common, Culleton posits the question as to how the life of Cheryl be cut short despite the promising note.

The issue of identity which plays a crucial role in the lives First Nations is monopolized as an external and internal aspect. For Aboriginal people, the privilege of racial purity proves to be a great temptation. It is realized in the same velocity by non Aboriginals. April always carried the internal reluctance in admitting her Metis background. Several times she expressed her dissatisfaction: “It would be better to be a full blooded Indian or full blooded Caucasian. But being a half-breed, you feel only the shortcomings of both sides” (142). April dislikes either of the binary oppositions and is found to be oscillating in between these identities. Culleton exposes the freedom of identity given to majority in making choices of their lives. But it is the members of the Aboriginal groups who are subjected to embrace negative traits of life. In many instances, the negativity of life is thrust on them with varying degree of brutality.
The notion of identities based on race are discredited scientifically and are perceived as the creation of Imperialism. The absence authentic aboriginality becomes a great handicap in defining the identity of Aboriginal community in the mainstream societies. Gerald R. Alfred in *Heeding the Voices of Our Ancestors* (1995) discusses the problems of Kahnawake Mohawks that persist in controlling the definition of ‘Aboriginal’ or ‘Indian’. People who meet the definition are bestowed with benefits:

Communities like Kahnawake have continued to rely upon locally defined racialist criteria (for membership) because they provide the strongest and most clear cut protections against the formulations proposed by those who would reform or simply benefit from the reserve communities… Resistance to the concept of independently defined membership criteria can only come from a perspective which does not value the Mohawk’s inherent right of self determination (176).

The liberal principles that effected the changes to the Constitution Act of 1982, failed to ensure the complete control on the issue of identity to the Aboriginal people. The changed act has defined aboriginal peoples as “Indian, Inuit and Metis peoples of Canada” (Canadian Encyclopedia, 1:500). These acts, to some extent, have failed to elevate the status of aboriginal people who suffered from racial discrimination. Moreover, in including and excluding some of the Natives from the consideration of the Govt. they have created confusion. Further, the Indian Act of 1951, aimed to remove the gender discrimination caused problems
in reserved communities. The Indian Act removed the status from several categories of people, mostly from status women who married non status men. This redefinition of status has put some pressure on some communities and they were explicitly excluded from membership by state legislation. The problem of State legislative identity is obvious in Rudy Wiebe’s *Temptations of Big Bear* in which Governor Morris points out: “the law is the same for red and white: That may be. But itself, it is only white” (31).

The incomprehensibility of the issue of identity, foregrounded by the laws and histories is further complicated by the situation of mixed ancestry. The difficulty in identifying aboriginality is compounded by a lack of cultural background and the pervasive racism. In *In search of April Raintree*, when Cheryl introduces April to an Old woman, April reflects, “If I had such a grandmother when I was growing up, maybe I wouldn’t have been so mixed up” (159). This reflects the cultural dilemma that divides the people. But Aboriginals have always fought the ‘divide and conquer tactics of dominant culture. These issues are repeatedly discussed in several literary works. The issue of identity conflicts influenced by the epidemic of suicide, addiction and incarceration in Aboriginal communities is thoroughly examined in Thomas King’s *Green Grass, Running Water* and Jeannette Armstrong’s *Slash*. Identity for Natives cannot be understood at personal level. It is the community that holds responsibility for the survival. Armstrong in Slash makes the elder to address the young people: “The next generations, and how we survive as Indians depends on that. It’s something that can’t be changed by any legislations or
politicians” (Armstrong 201). But it is a different problem for the First Nations who disown aboriginality. Drew Hayden Taylor’s _Funny, You Don’t look like_ sums up the dilemma. A status Anishnabe remarks, “for a while I debated having my Status card tattooed on my forehead” (10). This observation is an answer to the identity questioned by Native and Non Native. Richard Wagamese’s _Keeper’n Me_ documents the problems involved in upholding pure Native identity. Lee Maracle’s _Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel_ and Marilyn Dumont’s _A Really Good Brown Girl_ have appropriately documented the problems involved in Native & Non native identity.

In the face of the total rejection by the community and the society, the strong will for upholding unquestioned Native identity is the central concern of _In Search of April Raintree_. Culleton rejects the whiteness or Nativeness as simple constructs. April considers herself caught in between a racist, materlilist white, or “drunken Indian…on Main Street” (143). At one point April feels that she is more inclined to white culture and presumes that is what a half-breed is expected to do. One of the central concerns of the novel deals with Cheryl’s experience in tolerating the questions of a guest at a cocktail party held by April’s mother-in-law. The participation in the party brings the revelation to Cheryl that her father is an alcoholic and her mother has committed suicide. She feels proud to assert her identity and refuses to accept the limitations to her identity. She firmly demonstrates that identity is a tool to negotiate the changing social relationships. She rejects the role of identity as a trap or a fortress.
April projects a complete contradictory perspective of life resolved by the determination of representing white culture. She observes, “When I got free from being a foster child, then I would live just like a real white person” (47). April hinges on epidermalisation of identity and her appearance allows her to choose a white identity. She fears external rejection if she reveals Native identity. On discovering the squalid surroundings in which her father had lived, she decides to part her ways with Native culture: “that part of my life was now finished for good. I had a plan to follow… (and) I would stick with it, whether Cheryl agreed with it or not. It was my only way to survive” (91). Though she never explicitly talk about the threat of identifying, her negative outbursts reveal the anger against her parents. The resolution to identify herself with white culture devastates her own family relationships. She subscribes to the ideology of escapism and finds the ways to ignore Cheryl and her friends. This perspective of life denies her the required insight to understand the life and moreover, she lives with the feeling that she is protecting Cheryl and the family from public rejection. But, yet times she realizes that she is guilty of prejudice against her own sister. She spends more time with Cheryl and experiences the racist slights. The experiences of discrimination strengthen her decision to live as representative of white culture. She conceals her identity in the world of interior decoration, books on etiquette and passionately defends her fascination towards white culture: “Oh, well, Cheryl once had a fantasy which comforted her, and now I had mine” (98). When Cheryl draws strength in the reunion of her
parents living like olden-day Indians, April realizes that she needs to survive on the strength of strong Native parents.

The search for identity leads to the recognition of the issue of survival ‘something to live for’. April realizes the fallacy in leading a life of hypocrisy and fears the danger of lying. She is convinced that Cheryl’s decision to idealise Native culture eventually will survive. She understands that idealization and identification can be deployed in destructive and productive, deceptive and protective ways. When they run away from a bad foster home, the social worker Mrs. Semple makes them understand the native girl syndrome: “It starts out with the fighting, the running away, the lies. Next come the accusations that everyone in the world is against you. These are the sullen uncooperative silences, the feeling sorry for yourselves” (62). It is on this trajectory laid out, April decides to be white, Cheryl decides to be a Native social worker. These choices of evasiveness and resistance protects them as shields identifying them as the other.

It is only in the darkest aspects of the novel, the atrocity of rape perpetrated on April, April discovers the forced identity of “squaw”: “I began wondering for the hundredth time why they had kept on calling me squaw. Was it obvious?... Except for long black hair, I really didn’t think I could be mistaken as a Native person. Mistaken? There’s that shame again. Okay, identified” (146). Here, Culleton presents this as the mistake of the readers. ‘Caught up in the Native girl’s syndrome’, they have mistaken her for Cheryl. The mistaken identity for the readers, is a strong narrative element which brings in the ultimate
realization. In the court, April thinks that she is being mistaken as a prostitute: “I was indignant that I could be mistaken as a prostitute” (165). April finds out that Cheryl has been working as a prostitute: “Cheryl stood up then and looked right at me. I saw her face in that split second before I looked away from her” (167). As soon as April discovers that men who raped her thought she was Cheryl, she stops having the baths. From April’s perspective, ‘she’ was not raped-Cheryl was, and implicitly, deserved it. So, April feels that she no longer accepts the imposition of Nativeness on her. She finds some excuse to place the blame on Cheryl and Nativeness. Her refusal makes Cheryl to call her: “a bigot against (her) own people” (175). April has always felt that she was a ‘coward’ and Cheryl the ‘fearless’ one who “never worried about what other people thought about her” (111). The theme of the novel conveys lucidly that April’s weakness protects her life and Cheryl’s courage falters when her fantasy about her parents fails.

The theme of the novel poses the question about Cheryl’s death. Cheryl confronts racism and stands for Metis identity. She remains loyal to April and her parents. She refuses to turn her back on her family. She goes to University, becomes politically active and develops right riposte for the racist putdown. She confides to April, it was in part to get money for her father’s medication she turned to prostitution. However, April betrays her culture and parents. Cheryl’s drunken outburst resists the constructed racism. Displaced by racism and hit by unhealthy conditions, supporting the children’s welfare, bearing the parents pain and suffering certainly accounts for the resilience of Cheryl and April. All these
thematic circumstances makes the reader to see that this is not the matter of choice but it strongly conveys the existing reality in which Natives are caught in.

The suicide of Cheryl is a logical reaction to April’s betrayal to Native identity. Cheryl begins to take interest in Native issues when April’s reconciles with Native revelation: “the old fire had been rekindled” (157). On seeing the detachment of April, Cheryl commits suicide. April has told her sister that she feels shame when she sees “drunken Indians on Main Street” (152). It is obvious that Cheryl represents April’s Nativeness. To own her publicly as a sister is to declare Native ancestry, and yet April says: “I loved her. I could never cut myself off from her completely” (47). When Cheryl kills herself, it is too late to do what April has thought of doing for some time: “I would tell her everything was okay” (168). When April goes into the Cheryl’s room after the funeral. She finds an empty bottle whiskey and smashes it, screaming: “I hate you for what you have done to my parents! I hate you for what you’ve done to my people” (194). She reads Cheryl’s journals and discovers that Cheryl has a son. Early that morning, she finds a suicide note in the mailbox in which Cheryl essentially hands the baby over to her, and when she sees the baby later that day, her identification with Metis culture becomes complete: “I remembered that during the night I had used the word ‘MY PEOPLE, OUR PEOPLE’ (207).

In presenting April and Cheryl’s characters, the novel rejects romance solutions. April who has been betraying her parents and culture, finally gets the baby to look after. April becomes the victim of unfair representation, as it is perceived that children of the colour are presented as the other. Through the
consistent negation, April succeeds in avoiding racist slights and comments. The adoptive children finally discover that their parents are just alcoholic and dysfunctional as the racists. April marries a white man who proves unfaithful, having married April “only to get back at his mother” (116). The conclusion of the novel supports the notion that Cheryl was too ‘Native-identified’ to successfully bring up the child. April takes the baby and it reminds the reenactment of the social workers taking April and Cheryl from their parents. Margery Fee in the essay: “Deploying Identity in the Face of Racism” is of the view that April’s action of taking the child is only to ensure the place for her in Metis culture with the aim of bringing respect to Metis culture.

_In Search of April Raintree_ has brought in the issue of ‘searching’ to the centre of Native literatures. Culleton unfurls the Metis with events, places and people. Kelley Griffith in _Writing Essays About Literature: A guide and Style Sheet_ says that Native literatures introduce different places, events & people that Non natives do not know. This breaks the pedagogy of literature and paves the way for the critical voices to emerge. Jeannette Armstrong in _Looking at the Words of Our People: First Nations Analysis of Literature_ explains: “the questioning which shapes the critical pedagogical voice (7). She is of the view that the Native voices coming in literature are specific voices. Elucidating this situation, Kateri Damm observes: “When we express ourselves…we must do so from an informed position so that we do not contribute to the confusion and oppression, but instead bring into sharper focus who we are‖ (24). The formation of cultural identity is always an incomprehensible issue for the
Natives as their identities were constructed by the mainstream cultures when they were in the status of inability to define. The Native writers who have taken up responsibility of reconstructing and redefining cultural identities within their literary productions in English had to execute two fold responsibility of examining the past and cultural affirmation toward a new future.

Publishers were eager to capitalize on the novelty of the books written by Aboriginal people. Penny Petrone’s *Native Literature in Canada: From the Oral Tradition to the Present* heralded a phenomenal explosions of creative writing by Indians. Greg Young-Ing in *Aboriginal People’s Estrangement: Marginalisation in the Publishing Industry*” said that after 1970s & 1980s the publishing of Native authored books have tremendously decreased. He considered Culleton’s text as one of the unique Aboriginal voice in contemporary literature. Culleton strikes a different note away from the Metis nationalist writers like Howard Adams, Maria Campbell and Emma LaRocque. She opens up a space for critical discourse about the formation of identity and the transmission of culture. The semi autobiographical attempt portrays a young girl of mixed ancestry struggling with identity confusion and cultural oppression, trying to understand who she is. April Raintree as the narrator relies on the discourse given to her by the white foster homes. Her confinement in this discourse gives her negative stereotypes about the life. On the other hand Cheryl her sister feeds on romantic stereotypes. Caught in between the two worlds of Cheryl and April Raintree, the narrative voice is compromised by seductive terms and the slippery colonial English. Unlike the narrator in the novel,
Culleton struggles to construct the Native identity. Culleton admits this in her interview with Hartmut Lutz in *Contemporary Challenges: Conversations with Canadian Native authors*. She candidly admits the possibilities for cultural inheritance interrupted by her displacement in ‘white foster homes’. Bringing a culture specific voice, Culleton explains: “Native people growing up in urban Canada today…there is lot of pressure on you to assimilate and forget totally what you are as a person, what your heritage is” (97).

The theme of the novel reveals that there are numerous factors that contribute to the identity formation and Metis cultural transmission. One of the mitigating factors that interferes with cultural transmission and identity formation is the diseased condition of father and mother. Henry Raintree as the father represents the creator or originating source of culture. He is forced to relocate from the small northern community of Norway house to the large Urban city of Winnipeg. Hit by Tuber Colosis, he loses self sustaining power, becomes alcholic and becomes increasingly dependent on welfare. April’s mother represents the nurturer of the culture. Her role as mother becomes diseased when she is hospitalized. She is pronounced ill after a baby’s birth. The colonial authorities represented as Manitoba’s Children’s Aid Society take the newly born baby to the hospital and move April and Cheryl to a nice clean place. It is the displacement of the Raintree sisters from the diseased family origin that make them culturally malnourished by being displaced into a series of white foster homes. April is culturally displaced with the Dion family in St. Albert ‘a small French Catholic Town’ (24) and Cheryl is culturally misplaced
with the MacAdams. Cheryl is encouraged with the belief that she is Metis because “they are part Indian and part White” (43). April is dislocated from her culture of Origin. Cheryl is misplaced with a Metis family whose intentions are shaped by the boxed colonial construction of Native identity. Cheryl constructs an identity that connotes the romantic notions of Indians and Metis. April closes herself to the possibilities of transmission of heritage. When Cheryl presents a book about Louis Riel, April refuses to accept. Thought not verbalized, her thoughts are revealed in the narrative: “I knew all about Riel. He was a rebel who had been hanged for treason. Worse, he had been a crazy halfbreed…anything to do with Indians, I despised. And here, I was supposed to be part Indian” (42-42). The narrative fails to reveal the reason for April’s aversion towards ‘halfbreeds’ and ‘Indians’. But it reveals how she experiences cultural shame fostered and nourished by her experiences beyond the domestic sphere. Her foster mother Mrs. DeRosier contemptuously names her ‘halfbreed’. The contemptuous treatment poisons April and malnourishes her idea of heritage. Mrs. DeRosier and her children shamefully dehumanize April, conveying the meaning that ‘halfbreed’ connotes a product of animal husbandry. In contrast, Cheryl receives cultural nourishment and intellectual stimulation from Mr. MacAdams who is a Metis and teacher. Cheryl’s identity is constructed by “a lot of books on Indian tribes and how they used to live long time ago” (43). Her journey from childhood to adulthood is marked by the Native heritage. Despite carrying Native Romantic stereotypes, Cheryl openly expresses cultural pride. She proudly proclaims the Native pride in series of letters and copies of
speeches she sends to April. They consciously symbolize her efforts to reconstruct the Native heritage. However, the romantic imagination of ‘Indian’ and ‘Metis’ cannot sustain the family documentation provided by April. So Cheryl’s voice is silenced, when reality is silenced by the romantic perceptions about the Natives. The silence that Cheryl experiences, initiates her curiosity for recuperating information to construct Native cultural heritage. April tries to dissolves her Native Metis heritage and binges on the stereotypes from White mainstream society. Throughout her life, April lives in white ‘fairytale’ ideal and lives in Cinderella syndrome. Completely enamoured by mainstream fantasy idealism, she envisions that her life will be liberated by a handsome prince. This fantasy is realized in the form of Bob Radcliff. Completely rooted in white fairy tale idealism, April’s romanticised life with Bob begins to crumble when she realizes that the mainstream people live for money or for power. Her romantic perception of life collapses when she realizes that her life is surrounded by hypocrisy and superficiality. She moves from passive state to resistance when she overhears the conversation between her mother in law, Mother Radcliff and her friend, Heather. Reality descends and becomes ‘fighting mad’ on learning that her husband is having an affair with her friend (114). The revelation of Bob’s mother that she “would simply dread being grandmother to a bunch of little half breeds” (116) inflames her situation. The adverse comments her mother Radcliff confront her own culture shame. She inevitably liberates her voice: “Bob’s mother would rather have a person like you, a hypocrite, an adultress, as her daughter-in-law, rather than risk a few grandchildren who
would have Indian blood in them” (116). When her romantic stereotypical perceptions collapse, April is set in a motion of reformation of identity and reconsideration of culture. This is symbolized by April’s move from the closely guarded world of wealth into shared accommodations with artistic types (119), who represent her journey into a world of freedom.

April, during the time of transition, makes efforts to reconnect with her sister Cheryl. However, Cheryl discovers that the colonial language disallows her from experiencing the reality of ‘Indian’ & ‘Metis’ and becomes uncommunicative. Consequently, April, disconnects herself from the possibilities of identity formation and cultural transmission. April moves way from romantic perception fostered by the white world to sustain the relationship with her ‘Metis’ sister. Identifying Cheryl’s alcoholism, April realizes that her sister is no longer an exceptional Metis. But she tries to rescue Cheryl from the ‘Native girl syndrome’ (62). Three white men rape April believing her a prostitute and ‘fucking squaw’ (128). On knowing that the intended victim was Cheryl, ‘champion of Native causes. A whore?’ (166). April becomes critically diseased and cleanses herself with ritualistic baths. Cheryl kills herself as the final solution and terminates the possibilities for own cultural transmission. The last option of the Cheryl, makes April to reexamine the past. Reading the journals contained by Cheryl, April revisits the past life of Cheryl. April identifies that Cheryl had liberated herself from the romanticised by conception of life nurtured by her imagination. From the information of the journals, April learns that their mother was killed herself when their baby died in infancy. She
understands that the dreams of Cheryl to rebuild the spirit of once proud nation are destroyed. It is through the writing she feels the presence of Cheryl’s voice: “I study the pitiful creature in front of me. My father! A gutter creature! The imagination of my childhood has played a horrible rotten trick on me… I should have listened to April”(198). From these experiences, April realizes the possibilities for new life of cultural transmission. She explains that “I had used the words “My People, Our People”. April observes that it was tragic, only to make me accept my identity, Cheryl had to end her life.

It is obvious, that the readers of Culleton’s text may not come away from the understanding of Metis culture or history. There is the possibility of misconstruing the Metis culture. April’s father, the creator of the source of culture is presented as mixed blood and her mother the nurturer of culture, is referred as ‘part Irish and part Ojibway’ (11). Assuming the readers ability to develop the understanding of the malnourished and oppressed condition of the Raintree sisters, the novel becomes a significant critical discourse in providing a contemporary understanding of identity formation and cultural transmission.

Janice Acoose in the essay ‘The Problem of ‘Searching’ for April Raintree’ is of the view that the novel explores critically the stereotypical constructs and imposed definitions and argues for reconstruction of the archaic images of wearisome ‘Nativeness’. This perspective is substantiated by Agnes Grant in the essay ‘Abuse and Violence: April Raintree’s Human Rights (If she had any)’. Agnes observes that the theme of the novel dealt with cultural identity
and renewal and Culleton touched a responsive chord in readers from all cultures.

The novel appeals to the readers beyond Aboriginal circles. The theme has demonstrated that Culleton has moved away from her own culture to present the universal themes, insights and values. Though the theme of the novel deals with the cultural identity of the Natives, Culleton plays a responsive chord in readers from all the cultures. Abuse of women and children is not confined to Aboriginal cultures, though the theme is being glorified in literature and media. When Culleton wrote the novel, white middle class feminist movement was prevalent. The realistic rendering of the problems of women, specially the rape scene, made women to understand that misogyny is compounded by racism. With profoundity, Culleton made everyone to understand what it is to be an Aboriginal woman in Canada.

The theme of *April Raintree* was influenced by the events in Culleton’s life. The authentic narration is misconstrued as an autobiography. Culleton was a foster child. She was the victim of rape and her sister committed suicide. In its unusual narration, the novel documents the abuse of April as an adult. It goes back into her childhood and shows how her rights were violated from time to time right from her childhood. The rights of the children are examined the way the feminists have exposed the abusive of women. When April and Cheryl were removed by the social workers the screaming of April has emotionally moved the readers: “Mommy, please don’t make us go. Please Mummy, We want to stay with you. Please don’t make us go. Oh, Mom, don’t” (18). This reflects the
deplorable situation of Native children in which they live, despite the proclamation of Canada as one of the best countries in the world. Culleton documented the prevailing poor condition of Native children in a heart wrenching way. April would barricade the bedroom door with a toybox to protect Cheryl and herself from fighting and drinking adults. On bad days, they would spend the days in park away from irresponsible adults. Socially ignored by the other children, they played by themselves in a corner of the park. There were happy family times, when the parents were not drinking. April used to protect her mother from soberness: “To prolong that mood in her I would help her with everything, chattering away in desperation, lest my own silences would push her back into her, normal remoteness” (12). Despite her efforts, April completely fails to influence her parents. To justify this status of life, Culleton provides a bare description of the beahaviour of the drunken parents, friends and relatives. April tells how she found her naked mother in bed with a stranger and recounts how she watched the drunken man dirtying the house. The most puzzling things was the fight between her parents. Though, it was amusing, April used to watch with indignation. Helping her mother to kick the other woman out, April could not fathom and comprehend the existing reality: “There were lot of grown up things… My mother should have fought with her life to keep us with her. Instead, she handed us over” (18).

When April & Cheryl were taken to an orphanage, they were the victims of indignity. They were thoroughly scrubbed, checked for lice and put to shame for cutting hair. They withstood the victimization and stood together. They
found time to cuddle together in one bed. April could see her father outside the
orphanage and could find consolation that her parents still cared for her. But
they were separated as foster homes were found for the girls. The separation has
increased the anguish of April: “I was so sad, so lonely, so confused. Why was
all this happening?” (24). But she had developed many survival skills of
watching, listening and adapting to the requirements. She was comfortable in the
first home and Mrs. Dion was like her mother. She developed a sense of well
being with her foster parents. The foster parents gave her love and support and
instilled in her a deep sense of religion. But unfortunately, April was transferred
to a different foster home, when Mrs. Dion became terminally ill. The sudden
transfer to a different foster home, deprived April even from mourning the death
of Mrs. Dion. April’s attitude towards life changed dramatically, when entered
DeRosier home. Till this point in her life, she trusted the significant adults in her
life. She understood that it were the circumstances that brought adults into her
life causing pain. Mrs. DeRosier was racist, manipulative, exploitive and
hypocritical. April complied with her every demand. She failed to understand
that her conscience was long buried under a faced of community. April couldn’t
understand that DeRosier was a hapless participant in a power struggle. Because
the struggle was between a grown up woman with the power and a mere child.
There was no hope of equity, as the woman was white and April was Metis. The
unfair and abusive treatment meted out to April by DeRosier pushed April to the
brink of despair. This has tested April’s faith severely, especially when they
were in church. Unable to bear the ill-treatment April told God: “Oh, God, why
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did you let me born? Why?, Why was I ever born? Why do you let these bad things happen to Cheryl and me? You’re supposed to be loving, protective and just. But You’re full of crap, God! You’re just full of crap and I hate You. You hear me? I hate you!” (45). Racism was at the root of April’s abuse and exploitation. She has faced the racist comments openly in the household of DeRosier. The children of DeRosier have demonstrated in many ways that they were internalizing the message of racial superiority for which their mother stood. But their father, who remains to be a shadowy figure, condoned the racism of his wife and children.

The treatment that April has received in the society is purely based on racial stereotypes. It never sought to look for the causes for the girl’s unhappiness. Her ‘Native girl syndrom’ was totally baffling to the young girls. The social workers lectured on knowing, that the girls ran away on knowing that they were to be separated again. ‘Native girl syndrome’ was characterized by fighting, running away, feeling persecuted, being stubborn, uncooperative, indulging in self pity, early pregnancy, inability to hold jobs, reliance on alcohol and drugs, shoplifting, prostitution, jails, abusive partners and welfare. Bemused by the verbal onslaught, April has assured Cheryl: “We are not going to become what they expect of us” (64). Maggie, one of the teachers of April, attempts to discredit April on the basis of racial stereotypes.

The novel exposes the facets of covet racism and its inherent systematic treatment of foster children. Mrs. DeRosier holds the power to punish the girls for running away by cutting off their hair. April considers her hair as ‘Crowning
glory’. DeRosier chose the form of punishing the girls by cutting the hair as she knows that it would cut to the heart of April’s power of resistance. Tomson Highway in *Kiss of the Furqueen* depicts how the character Champion, fails to put the bravefront: “His hair now was gone completely; champion had no more strength left…” (54). It is pertinent to observe that hair was a preoccupation for the European colonizers. Colonial history gives us umpteen examples of dominant groups performing rituals to shear the hair of the subordinates or slaves. Cutting of the hair is considered to be the dominant part of the rituals of cross-cultural domination that were observed across the world. Though, Mrs. DeRosier and April have not understood the symbolism of this act, it has demonstrated the power of adults over the children. It is particularly seen as the act of racial discrimination perpetrated by the colonizers on the Natives. On the lines of Champion in *The Kiss of Fur Queen*, many Natives from the northern areas used to place their children in foster homes. These homes used to receive generous allowances to look after their young boarders. They were confined to the basement bedrooms, joining the host families only at mealtime. Agnes Grant in the essay ‘Abuse and Violence: April Raintree’s Human Rights (if she had any)’ is of the view that these homes concealed the information to the foster parents and disallowed the children in receiving the immediate attention.

April’s marriage to Bob Radcliff has only reinforced her self concept. She was constantly overshadowed by her domineering mother-in-law. April was dumbstruck on knowing the opinion of mother Radcliff: “I would simply dread being a grand mother to a bunch of little halfbreeds!” (116). The marriage was a
failure and it ended with generous monetary settlement. April’s acceptance to end the marriage becomes a survival instinct that helps her find relocation to Winnipeg. Her freedom from marriage have not protected her from violence sponsored by racism. The atrocity of rape perpetrated on her speaks for April’s horror and disgust that speaks indignity and pain she suffers. Though the novel depicts the consequences of rape and the circumstances in which the victims of rape are caught in, the atrocity April experiences remain understated. Culleton provides an intense account of the aftermath of rape providing a contrastive situation of the victims of rape. April’s self had been lost, though physically more traumatic. She copes with as there is none in her life. The reactions of the victims of rape are pertinent observation on Canada’s justice system. But there are many victims who are unable to formulate impact statements. These women are trained from early childhood to accept and survive the victimized positions. These women wait like April until they are safely locked to let their tears flow.

The novel centres on the reclamation of the self. April’s first move towards reclaiming of the self is reporting the rape. She chooses to report the rape as one of the means of reconstructing her identity. Undergoing the traumatic experience, she musters the courage to publicly charge the rapist. She had patiently born the insensitive attitude of medical staff who had examined her. She puts up brave front when required to narrate the lurid details of her victimization. During her formative years, she becomes accustomed to the critical scrutiny by the people. She enriches her skills and allows her to maintain inner dignity and integrity, experiencing the humiliating conditions. The barrage
of dehumanizing was exacerbated by her Native identity. Culleton dramatically portrays the vulnerability of Aboriginals and distorts the general perception that violence is the integral part of Native culture. Analysing this perspective, George Manuel, the first president of National Indian Brotherhood observes: “The symbols that point to discrimination and low esteem become absorbed into the daily custom and life style of the wretched of the earth, until we come to believe what is said about us” (Manuel & Posluns. 102). Vicki English Currie, the black foot Scholar and educator in the essay “The Need for Re-Valuation in Native Education” supporting the Manual’s statement points out: “Many Indian people who are experiencing inner conflict are under the impression that we are born with this anguish and that it is part of an Indian life style. We seem to accept this self-concept, with all its negativity” (Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada. 1990). April subscribes to this belief about Aboriginal people. The search for identity continues on the realization of April that Aboriginals are not worse than any other culture group. On this belief, April convinces the social workers to remove her from DeRosier home. She sues for divorce and gets a comfortable settlement. She successfully prosecutes the rapist. In contrast, Cheryl’s survival was her own. It is Cheryl’s suicide that shocks April and jolts her attitude towards facing reality. Culleton gives a happy ending to the search. April decides to raise Henry Lee with the help of Cheryl’s friend Nancy. Culleton assures love, peace and serenity in April life proclaiming the essence of Aboriginal culture.
The theme of the novel has diverted the attention of the entire nation to genuinely understand the crucial issues of Canadian society. It helped the government to procure the exact details of the Native population. The final report on Canadian panel on ‘Violence against Women (Aboriginal Panel) provided the exact information:

There are approximately 5,11,791 Native people with status rights, as defined by the Indian Act, of whom RS. 30,000 live on reserves. The 1991 census indicates that approximately 135,265 are approximately Metis living in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta…1991 Statistics found that almost aboriginal population of Canada is under the age of 35. (149)

Those who were not registered as ‘status’ or ‘treaty’ were not considered to be natives. In “Circles of Healing: Illness, Healing and Health among Aboriginal people of Canada” David Long and Terryfox observed that if Metis and Non status people are included, the number of Natives will two million. Doctors Waldram, Herring and Young said that the database from the hospitals and health insurance plans do not provide ethnic identification. The novel has also provided good understanding of the issue of foster care and renewal in Aboriginal communities. Understanding the history of Raintree family leads to understanding of foster care and renewal in Aboriginal communities. Suzanne Fournier and Ernie Crey’s analysis: “by the late 1940s four or five generations of Native people had returned from residential schools as poorly educated, angry, abused strangers who had no experience in parenting” (82). The novel
also provides the analysis of the destructive effects of alcoholism and its abuse in the lives of Natives. The National Native Association of Treatment Directors estimates that 80 percent of Aboriginal people in Canada are affected by alcoholism. Waldram, Herring and Young have argued that the negative effects of poverty, racism and marginalization stemmed from the influence of alcohol and it has become cultural and biological problem. The issue of violence against women and family is also analysed by the Native associations and sociologists. Long and Fox report that "a study in British Columbia indicated that 86 percent of Native respondents had experienced family violence’ (249). Paul whitehead and Michael Hayes discussed that alcoholism and social problems are found in 31 percent of rape victims. In the general population of Canada, forty percent of woman reported at least one experience of rape (Women’s Safety project). This has elicited information that one rape in ten in the general population is reported. Members of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal people published a separate volume titled: “Choosing Life: Special Report on suicide among Aboriginal people” and acknowledged the profound significance of suicide among Aboriginal people. Arguing the epidemiological data on Aboriginal suicides and homicides, Waldiram, Herring and Young proved that one in every ten Native deaths is a suicide and it is five times higher than the general population’s suicide rate. The critical response on In Search of April Raintree has further invited the response of the senior scholars to recommend the literary power. The reflections of the people brought out brutal information on the issues of violence, poverty, illness, despair and the effect of the history of
cultural genocide. Jeanne Perreault in “In Search of Cheryl Raintree and Her Mother” observed that the novels showed the struggles and the strength of Metis women. The assertion of the women characters refers to the activism of Native Women in their own communities and on behalf of their own people.

Most of the First Nations writers of Canada claim that Beatrice Culleton’s *In Search of April Raintree* has profoundly influenced the literary developments than any other work. It was only Maria Campbell’s *Half Breed* (1973) that stood out as an exception in proving that Native literature could be used as a tool for political change by exposing the devastating consequences of racism on the lives of Natives. Culleton possesses narrative authority as an evidence to the events that she recounts. Following the narrative pattern of Campbell, Culleton employs a different narrative strategy to expose the great ‘social truth’. The theme of *April Raintree* substantiated the fact that Native writers can create narratives that claim to reveal the social truths. Culleton’s use of imaginative fiction, makes *April Raintree* as a very significant embryonic canon of Native Canadian literature. On the lines of Campbell, Culleton writes about Metis people who belong to the generation of Campbell. The Raintree sisters are urban Metis, who are alienated from their community. April accepts the racist beliefs, with no Cheechum (grand mother) to guide her. April acquires racist mentality from her foster family and from her social worker, Mrs. Semple. She becomes a victim to the ‘Native girl syndrome’ (62) and is condemned by the life of crime, prostitution and abuse. Though Mrs. Semple is responsible for April’s wellbeing, she makes April to despise her identity. This makes the
readers to understand that racism is an integral part of Canadian culture. Though it is the story of Campbell’s community, large number of readers understand negatively the confessions of April’s prostitution and drug addiction. Similarly, many readers were betrayed by Cheryl’s transformation from proud ‘Metis’ into a gutter creature. Cheryl is the sympathetic character as she proclaims her Metis heritage in the face of extreme adversity. But her identity is built on fragile foundation as she acquires it from books. Until she reaches adulthood, she lives with little real contacts. She dreams and imagines her father to be “a tall, straight, handsome man (who) in the olden days would have been a warrior” (Culleton. 198). When reality dawns on her, she succumbs to ‘native girl syndrome’. This makes the Native readers angry who are proud of her Metis identity. Towards the end, the novel fails to offer redemption from the trauma of racism and also reconciliation between Metis and white. The novel ends with the death of Cheryl in 1972, prompting April to reassess her life. After leading the life of pragmatism, April transforms herself into idealistic, shiny eyed young woman. April invests the hope of future in Cheryl’s little boy and also in her people. April’s acknowledgment comes from Cheryl’s school girl speeches and essays.

*In Search of April Raintree* has opened the doors for the later Native writers to use fiction as a means of imagination to ensure better life to the Natives. Richard Wagamese’s *Keeper ‘n Me* (1994) carried the theme of cultural reclamation left by Culleton. *Keepr ‘n Me* carries the thematic reflection *In Search of April Raintree*. The protagonist Garnet Raven is replaced
from his family and put in white foster homes. Growing up as an aboriginal person, he acquires the negative stereotypes from his foster families. Towards the end of the novel, April intuits that she must return to her people for better future. On the same line, Garnet Raven relearns and reclaims his identity as an Anishanabe erasing the scars of racism and cultural alienation. Jo-Ann Thom in the essay “The Effect of Readers’ Responses on the Development of Aboriginal literature in Canada: A Study of Maria Campbell’s Halfbreed, Beatrice Culleton’s In Search of April Raintree, and Richard Wagamese’s Keepr’n Me” observes the difference in thematic concerns:

*Keeper ‘n Me* differs from In Search of April Raintree in that Wagamese spends only 20 of its 214 pages dealing with the trauma of Garnet experiences as a result of his forced integration into mainstream society…it concentrates on Garnet’s personal healing that occurs while he learns to be Anishanabe, not ‘a brown white Guy ‘(12) (301).

Wagamese differs from Culleton in using humour to persuade readers to listen to Garnet’s life. Garnet tries to hide his identity like April. Before the reunion with the family, Garnet experiments with a number of different identities to avoid being who he really is. Garnet decides to be black, after making friendship with Lonnie Flowers, a black man. The humour that permeates *Keepr’n Me* serves multiple functions. It becomes subversive, like Thomas King. Culleton instead of cajoling the readers like Wagamese, assaults them with harsh realities.
In the light of other perspectives, Culleton’s *In Search of April Raintree* is considered to be moving, well crafted, politically powerful novel. April has become the epitome for travesty and an echo for search. However, well intentioned, not everyone will agree that April is a mistake. Apparently, Culleton welcomed the possibility of rewriting the novel fearing the younger generations would read it. Fearing the depiction of rape scene, Culleton has undercut in the second version *April Raintree* (1984). Margaret Clarke has lamented the way in which Culleton or the editor has undercut the first version of the novel. Helen Hoy has argued that the present version is more than a bowdlerised, diminished version of the original. Some of the critics have justified the changes and the losses in translation. Hartmut Lutz has suggested that a slightly school edition is substantial and significant. The objective of the changes is to make *April* appropriate for young readers. Culleton suggested that April has been adapted to be suitable for high school study. Based on the assumptions, the principles of revision are obviously progressive and conservative. Peter Cumming in the essay “The Only Dirty Book’: The Rape of April Raintree” has examined the consequences of depletion and sanitization of language of the novel.

The novel is primarily about two sisters losing track of one another in the mess of systemic racism, foster care, alcoholism, sexual assault and recapitulation in the harrowing legal system. Helen Hoy in the ground breaking essay, astutely points out the dangers of criticism that oversimplifies its ‘discursive transparency’. Though complicated, the novel through the simplicity of literal story, conveys the story of two sisters. April and Cheryl are subjected
to the vagaries of children’s aid and are always with each other. April protects Cheryl and Cheryl seeks advice from April on important occasions. Staying in separate foster homes, they sustain the relationship through letters. All this conveys to the readers that the sisters can make good together: “When we’re old enough, we’ll be free. We’ll live together. We’re going to make it. Do you understand me? We are going to make it. We are not going to become what they expect of us”(64). Metaphorically, though sisterhood is a well known trope for Feminism, it works in less literal ways in the theme of the novel. The concept of ‘sisterhood’ has inspired women’s liberation movement of Sixties and Seventies. In 1980s & 90s the concept of ‘sisterhood’ began to fracture and women’s movement across the world was influenced by the issues race, class, culture, nation and sexualities. This has led to the rethinking of conceptual assumptions.

But *In Search of April Raintree* promoted the concept of Native sisterhood. The novel has demonstrated that even within the ‘Native Sisterhood’ there are irreducible differences which are very crucial to be understood. The conceptualization of sisterhood in the novel makes the readers to understand that April and Cheryl are not like. The novel articulates the differences from one another as an issue under debate. The dissimilarities are not presented in the initial stages of the novel. April and Cheryl obviously have distinct personalities and they realised the differences as the grow up. The content establishes the way in which personal characteristics can be charged politically. It is Cheryl who is outspoken than April in the early parts of the novel. As the narration advances, Cheryl’s directness gets reconfigured as the pride of Metis just as
April’s shyness turns into shame and political quiescence. The constitution of irreducible differences are easily established in April’s shame about being Metis and Cheryl’s respect for it. Race become a constitutive element of their gendered identity and their different identifications are particularly charged because they are articulated in a systematic racist society. Cheryl embraces her Metis identity wholeheartedly conducting research into traditional Indian practices. April believes that being Metis is being poor and dirty. Belittling of Metis identity is followed by the problem of Cheryl. This remains to be the unsolved rift till the end of the novel. It is this rift that keeps April coded as the ‘white sister’, and Cheryl as the ‘brown’ one. The characterization that is made keeps these two characters as politically incompatible. April tries to find herself in the policy of assimilation and never fears the loss of Native identity. Cheryl idolizes Native identity. She takes pride in the glory of Native past and firmly believes the influence of the past over the future. April runs from the burden of the past. These perceptions are ideological differences and stand for the articulation of distinct political representations. They are to be considered as familiar feminist paradigms. April decides to concentrate on her career after reading one of Cheryl’s letters about her work on Riel: “Riel and Dumont, they were men of the past. Why dwell on it? What concerned me was my future” (87). April’s renunciation of history and community marks her as a quintessentially liberal subject. On the other hand, Cheryl adopts identity politics and articulates uncompromising self representation. Her political and personal yearnings become a dream. Significantly, it is based on the idealization of the
‘Native past’: the life of olden day Indians. Cheryl’s formulation of identity politics illustrate that the personal is deeply political.

April and Cheryl’s attitude towards life prove inadequate. Cheryl idolises her father as an Indian warrior but on meeting her alcoholic father, her idealism gets distorted: “her dreams to rebuild the spirit of a once proud nation are destroyed.” (198). Absolutely she is denied of the space to mediate between ‘identity’ and ‘politics’. But the suicide of Cheryl holds a devastating effect on the feminists who wished to promote uncompromising spirit of Cheryl to the younger generations. Cheryl as a character conveys the emulating subjectivity and this is linked to personal, political, social and historical. Her politics seems right and her death seems so wrong. The novel oscillates in between the liberal vision of self determination of April and Cheryl’s resuscitating components of Native life. The obvious solution that contemporary feminism provides is the acknowledgement of the differences between independent lives. This approach provides a liberal solution to the social problem. This also demonstrates the inadequacy of live and let live policy and April and Cheryl are responsible for each other’s well being.

The novel contains several examples of the limits of sisterhood. It is a sister Sylvia Gurnan, who initiates the attack on Cheryl/April. Nicole, the Dion daughter, is obviously a foil to Maggie DeRosier, suggesting that sisterly relationships are not given but made. Building a positive relationship proves to be necessary for biologically related sisters but April and Cheryl fail to establish the relationship. April neglects to invite Cheryl to visit her when she first moves
to Winnipeg and their relationship is further strained by the racist confines of the Radcliff family. Cheryl withholds from April the huge changes in her life: the fact that she has quit school, moved in with Mark, traded sex for money and borne a son. These examples convey that the problem between the sisters runs throughout the novel. The two sisters fail to conceive the differences between them. The trial scene constitute the pinnacle of feminist problem. The recognition of difference between the sisters is at its most intense and its most insoluble at that point— as is the need for community between them. April discovers that Cheryl has been working as prostitute, during the trial scene. Cheryl silently pleads for understanding, at the moment of the revelation. This moment reverberates as the remainder throughout the novel. It brings forth Cheryl’s inability to articulate the actual conditions of her life. This also reflects April’s inability to comprehend the gulf between them. The reflection of April constitutes a recognition of incommensurability: “I kept thinking of the look she had given me that afternoon…but I decided I would try my best to forgive and forget” (167-168). This conveys that this is not merely a matter of difference but a total incongruity, an incommensurability that both fail to see around. The only option that remains for them is to ignore the differences and to adopt the ethos of forgiving and forgetting.

While articulating the problem of meaningful sisterhood, the novel fails to provide the problem of meaningful sisterhood. Dialogue and honesty, the obvious antidotes to secrecy and lies, prove to be failures for incommensurability. The dialogue between April and Cheryl becomes vitriolic
and it undermines and proves the methods of talking and honesty as inadequate. After the trial scene, when Cheryl reveals to April it soothes the relationship to some extent: “Oh? You think things should return to normal, do you? Well Good luck!” (173). This statement displays the enormity of misunderstanding but forecloses the possibility of recovering the lost ground. The historical, material and discursive conditions of systemic racism makes April and Cheryl intelligible. Outside the conditions, they are never related but the conditions actively produce the relationship between the two sisters. Guilt and shame run through quintessential social feelings in their relationship. Cheryl charges April and vice versa. The two women cannot brush aside the social, historical and material contexts in order to assert a sisterliness. The inadequacy of honesty and dialogue resulted in Cheryl’s death. Cheryl has abandoned her journal writing, before her death. April also comes close to understanding the limits of dialogue herself in reading Cheryl’s dairy. Far from the rhetorical questions the narrative works inexorably to pose good deal of intellectual questions. It raises the question on the articulation of experience in language, the failure of the dialogue in establishing the cultural co ordination, the role of interlocutor in understanding the Native experiences and on the conditions pursuing alliances among women.

The novel celebrates the move away from the nuclear family towards a family unit reconstructed around chosen connections: “the psychic and familial chaos wrought by Cheryl’s suicide is headed by the promise of liberty born as the next generation” (152). The chosen family is more important than the natal
family. Biological inheritance paves the way for the emergence of ‘sisterhood’ of the Native community. So, April’s rising is considered as the result of political consciousness, towards the end of the novel. The community is encoded in the reconstruction of the family. Cheryl’s life begins to emerge after her death, through April’s recollections and the disembodied text of her journals. From the Feminist perspective, it is the white-identified April who gets to take care of her ‘brown’ sister’s child. The community is presented as deeply compromised, towards the end of the novel. The death of Cheryl marks the sisters failure to turn biological connection into meaningful sisterhood. But there is an insistent optimism in the closing lines of the novel that wishes to obliterate the most awful aspects of parents’ alcoholism, the children’s removal into social care, the horror of April’s foster situation, Cheryl’s alcoholism and death. Heather Zwicker in the essay ‘The Limits of Sisterhood’ observes: “sisterhood raises more problems than it solves; dialogue isn’t enough; honesty isn’t always possible or necessarily helpful.( 334)” She is of the firm view that the most useful way to read In Search of April Raintree is to take away from the novel the questions that it arises.