

Postcolonial Echoes in Select Native American Poetry: A Critical Study

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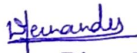
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I hereby declare that the data presented in this Dissertation report entitled, “Postcolonial Echoes in Select Native American Poetry: A Critical Study” is based on the results of investigations carried out by me in the Discipline of English at the Shenoj Goembab School of Languages and Literature, Goa University under the Supervision of Ms. Poorwa Naik and the same has not been submitted elsewhere for the award of a degree or diploma by me. Further, I understand that Goa University or its authorities will not be responsible for the correctness of observations / experimental or other findings given by the dissertation.

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COMPLETION CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation report “Postcolonial Echoes in Select Native American Poetry: A Critical Study” is a bonafide work carried out by Ms. Lauren Divya Fernandes under my supervision in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Masters of Arts** in the Discipline of English at the Shenoj Goembab School of Languages and Literature, Goa University.



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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to unearth the extent to which the application of the theory of Postcolonialism to the select Native American poems would aid in a better comprehension of the consequences of the European colonisation of the Native American lands. The employment of the methods of close-reading and discourse analysis of the poems, vis-à-vis the theory of Postcolonialism and the select concepts, was carried out to achieve the goal of this dissertation, and to obtain the following findings.

Native American poetry acts as a storehouse of historical experiences that aids future indigenous generations in connecting with the trials and tribulations faced by their elders. It acts as a platform for sharing and preserving Native American languages, traditions, and perspectives. Analysing the select poems from the lens of postcolonialism provides a critical perspective to better comprehend the lived experiences of the indigenous people, reflecting the impact of colonisation, loss of land, and forced displacement. This poetry helps provide an alternate interpretation of the literature that has long been dominated by the white race's perspectives. Most importantly, indigenous poetry acts as a tool of resistance and a voice against oppression.

Key Words: Native American, postcolonialism, poetry, alternate narratives, colonialism, tool of resistance.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“Historically speaking, we went from being Indians to pagans to savages to hostiles to militants to activists to Native Americans. Its five hundred years later and they still cant see us. We are still invisible.”

— John Trudell

1.1 Introduction

Native American literature focuses on the indigenous people's way of life, encapsulating the various customs, beliefs, and practices that play a central role in the existence of the native people. However, this literature also unearths the harrowing impact and effects that colonisation has had on the Native American people.

Long before the arrival of the European colonisers to the native nations, poetry, just as in other cultures and races, existed in the form of oral presentations of stories, death and love songs, prayers, war cries, and lullabies. These songs or laments were deep-rooted in narratives performed by the indigenous people on various occasions that called for it. With the arrival of the European colonisers came the incorporation of European literary forms, such as the short story and novel. Unsurprisingly, the origins of Native American poetry include ritualistic poems used in various ceremonies to worship/appease deities, for healing, celebration, and day-to-day living. Steeped in spirituality and driven by the imagery of nature, these traditional poems reflected the way of life of the native people.

Even today, the poetry of Native American people continues to follow this similar path. In-depth studies of these poems unearth various aspects such as the significant role nature and spirituality play in the lives of these people. However,

contemporary Native American poetry also focuses heavily on and relays the issues which the indigenous populations have had to face over centuries, following the onset of colonisation. While colonisation may seem like a distant memory of the past, the native populations are still reeling from its negative impact. Unfortunately, the Native American experience has for centuries been ignored, hidden, and rendered non-existent. Even in the 21st century, the struggles and stories of native populations are brushed under the carpet. In the United States alone, most history textbooks of schools hold no trace of native history despite native people being the original inhabitants of the land.

It is almost as if Gen. Richard H. Pratt, the founder of the Carlisle School, was successful in his attempt to “Kill the Indian, and save the man.” Many non-Native students assume Native people must have died off since they largely disappear from textbook narratives after the 1890s....Policymakers have good reason to protect the mythological narrative of America that their political power is rooted in. If American K-12 teachers used critical race theory to inform their social studies curriculum, students might learn the real truth about the country’s failures to live up to its own ideals (Jeffery).

For this main reason, the literature of the native nations is of precedence. Before the nineteenth century, Native American literature, in general, was restricted to a mere handful of indigenous writers who published works for an almost absent audience. From the 1960s, a period termed the Native American Renaissance came a significant rise in the number of Native American writers and indigenous literature being published. This term is believed to have originally been coined by Kenneth Lincoln (American writer and professor). Native American poetry plays a critical role in disseminating the experiences, perspectives, culture, struggles, and lives of

the American Indian people. Hence, close readings and analyses of the poetry of native nations help bring to light contemporary issues and disprove negative stereotypes and misconceptions surrounding the group. This poetry serves as a preserving force and a celebration of indigenous culture. It encompasses their unique traditions, spiritual beliefs, and languages. Native American poets establish a connection to their land and help safeguard their ethnic identity.

In particular, this dissertation will focus on the analysis of select Native American poems through a postcolonial lens. From the lens of postcolonialism, the poetry of the native nations provides a critical perspective to better comprehend the lived experiences of the indigenous people, reflecting the impact of colonisation, loss of land, and forced displacement. This poetry helps provide an alternate interpretation of the literature that has long been dominated by the white race's perspectives. More importantly, indigenous poetry acts as a tool of resistance and a voice against oppression. It gives Native American poets the chance to assert their presence in mainstream literature and reclaim their once-silenced voices.

It is important to note that academic writing relating to Native American literature uses several varying terms to describe the native population of America, such as American Indian, Indian American, Indian, and even the derogatory Red Indian. These generalising terms typecast the native masses based on existing European languages and concepts. In reality, the native masses belong to numerous tribes that hold their own unique identity and culture. However, concerning Native American poets, their tribal identity is always mentioned along with their names. As aptly put forth by the poet Heid E. Erdrich (Ojibwe), *"there is no such thing as Native American poetry. We are poets who belong to Native Nations"* (qtd. in Hall).

While acknowledging the importance of these identities, during the course of this dissertation, the terms Native American, native, and indigenous will be used for the sake of consistency and clarity.

1.2 Introduction to Postcolonial Literature

Postcolonialism refers to the theoretical study of the political, cultural, and economic effects of colonialism and imperialism on previously colonised people and their lands.

As given in the eleventh edition of *A Glossary of Literary Terms* by M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, postcolonial studies:

These studies have focused especially on the Third World countries in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean islands, and South America. Some scholars, however, extend the scope of such analyses also to the discourse and cultural productions of countries such as Australia, Canada, and New Zealand...

(Abrams and Harpham 305–06)

Noticeably, America doesn't feature in the above as to many a researcher, Native American literature is not considered as postcolonial simply because the Native people continue to exist under the "rule" of the white race, unlike their counterparts in Africa or India who have attained complete independence from their colonial rulers.

In terms of literature, postcolonial theory is a critical approach that studies and analyses literature produced in nations that were once colonies of other countries. In their literature, postcolonial writers focus on the ramifications of colonialism while also delving into the effects of decolonisation. While postcolonial literature encompasses literature from several nations, it consistently tackles specific recurring issues central to postcolonialism. These include the

disestablishment of Eurocentric narratives and norms and reclamation of the native past, issues surrounding various concepts such as hybridity, identity, marginalisation, and otherness that postcolonial subjects have to deal with post the advent of colonialism, and the consistent effort to reaffirm the native presence through the language of the colonisers.

1.2.1 Importance of Postcolonial Literature

Postcolonial literature is a vast area of study encompassing a multifarious range of literary works produced by writers from regions once colonies of European powers. Its significance stems from its power to highlight the experiences of the colonised masses and delve into the complexities that have arisen from colonialism.

Postcolonial literature acts as a tool through which native writers can reclaim their true history, culture, and identity while challenging the age-old Eurocentric perspectives that have dominated mainstream narratives. By challenging these colonial narratives, postcolonial literature encourages readers to question existing ideologies and misconceptions surrounding previously colonised lands. Since this literature delves into the advent of colonialism and its aftermath, it creates an awareness of the horrors of the colonial period. It also opens up a space to confront issues such as racism, human rights, and social justice.

Apart from the foregoing points, postcolonial literature is significant as it explores the complexities that arise from the amalgamation of native and colonial cultures. The vastness of postcolonial literature thus reflects the manifoldness of perspectives, experiences, languages, and cultures existing within regions that were colonies of European powers.

1.2.2 Concepts to be Employed in the Analysis of the Select Poems

The poems selected for this study will be analysed based on the theory of Postcolonialism and certain related concepts. These concepts are:

1. Colonialism- As given by the Merriam-Webster dictionary, colonialism is defined as the *“domination of a people or area by a foreign state or nation : the practice of extending and maintaining a nation's political and economic control over another people or area.”* Colonial domination extends not just to the political and economic front but encompasses the socio-cultural aspects as well.
2. Other- Renowned postcolonial theorist Edward Said, in his noted work, *Orientalism* (1978), explores the concept of the Other in relation to the Western (Occident) construction of the East (Orient). According to Said, Western societies have historically constructed and represented the Orient as essentially inferior and alien to the Occident (the West).

The colonized subject is characterized as ‘other’ through discourses such as **primitivism** and **cannibalism**, as a means of establishing the **binary** separation of the colonizer and colonized and asserting the naturalness and primacy of the colonizing culture and world view (Ashcroft et al. 154: 2007).

3. Hegemony- Gramsci’s concept of hegemony refers to the dominance exercised by a ruling group that goes beyond economic and political power, reaching into the culture, institutions and very importantly, ideology of the society. According to Gramsci, hegemony is-

spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group, consent “historically” caused by the prestige

(and therefore by the trust) accruing to the dominant group because of its position and function in the world of production (Femia 42).

4. Subaltern- Gayatri Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) highlights the voicelessness of those pushed into the margins of society within a dominant political and social structure and discourse. Spivak argues that the subaltern lacks the means to make their voices heard and must thus be represented. The concept can be applied to the study of Native American women due to the marginalised position they hold in American society.
5. Exoticism- The concept of 'colonial exotic', now 'postcolonial exoticism' was first used to refer to '*alien, introduced from abroad, not indigenous*' (Ashcroft et al. 101: 2007). Gradually, it evolved to include the intersection of power, representation, and cultural dynamics. In postcolonial literature, the notion of exoticism is related to the process by which the otherness or difference of cultural space, artefact, or practice of the native is viewed as a source of stimulation and marvel for the coloniser (Forsdick, 2001).
6. Identity- In a general sense, identity can be described "*as a person's sense of self, established by their unique characteristics, affiliations, and social roles*" (Berkeley). However, with context to postcolonialism, countries that were once under colonial rule often emerge with a postcolonial identity, a complex and unique set of characteristics that arise in individuals due to the impact of colonisation and subsequent decolonisation. Shaped by the historical experiences of colonialism and constantly evolving with cultural influences, postcolonial identity encompasses how individuals and

communities navigate and redefine their sense of belonging and self in a postcolonial society.

7. Worlding- According to Spivak, worlding refers to “*the way in which colonized space is brought into the ‘world’, that is, made to exist as part of a world essentially constructed by Euro-centrism*” (Ashcroft et al. 225: 2007). In other words, the natives view themselves how the colonial powers have recorded them. “*This transformation occurs through acts such as cartography, writing, or simply traveling over the colonized land*” (Raja). However, more than mapping the native lands, worlding played a significant role in the colonial education system, where natives were taught to view themselves through the lens of the colonial powers. In this regard, the natives “*start[ed] seeing themselves as they [were] recorded and represented by their master*” (Raja).
8. Writing Back- Originally coined by Salman Rushdie and further developed by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin in their book *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature*, the concept revolves around the challenging of Eurocentric notions of literature and language. It refers to how writers belonging to previously colonised nations respond to the literary canon stemming from the colonial front. Under this concept, writers can choose to write back using the process of either abrogation or appropriation. While abrogation refers to the rejection of all forms of colonial culture, including the use of the colonial language, appropriation “*is the process by which the language is taken and made to ‘bear the burden’ of one’s own cultural experience, or, as Raja Rao puts it,*

to ‘convey in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own’”(Ashcroft et al. 38: 2004).

1.3 Scope and Limitations of the Research

1.3.1 Scope

In having completed the literature review, it has been uncovered that research and studies on Native American poetry, through the lens of Postcolonialism, borders on non-existent. As a result, this study is a step in the direction of filling in this research gap and working towards creating awareness of the existence of the Native American narrative and experience through poetry. The study has been carried out to contribute to the limited research, specifically in the field of Postcolonialism in Native American poetry.

1.3.2 Limitations

- Study limited to the analysis of select poems.
- Study not focused on a single poet.
- Study limited to Native American poems written in English.
- Reliance on personal comprehension and analysis of poems vis-à-vis the generalised theory of Postcolonialism.
- Use of limited concepts under the Postcolonial theory, i.e., ‘colonialism’, ‘other’, ‘hegemony’, ‘subaltern’, ‘exoticism’, ‘identity’, ‘worlding’, and ‘writing back’
- Grouping of poems under the umbrella term of Native American poetry limits the ability to explore each tribe’s culture and identity (presence of different native nations and tribes, as a result, differing cultural significance).

1.4 Relevance and Necessity of the Research

1.4.1 Necessity in the field of Languages and Literature

Poetry, in general, is an essential part of the study of languages and literature as it possesses the ability to deliver the most in-depth, emotional, introspective messages and ideas while also highlighting pressing issues of the hour, sometimes in the shortest possible manner. In terms of Native American poetry, Native American poets, through their poetry, draw attention to the realities of their people. They depict the destruction of their culture, identity, and land caused by the colonisation of their lands.

With regards to the proposed research, Native American poetry plays an essential role in the field of literature and languages, as while it highlights the choice of the Native people to write in the language of their colonisers as a means of rebellion, it most importantly narrates the stories of the Native American people in all their entirety.

The study of Native American poetry is essential, for it provides valuable insights into the history, culture, and experiences of the indigenous population of North America. In particular, this research will highlight the experiences of the native population prior to, during, and after the advent of colonisation. It attempts to assist the postcolonial narratives of the indigenous population, due to the fact that from time immemorial, the narrative has been driven by the colonising race.

This research aims to aid in cementing the need to preserve indigenous voices through poetry. Native American poetry acts as a storehouse of historical experiences that inadvertently enables future indigenous generations to connect with the trials and tribulations faced by their elders. It provides a platform for sharing and preserving Native American languages, traditions, and perspectives.

Native American poetry provides the Native American people with the ability to claim their place in the literary world. It provides a rebuttal to age-old misconceptions and stereotypes about Native American culture. While this research in itself does not provide a comparative study, it can be used as a part of a comparative study of the experiences shared by colonised nations. Overall, this research is an attempt to further establish the necessity of the study of Native American poetry in a wider literary arena, and to promote the native way of life.

1.4.2 Relevance to the Society

In 21st-century America, the Native American population has been fighting to have their voices heard in the mainstream. Today, with the growing awareness surrounding the Native American plight, it is no secret that colonisation was the biggest curse to ever befall the native population of North America. In addition to destroying their lands, the historical trauma that has come with colonisation has plagued the native population in multitudes. Native communities are engulfed in issues such as poverty, poor physical and mental health, domestic abuse, addiction, unemployment, as well as lack of adequate housing and access to education. These issues are a direct result of historical trauma and injustice metted out to the Native American population. All this is reflected in Native American poetry, especially that of contemporary times. However, the poetry of the native people speaks volumes about their resilience. Despite the colonial and subsequently, U.S government's attempt to destroy every aspect of the native way of life, their cultures have persevered.

The various poems analysed in this study through the lens of postcolonialism, paint a picture of the aforementioned. As a result, this research is relevant not just in its historical focus but also in its highlighting of the

contemporary issues faced by the American Indian population in America. It ultimately advocates for the recognition and acceptance of the Native American narrative and experience.

1.5 Literature Review

As mentioned in the introduction, Native American literature originated in the form of oral tradition before contact with the European races, subsequently progressing to European literary forms and languages. Native American literature, for centuries, was kept under wraps, and native writers, along with their literature, never got the recognition they deserved. However, with time, this reality is slowly changing with the growing interest in Native American people and their literature.

Since this dissertation revolves around the echoes of Postcolonialism in Native American poetry, it is essential to analyse the existing literature/studies on the pre-colonial and colonial history of Native Americans. It will help us understand the grim historical transformations in the lives of Native Americans. The articles and research papers stated below discuss the history of the Native American people, the systematic genocide, the stereotypes surrounding the indigenous people, as well as the historical violence against the indigenous women.

1.5.1 Literature/Studies Relevant to this Dissertation

Peter d'Errico, in his article, "Native Americans in America: A Theoretical and Historical Overview"(1999), discusses Native American struggles for sovereignty and self-determination, highlighting the unique challenges they face. In part, he explores the imposition of federal law on Native Americans, including the termination policy, as well as the impact of colonisation (Christian colonisation, to be specific) on Native American history. Essentially, this article details the

shaping of America through the determining interactions between the colonisers and the indigenous population.

Focusing on the systematised eradication of the native population, Ann Piccard's article titled "Death by Boarding School: "The Last Acceptable Racism" and the United States' Genocide of Native Americans" (2014) sheds light on the systemic violence, cultural erasure and racism experienced by Native Americans. Piccard discusses the historical injustices inflicted upon the native population, such as the loss of land, autonomy, and resources, and explores the ongoing impact of these injustices. Additionally, she critically examines the genocide of the indigenous people, discussing the various policies and treaties crafted towards displacing the native people off their lands, as well as the forced assimilation of Native American children who were stolen from their families only to be subjected to abuse in boarding schools.

The article "Data and Native American" by Kimberly R. Huyser (2020) essentially highlights the issues about the census data collection from Native Americans. According to the documentation, indigenous people "*were not inclusively counted by the U.S. Census until 1930*" (Huyser). Before 1960, census data was collected in person, leading to racial misclassifications and assumptions. The Civil Rights Movement and American Indian activism saw a change in the societal and political culture in the U.S., which brought about a decrease in the cultural repression of the indigenous people. However, this has not been enough. The Native American population is the only group from which the U.S. federal government demands "*computed lineal ancestry to acknowledge formal belonging*" (Huyser). An enrolled member of the Navajo Nation, Huyser calls for the need to be mindful of the historical and contemporary context of the indigenous

people to rebuild trust between them and social researchers. She states that only by releasing data per the natives' guidance and preference will the tribal nations be able to govern their identity and data.

Crisca Bierwert's review essay, "Post-Colonial Studies of Native America. A Review Essay" (2003) analyses Thomas Biolsi's *"Deadliest Enemies"* and Kathleen Fine-Dare's *Grave Injustice* as texts that examine the native rights movements as well as address institutionalised violence. Bierwert highlights how Biolsi and Fine-Dare navigate sensitive issues of political power and cultural property and offer insights into local activism and historical injustices. Both studies use critical race theory and action research to challenge narratives of power and advocate for indigenous voices. This review thus shows how post-colonial studies of Native America offer cultural critiques, highlighting colonial narratives and socio-political struggles.

Candice Serrano's "The Vanishing Race: Dealing With Native Stereotypes Through a Lens" (2017) provides an alternative to the Native American-centred stereotypes. Her work focuses on Edward S. Curtis (an early twentieth-century photographer) and Will Wilson (a contemporary artist). In his work, *The North American Indian*, Curtis photographed and documented several native tribes. However, in viewing them from the perspective of a white settler, Curtis' photographs assisted in portraying the unfounded stereotypes placed on indigenous people of North America - that they "are an "uncivilised," "red skin," "hostile savage," race of the past" (Serrano). Wilson, on the other hand, uses Curtis' photographs in his project *Critical Indigenous Photographic Exchange* to challenge these stereotypes and the "vanished race" narrative. Serrano explains how the "Vanishing Race" label stemmed from historical decline due to disease,

genocide, and displacement, and historical atrocities like scalping led to racist terms like "redskins." Nevertheless, Wilson's project gives *"a voice to those who have been silenced for far too long, and a deeper understanding of who they are today"* (Serrano).

Addressing the crimes against the Native American women, Martha Bono's 2019 thesis titled "Historicizing Sexual Violence Against Native American Women: Colonization, Intracommunal Shifts, and Creative Forms of Discourse" traces the origins of sexual violence against Native American women to the arrival of the Europeans to the native lands. She argues that it is the U.S. federal government that is largely responsible for creating this climate of violence and drawing on the urgency to find solutions to this "epidemic" that endangers thousands of indigenous women.

While the above studies centre around historical perspectives, the following research focuses on the literary studies closely relevant to this dissertation.

Robin Michalec's essay on "Stories of History and Memory: Native North American Oral Tradition as Identity Reclamation" (2021) explains how Native North American oral traditions serve as a link to history and memory, functioning as a tool for the reclamation of an identity nearly erased by colonialism. Here, traditional storytelling is highlighted as a powerful tool of collective identity, countering the colonial narrative imposed on Native nations. The essay also mentions the manner in which scholars emphasise the cultural and geographical significance of storytelling in informing Native identity and resisting assimilation and erasure.

Renate Eigenbrod's article, "A Necessary Inclusion: Native Literature in Native Studies" (2010), essentially speaks of the need to include a more scholarly

focus in native literature due to the limited courses available. Eigenbrod explains how indigenous literature contributes to indigenous intellectual traditions and challenges colonial narratives. He also emphasises how native literature serves as a tool for decolonisation, empowerment, and challenging stereotypes in mainstream discourse.

The article "Colonialism and Native American Literature: Analysis" (1987) by Jack Forbes' speaks of how modern Native American literature reflects the influence of colonialism and imperialism since the sixteenth century. Covering a wide range of themes in Native American literature, from traditional to contemporary issues, Forbes defines Native American literature as works created by individuals of Native identity and culture for dissemination within the Native community. In the article, Forbes also includes how Indian writers face the dilemma of writing for a non-Indian audience or primarily for Indians due to differing needs and objectives.

In the introduction to *Postcolonial Theory and the U.S.: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature* (Amritjit Singh, Peter Schmidt, 2000), an anthology of essays that discuss postcolonial critique and U.S. ethnic studies, the writers briefly discuss the contribution of Jana Sequoya Magdalene. It talks about part of the struggle to define the notion of "Indianness" in culture and literature. Magdalene confronts the issues of cultural appropriation, one that surrounds the appropriation of Native American studies in the context of postcolonialism and the other surrounding the moral codes of publishing oral sources of Native American populations that serve as tools for survival.

In his research on "Native North American Writing And Postcolonialism"(2001), Mark Shackleton focuses on the literature of Gerald

Vizenor (an American writer, scholar, and enrolled member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe). Specifically, Shackleton highlights Vizenor's use of the '*"Trickster hermeneutics" (cultural survival through the interpretation of, and resistant response to, stereotypical representations)*,' (Shackleton) as a contribution to the postcolonial discourse. This aspect of Vizenor's writing also serves as a study by Kirstin L. Squint. However, a significant mention in Shackleton's paper is that within Native American literature, the use of trickster figures contributes to the sense of native identity and self.

In another essay (2002) focused on the novel *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* by Native-American writer James Welch, Franci Washburn, the author, analyses the postcolonial subject from the perspective of the coloniser. Welch's narrative provides insight into the constructed image of the Native Americans by the white colonisers, which, to a certain extent, continues to prevail today. Washburn's essay speaks of how many postcolonial theorists narrow the term to exclude Native American literature, as according to them, it applies to countries that have achieved the status of independent nationhood. Welch's book, however, ends on a dejecting yet all too real note of the Native American protagonist constructing his identity through the actions, albeit positive, of the white coloniser.

A more generalised study on "Postcolonialism and the Native American Experience" by Jyotirmaya Tripathy (2009) focuses on the crucial aspects of postcolonialism. To solidify her stance, she references Ashcroft et al. *The Empire Writes Back*, Gayatri Spivak, as well as Leslie Marmon Silko's poem "Ceremony." She goes on to state the manner in which colonisers disrupted native traditions in order to create a group of civilised and homogenised people. As a means of oppression, colonisers dislodged natives from their culture by forcing them to forget

their native identity. Triparthy further discusses, in part, the process of decolonisation and the remembrance of one's original tradition.

Kateryna Chornokur, in her 2012 thesis titled "Postcolonial Religion and Motherhood in the Novels by Louise Erdrich and Alice Walker", discusses the cultural colonisation through religion in Erdrich's works. These works pit the native tribal manners of worship against the white man's religion, Christianity. It discusses the faux superiority and cruelty meted out to the natives in the name of the colonisers' religion. Yet at the same time, Erdrich's works, as stated by Chornokur, provide a window into the "*postcolonial amalgam of religious views*" (Chornokur), which Native Americans ultimately adopted in order to resist colonial supremacy and re-establish their identities. With regards to motherhood, Chornokur discusses how non-white mothers have been forced to endure losses at the hands of colonialism.

In her book, *Understanding Louise Erdrich* (2016), Seema Kurup, in part, writes about the colonial themes in Louise Erdrich's works and the manner in which her works portray the historical and contemporary consequences of colonisation. Kurup also details how Erdrich established native life prior to colonial contact in some of her later works.

Saddik M. Gohar's paper, "The Intersections between Native American and Anti-Colonial Palestinian Poetry" (2018), draws on similarities between contemporary Revolutionary Palestinian poets and Native American poets in their rejection of the oppression of the colonial forces. The exemplifications through the poetry provided in the study reflect the struggle of the indigenous populations against these colonial powers. Gohar states that both Native American poets and

Palestinian poets use poetry as an instrument to bring about social change through resistance and restore that which colonialism attempted to destroy.

In a study on N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* by Ngantu Epe Kome Judith Go`oh (2020), some of the explored notions of postcolonialism highlighted include the effects of colonialism on Native Americans, as well as issues of homelessness, identity, and double consciousness faced by the characters of the novel.

In the available abstract of Danica Lynn Miller's dissertation, she talks about how her study maps out the responses of Native American writers to various federal laws. She highlights the independent identity established by the native tribes in treaty negotiations with the European governments and, subsequently, the U.S. federal government. She goes on to state that these historical moments have been captured and illuminated in Native American literature for decades.

Jennifer Hall's 2019 thesis on *Red English: Duality and Representation in Contemporary Native American Poetics* analyses the duality of language and identity in contemporary Native American poetry. Her thesis comes closest to this dissertation topic as it deals with the theory of postcolonialism as well as other theories and concepts such as Post-Apocalypse Stress Syndrome, Double Consciousness, Manifest Manners, the Postindian, and Survivance, in relation to Native American poetry. Hall uses examples of poems by Tommy Pico and Layli Long Soldier to highlight the role Native American poets play in resisting Eurocentric misrepresentations of Native American cultures. She also highlights the use of linguistic techniques such as abrogation and appropriation given in *The Empire Writes Back* (Ashcroft et al) to resist the imperial dominance of English.

After reviewing the accessible literature on Native American poetry in the context of postcolonialism, it is found that most of the concepts chosen for this study have not been used in the analysis of the selected poems before. Thus, through this focus, this dissertation aims to fill in the research gap existing in the field of Native American literature and draw attention to the necessity to emphasise its presence in mainstream literature.

1.6 Research Questions

- Why is it important to study Native American poetry?
- How is the theory of Postcolonialism exemplified in Native American poetry?
- Can Native American poetry vividly present the effects of colonisation on the lives of the native population?
- Does Native American poetry shed light on the contemporary issues plaguing the Native American population?
- How does the application of the theory of Postcolonialism to Native American poetry help in better understanding the plight of the Native American population?

1.7 Objectives

- To highlight the significance of Native American poetry.
- To analyse Native American poetry through the lens of Postcolonialism.
- To study the consequences of Colonialism on the Native American people as depicted in the poems.
- To draw attention to the ever-present issues plaguing the Native American population, through the select poems

- To discredit the misconceptions and stereotypes surrounding the Native American people.
- To emphasise the need to keep alive the Native American experience and narrative.

1.8 Hypothesis

The application of the theory of Postcolonialism to the select Native American poems will aid in a better comprehension of the consequences of the European colonisation of the Native American lands.

1.9 Research Methodology

This dissertation will employ the application of the theory of Postcolonialism along with certain encompassed concepts in the analysis of the selected poems. Under the theory of Postcolonialism, there are various concepts that are used in the analysis of literature. For this dissertation in particular, the concepts of ‘colonialism’, ‘other’, ‘hegemony’, ‘subaltern’ ‘exoticism’, ‘identity’, ‘worlding’, and ‘writing back’ will be used to substantiate the use of the theory.

To provide a rounded study and to chalk out the extent of the impact of colonisation on the Native American population of today, the poems will be clubbed into two categories: those that will be analysed to highlight the native way of life during colonisation and those that will be analysed with the aim of exploring the native plight post the period of colonisation. The poems in question are: “Long Time Ago” by Leslie Marmon Silko, “White Man Come” by Ray Is Na Wi Chah, “Sentenced”- Ruth Margaret Muskrat Bronson, “The White Man Wants The Indian’s Home” by James Harris Guy, “Everything You Need To Know In Life You’ll Learn In Boarding School”- Linda Legarde Grover, “Reservation” by Jack Scoltock, and “Love Lessons in a Time of Settler Colonialism”- Tanaya Winder,

“Sure You Can Ask Me A Personal Question”- Diane Burns, “Missing More Than a Word”- Tanaya Winder, “Through Indigenous Eyes”- Pernell Thomas, “Daredevil”- Sherman Alexie, “Can You Feel the Native American in Me”- M.L.Smoker, “Trudell”- Alex Jacobs, “What I Keep”- Linda Hogan, “Our Drums Will Forever Sound- Roy Acosta”, “We Are The People Of Long Ago”- Doreen Chavarria, “An American Sunrise”- Joy Harjo, and “Indian Singing In 20th Century America”- Gail Tremblay.

1.9.1 Research Tools

In order to successfully complete this study, a close reading and discourse analysis of the selected poems will be carried out vis-à-vis the theory of Postcolonialism and the select concepts under it.

1.10 Research design

1.10.1 Chapterisation

Chapter One- Introduction

- Introduction to topic along with relevance.
- Basic introduction to postcolonial literature and its importance.
- Explanation of chosen concepts.
- Establishment of the objectives, scope, limitations, methodology, and hypothesis of the given dissertation.
- Literature Review- Review of available literature/ research previously done in relation to the dissertation topic.

Chapter Two- A History of Native American Lands and their Literature

- Historical overview of the Native American lands prior to colonisation, during the period of colonisation, and subsequently with the establishment of the U.S. government.

- The progress of Native American literature and its current standing in the wider arena of literature

Chapter Three- A Poetic Depiction of the Native American World During the Period of Colonisation

- An analysis of the poems vis-à-vis the concepts of 'colonialism', 'other', and 'hegemony' and 'subaltern'.
- Poems that will be analysed- "Long Time Ago", "White Man Come", "Sentenced", "The White Man Wants The Indian's Home", "Reservation", "Everything You Need To Know In Life You'll Learn In Boarding School", and "Love Lessons in a Time of Settler Colonialism".

Chapter Four- The Colonial Aftermath and Poems of Perseverance

- Application of the theory of Postcolonialism and the concepts of 'exoticism', 'subaltern', 'identity', 'worlding', and 'writing back' to the poems. Relation to contemporary issues facing the Native Americans.
- Poems that will be analysed- "Sure You Can Ask Me A Personal Question", "Can You Feel the Native American in Me", "Trudell", "What I Keep", "An American Sunrise", "Our Drums Will Forever Sound", "Through Indigenous Eyes", "Daredevil", "Missing More Than a Word", "We Are The People Of Long Ago", and "Indian Singing In 20th Century America".

Chapter Five- Conclusion

- A recapitulation of the narratives portrayed in the poems vis-à-vis the historical and contemporary reality of the Native American people.
- A reiteration of the need for wider recognition of Native American poetry in mainstream literature and studies.

CHAPTER TWO: A HISTORY OF NATIVE AMERICAN LANDS AND THEIR LITERATURE

“Our children are still taught to respect the violence which reduced a red-skinned people of an earlier culture into a few fragmented groups herded into impoverished reservations.”

— Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

2.1 Native Life Before the Advent of Colonisation

The Americas were inhabited by Native Americans who lived in autonomous tribes for thousands of years before the arrival of European colonisers, each with their unique language, culture, and identity. Believed to have migrated from Asia to North America around 35,000 years ago (dates vary between scientists), Native Americans eventually lived across the continents of North and South America before the appearance of Christopher Columbus in 1492. While most of the Native American tribes were hunter-gatherers, their way of life depended on the geographical locations they were situated in. While studying these tribes, many scholars often categorise them into Alaskan Tribes, North-Western Tribes, North-Eastern Tribes, South-Western Tribes, South-Eastern Tribes, and the Great Plains Tribes.

Before European contact, the history of Native Americans is broadly categorised into three periods: the Paleo-Indian period, the Archaic period (8000–1000 b.c.), and the Woodland Period (1000 b.c. to 1000 c.e) (National Park Service). During these periods, the culture of the native people flourished. Native American

cultures produced intricate art, pottery, textiles, and tools. Each region developed its unique artistic styles and craftsmanship.

Native American societies had varied social structures. Some consisted of complex chiefdoms, confederations, or empires, while others were more egalitarian. Members of tight-knit tribes shared equal freedom and respect regardless of gender, fostering strong interdependence and bonds between all individuals. Several tribes were matrilineal, and Native American women were revered for their ability to bring new life into the world.

This aspect was a point of reverence, especially in connection to worshipping nature. Indigenous people have a profound connection with their land, which is often reflected in their spiritual beliefs. They have a great sense of respect and gratitude towards Mother Earth, regarding her as a sacred entity. For Native Americans, the land is not just a physical territory, but also a critical part of their cultural identity. They lived a sustainable life in harmony with nature, using only those resources necessary for survival.

Spiritual beliefs were essential to Native American life. The practice of Animism (the belief that spirits inhabit all living and non-living things) was widespread. Rituals, ceremonies, and religious practices played a significant role in daily life, connecting communities with the natural world.

Contrary to the narratives pushed forth by European colonisers, Native American social and political structures were far from primitive. Even before the advent of colonisation, the native people had established trade networks that spanned vast distances. Various items, such as obsidian, copper, and shells, were traded thus facilitating both economic interactions and cultural exchange among tribes.

Given the diverse existence of the varied Native American groups during the pre-Columbus era, it would only be understandable for internal conflicts to arise among the groups due to several reasons. Some of the most common reasons are:

- Resources: Competition for essential resources such as hunting grounds, agricultural space land, and water, would lead to conflicts between neighbouring tribes.
- Territories: Native American tribes often established territorial boundaries, however, these borders were not always precisely defined or recognised by all. Disagreements over the use of land and access to critical areas would often lead to conflicts. In addition, in certain regions, population growth and migration patterns led to increased pressure on available resources. This pressure would spark conflicts as tribes sought to protect their territories or expand them.
- Trade: Although trade networks and interactions between tribes were common, they also led to disputes over trade routes, control of economic resources, and competition for influence in regional alliances.
- Traditions: Some Native American societies attached cultural and ceremonial significance to warfare. Intertribal conflicts, which sometimes involved raids or territorial disputes, were occasionally part of established traditions.

While conflicts among these groups did occur, it is pivotal to avoid typecasting Native Americans as violent or ruthless. Several Native American societies engaged in alliances and had mechanisms for peacemaking, conflict resolution, and negotiation. Moreover, Native American cultures placed value on fostering diplomatic relationships and maintaining peace and harmony.

It is imperative to acknowledge and appreciate the intricate, flexible, and enduring nature of their diverse cultures, in order to grasp the life of Native Americans before the arrival of the Europeans. Understanding their way of life before the Europeans arrived is crucial to fully comprehend the extent of what was taken away from them by the white colonisers.

2.2 With Columbus Came Mayhem for Native Americans

“Only to the white man was nature a wilderness and only to him was the land ‘infested’ with ‘wild’ animals and ‘savage’ people. To us it was tame, Earth was bountiful and we were surrounded with the blessings of the Great Mystery.”

- Black Elk, Oglala Lakota Sioux

The arrival of Christopher Columbus to the Americas marked the beginning of the end for the native nations. With the onset of colonialism, a large number of tribes and their cultures were completely wiped out. Those who remained struggled to survive amidst the destruction of their lands. However, this reality is often overlooked or underrepresented in mainstream narratives. For instance, many American history textbooks fail to accurately portray the true origins and experiences of native peoples, often conflating their stories with those of the colonisers.

Between 1492 and the late 1500s, a large number of European settlers arrived in the Americas. According to Lewis Lord's article, "How Many People Were Here Before Columbus?", "[t]he 150 years after Columbus' arrival caused a loss of human life in this hemisphere equivalent to all the losses in World War II worldwide" (Lord). From the 16th century to the 19th century, it is believed that almost 90% of the Native population was wiped out by diseases like measles,

smallpox, and tuberculosis brought in by the Westerners. It is alleged that these diseases were deliberately spread among the Native Americans as a form of biological warfare. One such documented case is from 1763, known as the Siege of Fort Pitt, when Henry Bouquet, a commander, distributed "gifts" from a smallpox infirmary among the natives with the hope of the disease spreading to the nearby tribes (Barton).

This natural extermination was closely followed by a conscious and methodological act of ridding the land of its first inhabitants, spilling into various treaties and national policies for the same. In what can be rightly termed as a gradual genocide, Native Americans were brutally killed, abused and forcefully relocated away from their ancestral lands onto tiny reservations that worsened their plight.

During the colonisation of Native American lands, European powers used the 'Doctrine of Discovery' to claim the rights to the land. This doctrine relied on the idea that the land had been "discovered" and therefore could be claimed by the European colonisers. They argued that the native people were uncivilised savages and non-Christians, which justified their declaration of rights to the native lands. From their first interactions, the Europeans established their superiority and pushed forth the need for the native people to adopt the worthier European customs.

On their part, the Native Americans fought for over 250 years to reclaim their lands and way of life from European colonisers. By the 1830s the United States government forced the natives to comply with the system, under which tribes were declared independent nations that held the right to govern themselves, but in exchange for large sections of their lands. These forced treaties and bulldozing mannerisms of the colonisers caused the native people to retaliate. The Native American Wars involved Indigenous people, the English, French, Spanish and U.S.

Army. However, these conflicts resulted in significant losses of the Native American population and tribal land, as well as the forced relocation of survivors to reservations.

A series of conflicts known as the Native Indian Wars/American Indian Wars occurred between Native Americans and European settlers, from 1622 to the late 19th century, primarily over control of the land. The various powers fighting for control over the native lands, employed diverse strategies of manipulation to turn the Native American peoples against each other in order to further their interests. These tactics often exploited existing rivalries and cultural differences among Native American groups. No matter which side they fought on, be it as allies of the English colonists, or the French, or the Spanish, or even the American patriots, Native Americans were always negatively impacted. Every war ended with the bloodshed of hundreds of natives, and those who survived, were thrown off their lands by the various treaties crafted for the same.

Some of the most brutal wars fought were:

- Jamestown Massacre (March 22, 1622): During the Powhatan Wars that lasted for decades, the Powhatan Chief, Opechancanough, led an attack that resulted in the deaths of almost 350 out of the 1,200 colonists. This incident provided the English government with a pretext to justify its actions in attacking Native Americans and seizing their land.
- Pequot War (1636–37): In Colonial Connecticut, tensions between the Pequot tribe and the British, who sought to control the wampum and fur trade, led to an attack by the English militia and their Mohegan and Narragansett allies against the Pequot at Mystic. This resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Pequots, many of whom were women and children. Fearing

more attacks, many Pequots fled their territory, and the war ended with the dissolution of the Pequot nation through the Treaty of Hartford.

- King Philip's War/Great Narragansett War (July 4, 1675, to August 12, 1676): Believed to be one of the deadliest conflicts in American history, it was spurred by the execution of three of Wampanoag Chief Metacom's men, as well as the increasing encroachment on native land. Taking place in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and coastal Maine, Metacom (King Philip by the English) and his coalition retaliated by attacking the colonists and their indigenous confederates—the Mohawks and Mohegans. However, it ended with Metacom's beheading and the extermination of all his native allies.
- Tuscarora War (1711-1715): Considered Colonial North Carolina's bloodiest war, the Iroquoian-speaking Tuscarora tribe and allies fought English colonists who sought to expand their territory. It culminated in the deaths of 1,000 Indians, and around 1,000 captured Tuscaroras who were sold into slavery.
- Chickamauga Cherokee Wars (1776-1794): In a struggle to keep their territory, the Cherokee fought in a joint confederacy led by Chief Dragging Canoe against the American settlers throughout the American Revolution. In response to these attacks, the colonial forces killed hundreds of Cherokees and sold the captured into slavery. The native tribe was forced to surrender large regions of their land, and the ones who remained were forced away to Oklahoma.

While the Native Americans struggled to maintain control over their dwindling land, the colonial and settler powers bulldozed their way through using

any means possible. In 1830, the Indian Removal Act was signed by President Andrew Jackson, which allowed the U.S. government to relocate the natives from their lands. Between 1830 and 1850, around 60,000 native people belonging to the Chickasaw, Cherokee, Seminole, Muscogee (Creek), and Choctaw nations were violently removed from their ancestral homelands in the Southeastern United States. In 1838, 15000 Cherokee were forced off their lands and made to walk more than 1,200 miles on a gruelling route known as the Trail of Tears. 3,000 natives died during this torturous journey.

- Sand Creek Massacre (November 29, 1864): Led by Colonel John Chivington, U.S. Army forces attacked a peaceful Cheyenne and Arapaho camp at Sand Creek in Colorado. This vicious attack resulted in the indiscriminate killing of around 200 Native Americans, including women, children, and the elderly. The soldiers returned the next day to scalp and desecrate their bodies.
- Battle of the Little Bighorn (June 25-26, 1876): In the late 1800s, Lt. Col. George Custer found gold in the Black Hills of South Dakota, within the Great Sioux Reservation. When the Sioux Nation refused to sell the land, Custer and his 209 men attacked a camp of Sioux, Arapaho, and Cheyenne people by the Little Bighorn River in Montana. However, this led to his death and that of all of his men. In an act that is still disputed today, the U.S. government took control of the Black Hills, forcing the Native Americans to live on reservations.
- Wounded Knee Massacre (December 29, 1890): U.S army soldiers slaughtered around 300 unarmed Lakota Sioux children, women, and men who had gathered at Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota to perform the

Ghost Dance rituals (the natives believed that this particular ritual would help reunite them with the dead and bring peace and prosperity). In another slap on the face of the natives, 20 medals of honour were awarded to 20 of the soldiers who took part in this massacre.

The Native Americans were a means to an end for the colonial settlers to survive and thrive in the Americas. The native people were horrifically impacted by these wars, which annihilated tens of thousands of their brethren and displaced the survivors from their lands. By the end of the wars, the Native American way of life was almost destroyed.

On the one hand, the natives were murdered and pushed off their lands, while on the other, the U.S. government forcibly attempted to rid the world of the Native American ways. Beginning with the Indian Civilization Fund Act in 1819 to "civilise" the natives, by 1870, the federal boarding school system that comprised of church-run and government schools, forcibly began taking native children away from their homes to "educate" them. They were brutalised into submitting to the European way of life and forbidden from practising their native culture. Most of the native children faced unspeakable acts of physical, sexual and emotional violence, with many of them meeting horrifying ends.

2.3 Ghosts of Native Past and Present

Unlike the Indian or African nations, the Native American people never truly achieved their independence. With the colonial powers gone, the native people fall under the rule of the government of the United States of America, and the relationship between the latter and the former has been fraught.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

-Declaration of Independence

Despite this profound statement, Native Americans have always been treated as the other. They have had to fight for every possible right at every step of the way, whether for all native tribes to be recognised as citizens of the United States of America or to exercise their basic freedom of speech and religion. Today, according to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), there are approximately 574 Native American tribes nationally recognised, a far cry from the thousands believed to have resided on the continents during pre-Columbian times (before European arrival and influence).

The issues that plague the Native American population of the 21st century are a direct result of colonisation. They face challenges on all fronts, be it social, economic or cultural. Native people have been subject to historical and intergenerational trauma that has made them highly susceptible to the risk of alcohol use disorder and/or suicide. Evident disparities are seen in limited access to education, unemployment, and inadequate mental and general healthcare. Apart from these, native people battle with issues such as climate crisis, social discrimination and racism, misguided and inappropriate depictions in the media, as well as violence, especially against women and children. Native American women are more likely to be victims of violent acts of crime than any other minority race.

While there are approximately 300 reservations across the U.S., only around a quarter of the native population continues to live on them as many Native Americans have moved to cities in hopes of better opportunities.

However, there is a growing urgency to address and provide equitable solutions while considering all aspects of the Native American existence. Undoubtedly, for most of the native people, the first step to this is in remembering their history through their own narrative as opposed to the dominant narrative of their non-native oppressors that has held precedence for far too long.

2.4 An Overview of Native American Literature

Native American literature should be important to Americans not as a curio, an artifact of the American past that has little pertinence to an American present or future, but rather as a major tradition that informs American writers ranging from Cotton Mather and Nathaniel Hawthorne through Walt Whitman, William Carlos Williams, and William Faulkner to Adrienne Rich, Toni Cade Bambara, and Judy Grahn.

- Paula Gunn Allen

Like most cultures, the history of Native American literature is rooted in oral tradition, which was a vital means of preserving and passing cultural knowledge from one generation to another. Native American people are often regarded as natural storytellers due to their ability to share stories, legends, and myths rich in imagery. These narratives were often a means of preserving historical events or teaching moral lessons. Many Native American cultures also incorporated spoken word performances in various ceremonies and rituals, which were a form of artistic expression. Granted that Native American cultures did not employ the use of letters or written word, native narratives and important events were still physically recorded on items such as carved baskets, paintings, and clothing articles (qt. in Hall).

With the arrival of the European colonisers, the dynamics of the native oral traditions began evolving. Due to interactions with the Europeans, some of the natives adapted their oral traditions into written form. During the colonial and post-colonial periods, apart from delivering speeches to address issues related to cultural survival and the resistance to encroachment by the colonial powers, a few Native Americans, like Samson Occom, a Mohegan minister and writer, began to engage with written forms of expression.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, some Native American writers continued to attempt to preserve their cultural heritage through literature. Certain native communities established newspapers, like Elias Boudinot's Cherokee Phoenix, to express their opinions and resist assimilation. However, for the most part, native literature was ignored until the 1960s, which witnessed an increase in the number of written works by native writers and came to be known as the Native American Renaissance (coined by Kenneth Lincoln). N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968) is often credited with bringing Native American literature to a broader audience.

Some of the other notable works from the period of the Native American Renaissance are Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine* (1984) which gives a multigenerational perspective on the Ojibwe people's experiences, and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, a novel that explores the impact of colonisation and highlights the importance of native spirituality. Over the years, Native American literature has grown and expanded to include various genres of literature. A diverse range of native writers, such as Joy Harjo, Leslie Marmon Silko, and James Welch, have contributed unique perspectives and

styles. These works have gained recognition, receiving prestigious literary awards, of which some are:

- In 1969, Momaday's (Kiowa) *House Made of Dawn*, received the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction which made him one of the first Native American writers to be honoured with this prestigious award.
- Louise Erdrich (Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa) received the American Book Award for Fiction for her novels *Love Medicine* (1984) and *The Round House* (2012).
- In 1994, Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo): received the Native Writers' Circle of the Americas Lifetime Achievement Award.
- Another well-known Native American writer, Sherman Alexie (Spokane/Coeur d'Alene) had his novel, *Reservation Blues* shortlisted for the International Dublin Literary Award in 1996, and later, in 2007, he won the National Book Award for Young People's Literature for his novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*.
- Joy Harjo (Muscogee Creek Nation): Apart from her numerous awards, in 2019, Harjo became the first ever Native American to be named the United States Poet Laureate.

While Native American literature has indeed gained visibility today, there are constant discussions about its place in mainstream literature. Some scholars and critics argue that Native American literature should be acknowledged as a vital part of mainstream literary canons, placing emphasis on its importance in promoting diverse perspectives and cultural understanding. However, challenges and issues persist in addressing stereotypes and cultural appropriation, promoting authentic

representation, and ensuring that Native American voices are heard and respected in literary spaces. However, efforts to incorporate Native American literature into critical discussions, literary awards, as well as educational curricula have increased, helping to elevate its visibility in mainstream literature.

In mapping out the history of the Native American lands prior to the advent of colonisation, the impact colonisation has had on the native population, and the contemporary issues that today's Native Americans are forced to deal with as a direct result of the evils of colonisation and the European powers, this chapter thus acts as a backbone to the succeeding chapters which will delve into the analysis of the select Native American poems. Understanding the history of the native people is key to understanding the context in which these poems have been written. It would be impossible to fully comprehend as well as unjust to analyse poems of the Native Americans without first understanding the historical background of the native people. By chalking out an overview of Native American literature that traces the evolution of native literature from its origins in oral tradition to the 21st century, one can therefore place it in juxtaposition to the wider arena of existing literature, in order to acknowledge the importance of promoting and highlighting the literature of the native people.

CHAPTER THREE: A POETIC DEPICTION OF THE NATIVE AMERICAN WORLD DURING THE PERIOD OF COLONISATION

“Colonialism is the massive fog that has clouded our imaginations regarding who we could be, excised our memories of who we once were, and numbed our understanding of our current existence.”

-Waziyatawin (Wahpetunwan Dakota professor, author, and activist)

3.1 Colonial Narratives that Shaped the World

For centuries, colonial narratives and perspectives about Native America played a significant role in shaping misconceptions about Native Americans in mainstream society. These narratives were steeped in unjustified stereotypes and misconceptions that mainly stemmed from the colonisers' superior worldview.

“The one who tells the stories rules the world.”

— Hopi Proverb

The European colonisers would depict Native Americans as uncivilised, paganistic primitives that therefore reinforced the need to "civilise" them. Despite the evident misunderstanding of and ignorance towards the native culture, colonial narratives painted the natives as savages, often framing conflicts between colonisers and Native Americans as instances of European settlers defending their interests against hostile indigenous populations. Some colonial narratives promoted the idea of assimilating Native Americans into European ways of life, emphasising the supposed benefits of European customs and institutions. This perspective contributed to policies aimed at erasing indigenous cultures, languages, and traditions.

To further cement these misconceptions and stereotypes, the colonial powers emerged with captivity narratives, “*a genre of American literature that shares the story of a narrator being held captive by Native Americans*” (Novlr Glossary). Captivity narratives were structured to reinforce Western ideals regarding civilisation and progress while acting as a “source” from inside native societies. These narratives would often end with the escape or release of the captured European or American. While certain American captivity narratives were based on true events, many others were fictional in nature to suit the popularity of the stories.

Two of the most prominent captivity narratives are Mary Rowlandson's *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God: Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* and Mary Jemison's *Narrative of the Life of Mrs. Mary Jemison*. However, both narratives provided contrasting depictions of the Native Americans. Rowlandson's narrative (she was a Puritan woman captured in 1675 during King Philip's War) reinforces the stereotypes of Native Americans being hostile and violent, further establishing the natives as the other and reflecting Puritan beliefs. Her narrative is considered an example of classic early American literature and was a bestseller in colonial America. The following is an excerpt from the narrative-

Thus were we butchered by those merciless heathen, standing amazed, with the blood running down to our heels..... I had often before this said that if the Indians should come, I should choose rather to be killed by them than taken alive, but when it came to the trial my mind changed; their glittering weapons so daunted my spirit, that I chose rather to go along with those (as I may say) ravenous beasts, than that moment to end my days;... Amongst

them also was that poor woman before mentioned, who came to a sad end, as some of the company told me in my travel: she having much grief upon her spirit about her miserable condition, being so near her time, she would be often asking the Indians to let her go home; they not being willing to that, and yet vexed with her importunity, gathered a great company together about her and stripped her naked, and set her in the midst of them, and when they had sung and danced about her (in their hellish manner) as long as they pleased they knocked her on head, and the child in her arms with her. When they had done that they made a fire and put them both into it.

(Widger and Anonymous)

On the other hand, Jemison's narrative (Mary Jemison, also known as "The White Woman of the Genesee," captured in 1758, during the French and Indian War), counters the 'savage vs. civilized' dichotomy that exists in a number of captivity narratives. Her narrative details her decision to stay with the Seneca tribe and adapt to their way of life instead of returning to white society, thus challenging the traditional narrative trope.

Native American literature, like Jemison's narrative, provided a counter to the dominant colonial narratives that shaped mindsets and approaches towards the native people.

This chapter and the succeeding one will entail the analysis of select poems using certain concepts under the theory of Postcolonialism. This chapter in particular will include the analysis of the poems- "Long Time Ago" by Leslie Marmon Silko, "White Man Come" by Ray Is Na Wi Chah, "Sentenced"- Ruth Margaret Muskrat Bronson, "The White Man Wants The Indian's Home" by James Harris Guy, "Everything You Need To Know In Life You'll Learn In Boarding

School”- Linda Legarde Grover, “Reservation” by Jack Scoltock, and “Love Lessons in a Time of Settler Colonialism”- Tanaya Winder, using the concepts of ‘colonialism’, ‘hegemony’, ‘other’, and the ‘subaltern’.

3.2 Native Voices from a Colonised World

As discussed in the introduction, the theory of Postcolonialism from the lens of literature, enables readers to have an all-rounded comprehension of the consequences of colonialism. Postcolonial writers make deliberate attempts to call attention to the experiences of the colonised, so as to provide these once silenced voices the much-deserved platform to share their narratives and experiences of colonialism. Each poem that has been selected for this research is written by a person of Native American ancestry who chalks out the impact of the colonisation of their lands, while also detailing the ever-present struggles that the native population is forced to deal with.

Colonialism was a man-made plague that annihilated thousands of natives across colonised nations. It left the survivors with devastating trauma that continues to haunt generations of Native Americans even in this day and age.

The opening stanza of Leslie Marmon Silko’s (Laguna) poem “Long Time Ago”, sheds some light on the Native American existence prior to the arrival of the colonisers. The entire poem also conveys the rawness of the mystical abilities of the native people that are very often highlighted in literature.

Despite it being a poem that predicts the coming of the European powers, it aptly details the brutal rule of the European colonisers over the Native Americans. Through the lens of colonialism, the poem establishes the domination and decimation of the native people by the colonisers. This occurred on not just the political and economic front, but the cultural front as well. The constant use of the

word “objects” in the poem reasserts the colonisers’ materialistic drive for amassing wealth, power and territories, even though it came at the cost of millions of native lives.

*When they look
they see only objects...
The deer and the bear are objects...
They will carry objects
which can shoot death (Marmon, 97-113)*

The colonisers saw themselves as superior to the natives in every aspect, from culture to religion. In fact, because the natives did not follow Christianity, “*many settlers came to believe that the Native Americans could not be trusted..They began to fear the Indians and think of them as evil*”(VOA Learning English). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the colonial powers brought an almost annihilation of the Native Americans, their lands and resources, and their way of life. The poem’s jarring, yet truthful imagery highlights the same-

*They will fear what they find
They will fear the people...
Entire villages will be wiped out
They will slaughter whole tribes...

And those they do not kill
will die anyway...
the loss will destroy the rest
They will bring terrible diseases¹⁴⁰
the people have never known.
Entire tribes will die out ¹⁴²... (Marmon, 122-142)*

Just as how the witch's unravelling of the coming of the white powers could not be called back, the colonisation of the Americas too was unavoidable at any cost. While many native Indian tribes did everything in their capacity to resist the colonisers encroachment of their lands, their attempts were futile.

Like Silko's "Long Time Ago", Ray Is Na Wi Chah's "White Man Come", and Ruth Margaret Muskrat Bronson's (Cherokee) "Sentenced", talk about the destruction that the colonial powers brought to the Americas with their arrival. The European powers wreaked havoc on the native people's way of life. On the ecological front, flora and fauna thrived on the native lands prior to the advent of colonisation, as the Native American people lived a sustainable life in harmony with nature. They used only those resources that were enough to meet their immediate needs. However, when the colonial powers discovered the Americas, they proceeded to exploit the resources of these native lands. Just as described in "Long Time Ago", "they will find the rocks/rocks with veins of green and yellow and black," (Marmon, 156-157), the ever-growing demand for timber, minerals such as gold, copper, and coal, and animal products, especially fur, resulted in the dissemination of native lands. As Wi Chah puts it-

White man come, nothing the same

Buffalo all gone, no more game...

Fish all dead, killed by silt.

White man come, all is polluted

Uranium found, our rights refuted.

White man come, all is lost.

White man come, count the cost (Wi Chah, lines 1-2, 16-20)

In the 18th century, the unappeasable European demand for fur, led to the slaughter of millions of beavers, otters, skunks, deer, bison, and bears, which not only permanently changed local environments, but also affected the lives of the natives who were dependent on these animals for reasons such as food and clothing.

In addition to this, the colonial powers murdered thousands of Native Americans in order to seize control of their lands. Those that survived were forced off their lands and lost their very right to freely live as natives.

The last stanza of Bronson's "Sentenced" which serves as a lament for all that was viciously stolen from the native people, vividly describes the plight of the native population who were left reeling from the blows dealt by the colonial powers.

They have won, they have won,
Thru fraud and thru warfare they have won,
Our council and burial grounds they have won,
Our birthright for pottage that white man has won,
And the red man must perish alone. (Bronson, 4. 1-5)

The European colonisers used all unethical means possible, not just in their attempts to possess and desecrate native lands, but also to eliminate Native Americans and their way of life. In the struggle to hold onto to their homes and their very identity, the indigenous population of America had no genuine allies. Ultimately, just as stated in the last line of "Sentenced", in the violent clashes for control and power between the English, Spanish, and the American powers (colonisers and settler colonisers), Native Americans were the worst hit.

In applying Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony to the colonial rule of Native America, one can understand the means through which the European colonisers established and maintained their dominance over the natives.

Gramsci's concept of hegemony refers to the dominance exercised by a ruling group, that goes beyond economic and political power, reaching into the culture, institutions and more importantly, ideology of the society. Those aware of the history of the native lands hold the knowledge that every action of the colonisers towards the Native Americans was to assert their hegemony over the native population. Gramsci describes hegemony as-

spontaneous consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group, consent "historically" caused by the prestige (and therefore by the trust) accruing to the dominant group because of its position and function in the world of production (Femia 42).

However, unlike Gramsci's argument that a successful hegemony stems from securing the consent of the classes being subordinated, the colonisers were more inclined towards coercive methods, which were more often violent and gory in nature.

The European colonial forces and the American powers fought bloody battles with the native people to take control of their lands, while also forging treaties and policies to do the same. Though treaty negotiations held between colonial officials and tribe chiefs may come across as a more consent-conscious act on the part of the colonial powers, very often, they were extremely unjust and exploitative in nature. The post-American War of Independence appeared to have brought in some peaceful dealings (later ratified in various treaties), between the settlers and the native tribes, however, Native Americans were still seen as a stain on a progressive country (Hall).

James Harris Guy's (Chickasaw) "The White Man Wants The Indian's Home," is preceded by his letter to Alfred B. Meacham, who worked to initiate a fundamental change in the public's view of Native Americans in the 1800s. The letter was written in response to Meacham's journal, *Council Fire*, which was pro-Native American. The letter highlights the failure of the U.S. government (the whites) to recognise the Native Americans as human beings. Guy fervently speaks of the whites taking away the land of his people.

The first two stanzas of this poem reflect the two manners in which the settler colonisers exerted their hegemonic rule over the natives. In failure of the willing displacement of the indigenous population, the colonisers would coercively make the Native Americans move off their lands, subsequently framing treaties resulting in their claim over the native lands and often, the dissolution of indigenous tribes.

The white man wants the Indian's home, He envies
 them their land;
 And with his sweetest words he comes
 To get it, if he can.

And if we will not give our lands
 And plainly tell him so,
 He then goes back, calls up his clans,
 And says, "Let's make them go." (Guy, 1-8)

With the Indian Removal Act of 1830, the settler colonisers institutionalised the act of forcing the Native American people off their lands for the benefit of European settlement. After a series of battles and bloody massacres, native

survivors were coercively displaced onto reservations which were proclaimed to be for the independent functioning of native councils and governance. However, even today, within the 300 odd reservations in the United States of America, Native Americans are forced to endure various harsh conditions such as violence, poverty, and discrimination. Despite being just 13 lines, Jack Scoltock's poem "Reservation", essentially captures the bitter reality of native life on these reservations while also highlighting the hegemonic ability of the colonisers to deny the native people of their lands while pushing them off onto reservations.

They forced us

To live

In a place

We learned to hate

Reservation

The braves

Couldn't hunt

Couldn't fish

No rivers

No buffalo

We grew old

Before our time

In the Reservation (Scoltock, 1-13)

Having no access to their once abundant and lush lands, Native Americans are now considered to be one of the most impoverished ethnic groups in the United States (The Borgen Project). The indigenous group is more prone to chronic diseases due to the inadequate access to medical care. Apart from healthcare,

Native American reservations also suffer from inadequate housing facilities and sanitation.

The colonisers' attitudes towards the native population stem from the Eurocentric worldview that they held. In his noted work, *Orientalism* (1978), renowned postcolonial theorist, Edward Said, explores the concept of the Other, in relation to the Western construction of the East. According to Joy Porter, in relation to the Native Americans, this view came into play when Christopher Columbus first arrived in the Americas and came across the native people. His "*sense of cultural and religious superiority was such that because the Indians he first encountered did not speak his own language, he deemed them to have no conceptual language at all*" (Porter 44).

To justify colonisation, the West painted the natives of the colonised world as the antithesis to themselves. To the West, the natives were the inferior and savage other who needed to be civilised. In regarding the natives as less than human, the European colonisers justified their unjust expansion of their territories that forced the Native Americans off their land. "*In his 1783 letter to James Duane, Washington called Native peoples 'savage as the wolf. . . both being beasts of prey tho' they differ in shape'*" (Whyatt). By crafting an essentially savage v/s civilised image, the Americans attempted to carry out an "ethnic cleansing" which President Jefferson however termed to be as the ultimate civilising of the natives by removing them from their homelands (Porter 50).

As discussed by Ann Picard in her work *Death by Boarding School: "The Last Acceptable Racism" and the United States' Genocide of Native Americans*,

The white settlers had more rights to transfer the land than did the first human inhabitants of that land. The Court described the Indians as being "of

that class who are said by jurists not to be citizens, but perpetual inhabitants with diminutive rights (Piccard 142).

This process of ridding the natives of their traditional ways of life and forcefully assimilating them into the white mainstream society saw the establishment of dozens of Indian Boarding schools for the same. During the opening of the first school, Richard Henry Pratt (cavalry captain) delivered a speech in which he declared “*kill the Indian in him, and save the man*” (Little).

Linda Legarde Grover’s (Anishinaabe) poem, "Everything You Need To Know In Life You’ll Learn In Boarding School", details the brutalities meted out to native children at these boarding schools. Native American children were forcefully taken away from their parents and homes and placed in these schools which were aimed at severing the ties between them and their native cultures. Those parents who refused to send their children to school were punished. On entry into these schools, they were renamed, stripped of their traditional clothing, and their hair (considered to be deeply sacred and symbolic) was chopped off. They were forced to convert to Christianity and adopt the language and way of life of the colonisers-

Speak English. Forget the language of your
grandparents. It is dead. Forget their teachings.

They are unGodly and ignorant. Cleanliness is
next to Godliness. Indians are not clean. Your
parents did not teach you proper hygiene. Stay
in line. (Grover, 1-6)

If children spoke their native language or practised any of their native traditions, they were violently punished. They were forced to endure “*rampant physical, sexual, and emotional abuse*” (Waxman). In May 2022, a more than 100-page

report was released by the U.S. Department of the Interior on the federal boarding schools which were designed to assimilate Native Americans into the mainstream white American culture. More than 500 deaths of native children were reported, a number which is believed to increase during the course of the department's ongoing investigation.

Forget the language of
your grandparents. It is dead. If you are heard speaking it
you will kneel on a navy bean for one hour. We will ask if
you have learned your lesson. You will answer. In English.
Spare the rod and spoil the child. We will not spare the rod.
We will cut your hair. We will shame you. We will lock you
in the basement. Learn from that. Improve yourself.

You'll never amount to anything. Speak English. (Grover, 26-33)

Picard's detailing of the U.S. government's decision to forcefully assimilate the Native Americans into the white mainstream society in her work is worth mentioning as it provides a vivid description of the reality of the time, thus adding to the already grave imagery found in the poetry being used for this analysis.

A major policy shift by the BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs] occurred at the end of the Civil War. When that conflict drew to a close in 1865, Congress was tired of war and dismayed by the lack of unity within the country, so it decided Natives would be forced to assimilate to white society and, more important, become good citizens of the United States. That could not happen if the government allowed Natives to retain their lands, their culture and their sovereignty.

Thus began the sordid legacy of the Indian boarding schools. Forced assimilation persisted until passage of the 1953 Indian Termination Act, which purported to give Native Americans full citizenship in the U.S., but which simultaneously stripped them of their sovereignty, their lands, and their cultures. Apparently when all else fails, taking a people's children is the U.S. version of a "final solution." In 1879 the federal government undertook to destroy all Native American culture by sending Indian children, forcibly when necessary, to day or boarding schools. The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) was responsible for the boarding schools, and the fact that the BIA originated in the war department speaks volumes. Its role in the boarding school horrors has been well documented elsewhere, and is not subject to any reasonable dispute (Piccard 151-52).

Unfortunately, the irony lies in The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) acting as an advocate for the indigenous people today, albeit out of genuine intentions.

While it has been established and evidently proven that the colonisers' attitude and treatment of the Native Americans stems from their Eurocentric belief of the indigenous people being the other to them, it is still more generalised in concept. Across all the histories of the globe there occur certain commonalities, be it conflict and bloodshed, cultural exchange, environmental impact or technological advancement. However, one stark similarity in all the histories of the globe, especially with the element of settlement and post-civilisation, is the violence and oppression meted out against women.

From time immemorial, women have always been at the receiving end of some of the worst brutalities committed in the name of war, religion, and societal norms. Women have been cast aside as the weaker, inferior other, with people such as Sigmund Freud (who is criticised for his misogynistic views) claiming, "*Women*

oppose change, receive passively, and add nothing of their own" (qtd in Cherry).

Very few societies have treated their women with the respect, authority and equality that they deserve. In the case of women from previously colonised nations, the reality is further darkened due to the double oppression faced by them, first for being women and next for being women of colour. Women's rights were marginalised with the reinforcement and institutionalisation of the patriarchal system of power and domination that came with colonialism.

However, in the Americas, prior to the arrival of Christopher Columbus, Native American women were treated with respect and equality, and often possessed power and autonomy. Native American women were an integral part of tribal life, in fact, they often had an active role in the political functioning of tribes, occasionally being made tribal chiefs.

As mentioned in Chapter Two, Native American women are the most susceptible to violent crimes than any other minority group. This violence has its direct roots in colonisation rather than the native culture. However, violence against native women was a central aspect in the colonial strategy of conquest and genocide. It was evident that the colonial drive to exterminate the native people focused on the massacre of Native American women. This history of violence has continued to plague the lives of the indigenous women today, in fact setting a precedent for the violent crimes that these women are forced to endure daily. Thousands of native women go missing, never to be heard and seen again, ending up as mere statistics, or simply going unnoticed.

Gayatri Spivak's concept of the subaltern can be used in the analysis of the poetry of Native American women. In her seminal work, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), Spivak essentially argues that the subaltern, or those that have been pushed

into the margins of society, have no voice to speak for themselves within the dominant political and social structure and discourse. Being situated within the colonial context, Spivak's presentation of the concept can be used to analyse the plight of Native American women. Native American women's poetry provides a unique perspective of the reality of being a woman and a native in the colonial times and now in the United States of America.

Tanaya Winder's (Duckwater Shoshone, Southern Ute, and Pyramid Lake Paiute) "Love Lessons in a Time of Settler Colonialism," examines the experiences of Native American women within the framework of settler colonialism. Winder's use of the epigraph by Leann Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, writer and artist) highlights the invisible state of the indigenous women in being the subaltern- "I am not murdered, and I am not missing, but parts of me have been disappeared." In the very act of acknowledging the ever-present violence and trauma being inflicted on the women, with or without direct harm to them, Winder provides a safe space and voice for the voiceless within her words. She speaks of the various dimensions through which the colonisers exerted their dominance over the indigenous people, be it through spiritual dominance, political or cultural. The lines, "From Industrial Schools to forced assimilation, genocide means removal of those who birth nations —/ our living threatens. Colonization has been choking / us for generations" (Winder, 3-5), draw attention to colonial atrocities aimed to eradicate the Native American people and their way of life, that forever mark the history of the native people.

Winder emphasises the constant threat of exploitation and violence that Native American women faced during colonisation and still continue to face, which is a direct result of the intersection of gender, race, and the colonisation of their

lands. Winder draws on the collective nature of the native women's trauma as well as resilience by referencing the #MeToo movement. At the same time, through an ecofeminist perspective, we see how the violation of the Native American lands transcends to the reality of the indigenous women.

There is danger in being seen, our bodies are targets
marked for violence. We carry the Earth's *me too* inside us, a howling wind,
our mothers & their mothers swallowed these bullets long ago.

The voices ricochet *I wish I were invisible I wish I were invisible I wish*
echoes in my eardrums — we know what it's like to live in fear. (Winder,
lines 7-12)

While the period of colonisation has ended, Native American women have not been able to breathe easy. The reality of being the subject of a violent crime or simply vanishing without a trace, is all too real for them. Yet, despite this cruel existence, the indigenous women still possess strength and resilience, doing as much as they can to resist the seemingly never-ending oppression. Their strength and will-power stems from having to look out for, and fight for one another. Winder's very act of writing serves as a manner of reclaiming and reasserting the experiences and strength of the Native American women. While the poem is a harsh reminder of the brutality indigenous women have and continue to face, it still ends with a message of hope, that despite the trauma and injustice, they continue to breathe and fight for themselves and for each other.

We breathe and speak and sing for survival. We carve out in lines; we
write — *I know joy I know pain I know love*

I know love I know — lessons we've carried throughout time. Should I go missing: don't stop searching; drag every river until it turns red and the waters of our names

stretch a flood so wide it catches everything. And we find each other whole and sacred, alive and breathing and breathing and breathing.

(Winder, lines 13-18)

The colonisers treatment of the Native American women was a thousand times worse than the treatment of the women of their own race. Simply for existing as women of a coloured race, indigenous women have had to face unspeakable barbarity for centuries, that goes against the sacredness with which they were treated during pre-Columbian times. An old Native American saying goes –

The Elders say the men should look at women in a sacred way. The men should never put women down or shame them in any way. When we have problems, we should seek their counsel. We should share with them openly. A woman has intuitive thought. She has access to another system of knowledge that few men develop. She can help us understand. We must treat her in a good way (shift.is).

While the analysis of these poems has provided a historical trace of the colonisation of the Native American lands, it has mainly focused on amplifying the experiences and struggles of the Native American people. It may be possible that every aspect of the colonisation of the native lands has not been captured, nevertheless, an attempt has been made to highlight the most important ones. From having their lands stolen from them, to the genocide of thousands of their brethren, to the attempted eradication of their way of life, the Native American people have

been to hell and back for centuries. All the poems in this chapter have done justice in capturing the various aspects of the reality of the indigenous people during the period of colonisation. Through their words, the poets have given a voice to those who were left unheard for a very long time.

CHAPTER FOUR- THE COLONIAL AFTERMATH AND POEMS OF PERSEVERANCE

"Let me be a free man, free to travel, free to stop, free to work, free to trade where I choose my own teachers, free to follow the religion of my fathers, free to think and talk and act for myself, and I will obey every law, or submit to the penalty."

— Heinmot Tooyalaket (Chief Joseph), Nez Perce Leader

4.1 Situating Native American Voices in a Postcolonial World

In Chapter One of this dissertation, it has been established that some scholars believe that the critical approach of Postcolonialism doesn't apply to Native Americans as they never attained independence from their colonisers (either the British or the settler colonisers). In C.L.Innes book *The Cambridge Introduction to Postcolonial Literatures in English*, she states,

Indeed, given that indigenous Australian Aborigines and Native Americans have yet to recover their territory and achieve self-government, it has been claimed that countries such as Australia and Canada should be classified as not 'post-colonial' but 'colonial' (Innes 2).

However, while she draws an occasional reference to Canada during the course of her book, she does not include the Native Americans of the United States in her work. Nevertheless, she references Stuart Hall in admitting that there is a need to avoid limiting oneself to the confines of the term and instead strive to modify and question them.

As Stuart Hall remarks, "Those deploying the concept must attend...carefully to its discriminations and specificities and/or establish more clearly at what level of abstraction the term is operating and how this

avoids a spurious “universalisation”... Not all societies are “post-colonial” *in the same way*... But this does not mean they are not “post-colonial” *in any way* (Innes 3).

Just as argued by Jyotirmaya Tripathy, delinking postcolonialism from the official decolonisation of lands in such a manner that it prioritises the postcolonial subject rather than the territory ensures that “*postcolonialism is not just a temporal marker of the aftermath of colonial experience, but a position of resistance to colonial discursive practices*” (Tripathy 43). In this regard, the poetry of Native Americans must be looked at as a tool of resistance and rejection of colonial narratives that carved out a typecast corner for the indigenous population for centuries. While in Chapter Three, the poems analysed spoke of the countless colonial atrocities committed against the Native American people, this chapter seeks to highlight the Native American population’s status post the period of colonisation, yet at the same time, laud the native population on their efforts to persevere, despite the ever-present trials and tribulations.

The poems analysed in this chapter are- “Sure You Can Ask Me A Personal Question”- Diane Burns, “Missing More Than a Word”- Tanaya Winder, “Through Indigenous Eyes”- Pernell Thomas, “Daredevil”- Sherman Alexie, “Can You Feel the Native American in Me”- M.L.Smoker, “Trudell”- Alex Jacobs, “What I Keep”- Linda Hogan, “Our Drums Will Forever Sound- Roy Acosta”, “We Are The People Of Long Ago”- Doreen Chavarria, “An American Sunrise”- Joy Harjo, and “Indian Singing In 20th Century America”- Gail Tremblay. The concepts selected for the analysis of these poems are ‘exoticism’, ‘subaltern’, ‘worlding’, ‘identity’ and ‘writing back’.

4.2 Depictions of a Contemporary Native American World

Colonial narratives of the Native American world pushed forth unjustified stereotypes and misconceptions of the native population. For centuries, with exaggerated or often false accounts such as the Captive Narratives that were produced in these colonised lands, the native population were given a bad rap with no way of countering these tall tales. These misconstructions have followed Native Americans into the 21st century, with the non-native population believing in various myths such as - the use of Native American mascots being honourable for the indigenous population (Gover), the term Native American defining the entire native population, all Native Americans being alcoholics or the native population receiving free benefits from the U.S. government (Gover).

To debunk these assumptions- at the beginning of this dissertation, attention was drawn to the use of the term Native American, not as representing the entire native population, but simply as a means of maintaining consistency. The term Native American can in no way stand for the indigenous population as a whole because the population consists of numerous tribes who have their own unique identity, and each one holds a preference as to how they'd like to be addressed.

Native American mascots have very little to do with Native Americans...They reflect and reinforce the fundamental features of racial and gendered privilege in a settler society, particularly a sense of entitlement to take and remake without consent and to do so without the burden of history, the challenges of knowing, or the risk of penalty....(King 31-32).

The notion that the indigenous population receives a free ride of benefits from the U.S. government is anything but true. From crippling access to healthcare to living on reservations that lack adequate resources, Native Americans suffer a poor

existence, in addition to having to pay taxes like the average American (Gover). Finally, to address the most common fallacy that all Native Americans are alcoholics-

According to a study published by the National Institute On Alcohol Abuse And Alcoholism (NIAAA), white people — specifically, white men — are more likely than any other demographic group to drink alcohol on a daily basis, start drinking at a younger age, and drive while under the influence of alcohol. Furthermore, this same study acknowledges that the alcoholism that does exist within Native American culture is linked to the culture's history of economic disadvantages and racial discrimination. In other words, those that *do* suffer from alcoholism within the Native community may be trapped in a cycle of oppression and hardship that's difficult to break free from (Ridgway).

Diane Burns' (Anishinaabe-Lac Courte Oreilles and Chemehuevi) poem "Sure You Can Ask Me a Personal Question" speaks of how routine it has become for Native Americans to be met with stereotypical notions about their population. To make this obvious, Burns uses a bored tone to convey the recurring nature of these questions, and at the same time, the ability to predict them proves just how often she has heard them. The ignorant and demeaning nature of the questions is very evidently disguised under the pretence of genuine interest in the native's ethnicity.

One startling yet very true assumption is that the native population is a dying race. While it is of no contest that the colonisation of the Americas led to a genocide that killed millions of Native Americans, the aforementioned is far from true, and the poem establishes the same while also contradicting the belief that the native

population is from India or confined to just a handful of known tribes- No, not from India.

No, not Apache.

No, not Navajo.

No, not Sioux.

No, we are not extinct.

Yes, Indian. (Burns, 5-10)

While the indigenous population's way of life is intricately woven with nature, the depth and true meaning of this is very often just chalked up to mere spirituality. "No, I didn't make it rain tonight./ Yeah. Uh-huh. Spirituality./ Uh-huh. Yeah. Spirituality. Uh-huh. Mother Earth" (Burns, 31-34). Additionally, based off of representations in Hollywood and the media, many non-natives hold the misconception that being Native American equals to knowing every last bit of the native culture, which is not possible. As Kevin Gover puts it in his article on "Five Myths about American Indians," -

But it was Hollywood that established our monolithic modern vision of American Indians, in blockbuster westerns — such as "Stagecoach" (1939), "Red River" (1948) and "The Searchers" (1956) — that depict all Indians, all the time, as horse-riding; tipi-dwelling; bow-, arrow- and rifle-wielding; buckskin-, feather- and fringe-wearing warriors. Yet vast differences — in culture, ethnicity and language — exist among the 567 federally recognized Indian nations across the United States (Gover).

Burns' herself writes in the poem, "No, I don't know where you can get peyote. / No, I don't know where you can get Navajo rugs real cheap. / No, I didn't make this. I bought it at Bloomingdales" (Burns, 25-27).

Alongside these various stereotypes of the native population, the colonisation of the indigenous lands gave rise to what is often referred to as the colonial exotic, now postcolonial exoticism. First used to refer to '*alien, introduced from abroad, not indigenous*' (Ashcroft et al. 101: 2007), the term has gradually evolved to include the intersection of power, representation, and culture dynamics. In postcolonial literature, the notion of exoticism is related to the process by which the otherness or difference of a cultural space, artefact, or practice of the native is viewed as a source of stimulation and marvel for the coloniser (Forsdick, 2001). In this regard, the native became an exotic being when placed in juxtaposition with the colonial powers, and everything from their way of life to their very appearance was exoticised. Burns highlights how Native Americans are exoticised based on their looks stating-

So that's where you got those high cheekbones.

Your great grandmother, huh?

An Indian Princess, huh?

Hair down to there?

Let me guess. Cherokee?...

This ain't no stoic look.

This is my face. (Burns, 12-16; 38-39)

Unfortunately, this exoticisation of Native Americans was worse for the women as it led to the development of a colonial fetish for native women. Sexual violations and violent crimes against women from the indigenous population have roots that can be traced directly to the colonisation of the native lands. The over-sexualisation of native women has today found its place through cultural appropriation and the depiction of native women as sex symbols in the media. "*From Halloween*

*costumes, to popular stereotypes, and to offensive sex symbols, continuation of this harmful representation can **greatly affect the Indigenous community***” (Chakasim).

A Microsoft Bing Copilot search of Native American costumes for women generates the following results:

1. Traditional Native American Costume: This classic costume typically includes a fringed dress or skirt made from faux suede or other earthy materials...Pair it with a colorful headband adorned with feathers...Add accessories like moccasins, beaded jewelry, and perhaps a small tomahawk or bow and arrow...The look is inspired by the traditional clothing of Native American tribes.
2. Sexy Native American Costume: For a more daring twist, you can opt for a sexy version of the Native American costume...Think shorter hemlines, fitted dresses, and playful details...Fringe, beads, and feather accents can still be incorporated into this style.
3. Warrior Princess Costume: Channel your inner warrior with a costume that combines strength and elegance....Consider a warrior princess outfit featuring faux leather, intricate beadwork, and feathered accessories...Add a headdress or a feathered hair clip for an authentic touch.
4. Tribal Tease Costume: If you want a modern twist on the traditional look, go for a “Tribal Tease” ensemble...This style takes inspiration from Native American aesthetics but adds contemporary elements...Think bold prints, unique cuts, and unexpected details.

While the above generation may be guised as an attempt to celebrate Native American cultural heritage, keep note of the descriptions- ‘Sexy Native American Costume’ and ‘Tribal Tease Costume’. Given that an AI-generated response isn’t

the most accurate source, it still comes from various sites and pages. The stereotype of the 'Indian Princess' (often exemplified with the false narrative of Pocahontas, named Mataoka Amonute) further fetishises indigenous women, "*depicting them as desirable, beautiful, and untouchable, by, mostly, White men. She is usually submissive, helps the settlers out, and falls in love with a White man instead of the man her father and/or tribe "picked" for her*" (Chakasim).

These oppressive determinants result in the Native American women's position as the subaltern. As discussed in the previous chapter, Spivak's *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988), highlights the voicelessness of those who have been pushed into the margins of society within a dominant political and social structure and discourse. In the context of the 21st century, Spivak's presentation of the concept provides a unique perspective on the reality of being an indigenous woman in the United States of America. In the United States and Canada, the number of Indigenous women who go missing is countless, and this often goes unnoticed by authorities.

In 2015, the Canadian government announced a national inquiry into the epidemic of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG). In June, the commissioners found the state responsible for "a race-based genocide". The treatment of Indigenous women is no less alarming across the border: while Canada collects some data, the US federal government does not track how many people like Lonebear go missing or turn up murdered (Hylton).

Numerous articles capture the grim reality of native women who are murdered or suddenly go missing. These women are often preyed upon by serial killers and criminals since the authorities overlook them. One such infamous case is that of the

serial killer called ‘The Boozing Barber’ in Vancouver, who targeted vulnerable indigenous women and killed them by alcohol poisoning. A play, *The Unnatural and Accidental Women*, by Marie Clements, depicts this grim case. Similarly, another serial killer, Robert Pickton, preyed on 49 marginalised women-

The case became a flash point in the wider issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada. In 2012, a provincial government inquiry into the case concluded that “blatant failures” by police — including inept criminal investigative work, compounded by police and societal prejudice against sex trade workers and Indigenous women — led to a “tragedy of epic proportions” (Butts).

While in recent years, the attention towards this “hidden epidemic” (as called by former North Dakota senator Heidi Heitkamp) has increased (qtd. in Gable), enough isn’t done to ensure the safety of Native American women and girls. However, Native American women themselves are calling to attention the atrocities committed against them, making their voices heard through various means possible.

Tanaya Winder’s (Duckwater Shoshone, Southern Ute, and Pyramid Lake Paiute) poetry is one such call to action against the crimes against women. In “Missing More Than Just a Word”, Winder highlights the vulnerable plight of the women of the native nations caused by the colonisation of their lands. Through her poem, she seeks to bring to light the ever-present crimes against native women and the fact that they are more likely to be at the receiving end of violent crimes as compared to any other race. Winder’s use of crime statistics highlights the invisibility of the Native American as the subaltern.

1 in 3 Native women will be raped in her lifetime...

not guilty not enough

evidence not prosecutable not our jurisdiction..

*Native women are 2.5 times more likely to be sexually assaulted
compared to all other races...*

*A recent government study found that there were 14 federal human
trafficking investigations in Indian Country between 2013 and
2016. During that same period the FBI investigated 6,100
Elsewhere (Winder, 4;6-9;15-18).*

However, while Spivak argues that the subaltern lacks the means to make their voices heard and must thus be represented, instead of seeking representation through other means, Winder does it herself. Given the adverse impact of colonisation and its effects on the native population, for the longest time, the voices of Native American women have been silenced and pushed into oblivion. Despite this evident oppression, indigenous women are bringing representation to themselves, fighting to have their voices heard and struggling to bring themselves into visibility.

Let us poem a place where you cannot erase us into white space.

....

....

....

Let us dig to remind ourselves our roots are ancestral
and there is nothing deeper
than these sacred, dirt-covered hands (Winder, 19-22).

Just as how Winder writes into perspective the need to bring into the fore a separate space for indigenous women, Native American women have taken it upon themselves to herald the atrocities committed against them. They work tirelessly to

find their missing friends, relatives, and acquaintances while fighting for justice for those who have met brutal ends. While their relentless efforts are often met with the lackadaisical attitudes of authorities, they continue to push for reforms and the reshaping of the criminal justice system in a way that values their lives in a quest to provide a safe space for their little girls and the generations to come.

Echo-Hawk is one of many Indigenous women demanding a reshaping of the criminal justice system in a way that values their lives. She and others are pushing the issue to the forefront by pressuring public officials and policymakers to fund efforts to address the problem and by showing them, through testimonials and research, the cost of inaction.

“We refuse to let our people die in silence,” Echo-Hawk said (Brewer).

While Native American women were pushed into the constraints of the subaltern, the colonial powers, as part of their process of othering the native population, worked to assimilate and eradicate the native way of life. One such manner was through what Gayatri Spivak termed as the process of ‘worlding’. According to Spivak, worlding refers to “*the way in which colonized space is brought into the ‘world’, that is, made to exist as part of a world essentially constructed by Euro-centrism*” (Ashcroft et al. 225: 2007). In other words, the natives view themselves in terms of how the colonial powers have recorded them. “*This transformation occurs through acts such as **cartography**, **writing**, or simply **traveling** over the colonized land*” (Raja). However, more than mapping the native lands, worlding played a significant role in the colonial education system, where natives were taught to view themselves through the lens of the colonial powers. In this regard, the natives “*start[ed] seeing themselves as they [were] recorded and represented by their masters*” (Raja).

Pernell Thomas's poem, "Through Indigenous Eyes", is a testament to this concept. It speaks of the conflict between the traditional Native American ways of life and the reality that has been fed to the colonised population by the whites. In establishing missionary boarding schools for the native population, the white man essentially whitewashed the natives into believing that their way of life was inferior as opposed to the white way. As Thomas puts it-

I can speak the tongue of the white

I've learned to read and wright

All my teachers say "he is bright"

They say indians are wrong and White is right (Thomas, 8-11).

The European colonisers made the indigenous population believe that by being Christians alone, they could find true God. "Grandfather, I am a Christian /And through the White Christian / I have gained faith, hope and salvation" (16-18) By continuously reinforcing the stereotypes and misconceptions of the native population, the colonisers led many natives to believe in the same, regardless of the truth.

The poem brings out these aspects in the form of a conversation between a grandfather and his grandson. In doing so, it creates a definite difference in the old Native American beliefs and ways, and the younger generations often suffer from a conflict in identity due to the influence of the white culture. The grandfather struggles to teach his grandson the traditional ways of their native people, while his grandson has been led to believe the colonial stereotypes set against his people.

Why my grandson, do you not

Hear what I am saying?

The White culture you're embracing

Forgets about the poor and worships the rich

A woman is a whore, no excuse me a bitch

Do you hear what I'm saying?

All they do is take

But never give

You'll make a mistake,

If this is how you chose to live.

Open your Indigenous eyes (Thomas, 38-48).

With the blurring of the truth and the disregard for the role colonisation has had to play in the plight of the Native Americans, by painting the indigenous population as the creators of their wretched existence, it is easy for the white race to disassociate themselves from the issues that plague the native population. When the natives themselves hold these beliefs, there arises a conflict in their identity- what they innately are and the false notions they attempt to fight against or end up embodying-

I see through these indigenous eyes,

Violence, racial segregation and stereotypes

We are known as the drunken indians

Who abuse their own kin I see my people,

Indians Who use and abuse a bottle of gin

Who have no concept of 'sin'

They go around beating women and children

They go around polluting and littering our ancestral lands

This is the way of the Indian

...and if this is what you want me to be

Then count me out (Thomas, 50-60).

These lines convey various fallacies held against the native population. It also conveys the issues that plague the population as a result of colonisation. The alcoholism, the violence are rooted in the historical trauma that the Native Americans are left to grapple with. However, evidently, the grandson in the poem has been led to believe that these issues stem from the natives themselves.

Native Americans struggle with more than double the suicide rate as compared to the rest of the population of the U.S.A. Having to grapple with multiple risk factors such as historical trauma, loss of connection to their culture, poverty, unemployment, lack of easy access to healthcare and education, housing problems, violence, as well as having to struggle with mental health illnesses such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and anxiety disorders, makes them extremely vulnerable to suicide (Bourne).

Sherman Alexie (Spokane), describes in his poem, “Daredevil”, of the unending reality of the Native American people who for no fault of theirs, find themselves in conditions so deplorable, forcing them to take their own lives. This reality isn’t just reserved for adults but teenagers as well.

On her birthday, in 1963

My aunt and her friends drank antifreeze.

Fourteen teenage Indians died that night.

My aunt survived but she soon went blind (Alexie, 1-4).

Antifreeze poisoning results in a slow death (Higuera). With an assumption that its consumption was deliberate, one can conclude that the speaker’s aunt and friends, in drinking this poison and paradoxically choosing to end their lives on a day meant

to celebrate birth, preferred a slow and painful death as opposed to life. While the deaths of fourteen teenagers in a single night may appear to be an exaggeration, it does not squash the reality of countless indigenous people taking their own lives as a means of escaping their realities.

4.3 The Question of Identity Forged with Perseverance

“Identities are not stable points of arrival, but are processual. They are negotiated, recreated, discarded in accordance with contexts of power within the structures of race, class, age and sex.”

- Nonhlanhla Dlamini

Countries that were once under colonial rule often emerge with a postcolonial identity, a complex and unique set of characteristics that arise in individuals due to the impact of colonisation and, in some cases, the subsequent decolonisation. Shaped by the historical experiences of colonialism and constantly evolving with cultural influences, postcolonial identity encompasses how individuals and communities navigate and redefine their sense of belonging and self in a postcolonial society.

Native American identity, in terms of postcolonialism, is multifaceted, reflecting the unique history, cultures, as well as diverse experiences of the indigenous people. It cannot be chiselled into a singular, uniform existence due to the multiple and diverse presence of numerous tribes that pride themselves on their uniqueness. However, colonialism's impact on the native lives has made it difficult for many Native Americans to fully comprehend and make sense of their identity. Existing in mainstream American society also influences the makeup of this identity. Situating the Native American identity within the culture and society isn't the sole determinant of the claim of indigenous identification. As opposed to other

racess, Native American identity is, in part, politically officialised by what is known as tribal citizenship. *“Most places have tribes that function as distinct governments and tribal members are really citizens of those tribal nations. Deciding who gets to be a citizen is something that tribal governments decide”* (Martin and Treuer).

Native Americans are often asked about their identity in a way other Americans are not: Are you enrolled? What does that even mean? Is it fair, is it real? Where does subjective identity and registered national identity end? Is identity changeable or adaptable? Does more than one Tribe count? (Geboe)

In the analysis of the previous poems, we have seen how colonial-produced misconceptions, perceptions and stereotypes against the Native Americans adversely impacted the population and continue to do so. The process of worlding has been established to have manipulated the natives into embodying the colonial-dictated identity.

In analysing the issue of identity among the Native American population, W.E.B. Du Bois’ concept of Double Consciousness articulates the internal conflict present in Native Americans whose consciousness exists on the borders of being Native and then American. While the concept of double consciousness was conceptualised with the African American population in focus, it can be used to analyse the duality in the identities of the Native American people, who are an embodiment of their native heritage as well as influenced by mainstream American society and culture.

Native American poetry serves as a medium of celebrating native culture. It enables indigenous writers to express their struggles while establishing their identity as Native Americans. These poems reflect the heritage and connection

between the natural world and the native people, as well as highlight the extraordinary resilience of the indigenous people, all aspects which are of precedence to the identity of the Native Americans.

“Can You Feel The Native American In Me” by M. L. Smoker (Assiniboiné and Sioux) uses a first-person narrative that highlights the experiences of the native people, giving the reader a glimpse into not just their typecast lives but also the duality of their identity. The poem begins with a petty yet intentional incident of a white girl denting the speaker’s friend’s car, both of who are Native Americans.

a white girl in Wolf Point who slammed the door of her boyfriend’s Ford pick-up into the passenger side of Lara’s then new car. Lara was pissed, got out to kick the girl’s ass but they sped out of the Town Pump’s parking lot too fast. That girl was scared. Lara came back to the car and we laughed at that dent, but most of all we laughed at that fear (Smoker, 2-5).

In having to face constant prejudices from non-natives, some native people often choose to accept them not as their truth but as a reality they have to live with. The line, “but most of all we laughed at that fear” (Smoker, 5), depicts the humour the girls find in the white girl’s unwarranted fear of them. The next part of the poem addresses the clash between native assimilation into white society and culture and the consciousness of the traditional indigenous ways of life. This contrast is brought out in the following lines “Driveway to uncle’s house, we’re bumping Tupac, get out, step into sweat lodge / Got a sick auntie. Take in a towel, leave out hip-hop beat, add in hand drum” (Smoker, 5-7).

The reference to Tupac Shakur (American hip-hop artist) brings in the influence of the American culture, but at the same time, the poem does highlight the awareness of the contrast between the two cultures, as well the aspects of family

and native community. This proves the double consciousness of the native people, which is very evident from the last lines of the poem, “Our uncle forgives us this time for being late and we are more sorry for this than we were for quitting the basketball team or for getting pregnant last year” (Smoker, 7-8). These lines prove that for the native people, despite having to live prejudiced lives, existing together as a tight-knit community is essential for them to survive and persevere. For Native American identity, group identity plays an important role in moulding a native individual’s identity.

Many Native authors argue that, “a person must be integrated into a society, not simply stand alone as an individual, in order to be fully human,” and this personhood is *“inseparably linked to sacred traditions, traditional homelands, and a shared history as indigenous people”* (Weaver, qtd. in Michalec).

In this respect, native identity is affected and shaped by any factor, be it sociohistorical or political (qtd. in Michalec), that affects the indigenous identity as a whole.

Alex Jacob’s (Akwesasne Mohawk) poem “Trudell” is an ode to John Trudell (Santee Dakota), a poet, musician, and activist for Native American rights. Having himself faced a lifetime of violence and tragedy, Trudell blended his activism with the arts. In turn, he inspired several Native Americans to follow in his footsteps. The poem speaks of the fear, unknowing, and violence that comes with being a Native American. Yet in the struggle to hold onto his native identity, he is forced to find strength, not just for himself, but for his family and brethren, who have experienced extreme hardships- “But I’m strong, strong for my son, strong for

my daughter / I'm strong for my mom, she seen it all / I'm strong for my dad,
worked himself to death (Jacobs, 8-10).

In simplistic yet grim descriptions, Jacobs vividly portrays the plight of countless indigenous people who, after internalising centuries of historical trauma, prejudiced attitudes, and violence, have lost their true native identity and ways of life, following the path of corrupting American society.

I'm strong for my people, who have been captured, killed,
Put away, tortured, brainwashed, left out to dry.
Strong for my people who can't see the light no more
The banished, the incarcerated, the cancerated, the polluted,
The chronic, the addicted, the consumerated, the consumed.
I'm strong for my people who only care about things
And turned their lives into GNPs CODs ATMs MFAs MBAs MIAs
Degrees of disconnection, financial portfolios instead of dreams,
Visions of power replaced by coercion, corruption and greed.

(Jacobs, 13-14; 16; 20-21; 26-29)

The poem also appears to signal the gullibility and naivety of some of the native people, who, given the benefit of the doubt, believe in the improvement of their lives and the future as a means of shadowing all the injustice that they faced for the longest time.

As long as they think history can never be repeated
As long as they never read the signs or open their eyes
Or listen to elders who hear the earth cry
As long as they allow their own children to become
Indoctrinated by a system that built on lies (Jacobs, 31-35).

Jacobs details various aspects of the mainstream American system that have caused the disconnection, disintegration, and destruction of the native way of life. Yet, at the same time, he speaks of having to find strength in his identity in the face of all this adversity and presumably continuing in the footsteps of Trudell. While the poem sheds a grim light on the state of those native people who have unfortunately internalised and embodied the historical colonial dictates, it serves as an ode to the resilience that is a crucial aspect of Native American identity.

The reclamation of native identity, which was devastated by the colonisation of the native lands and further suppressed by settler colonisation, can take place through native literature. Over centuries, Native American writers, through their writing, have provided alternate narratives to the colonial accounts of them and their lands, which prove to be factual to their experiences under colonialism. This is known as writing back, a concept coined originally by Salman Rushdie and further developed by Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin in their book *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literature*. The concept revolves around the challenging of Eurocentric notions of literature and language. It refers to how writers from previously colonised nations respond to the literary canon stemming from the colonial front.

Rather than do this through abrogation, which refers to the rejection of all forms of colonial culture, including the use of the colonial language, many Native American writers provide their alternate narratives through appropriation, which “*is the process by which the language is taken and made to ‘bear the burden’ of one’s own cultural experience, or, as Raja Rao puts it, to ‘convey in a language that is not one’s own the spirit that is one’s own’*”(Ashcroft et al. 38: 2004).

The use of the colonial language- English, to establish their own experiences and tell their own stories provides native writers with a powerful tool to assert themselves in the dominant discourse. It allows them to demand the acknowledgement of their existence and realities.

Linda Hogan's (Chikasaw) poem "What I Keep" focuses on the exploitation and loss caused by the European colonisation of the native lands. The opening of the poem evokes a sense of nostalgia, highlighting the mystical quality of their natural world before the coming of the European powers.

Once we had mountains
and you took them down.
It was enchanted before,
with the song of golden winds
of pollens from flowers
you also removed, as if it were the gold
you searched for (Hogan, 1-7).

The poem draws attention to the adverse effect colonialism had on nature, bringing to the fore the materialistic and exploitative nature of the colonisers.

You took the plants on ships
away from our beautiful woods
from the forest, ...
You took the birds, the rookeries of beautiful waters,
feathers for hats
made from animals of this land (Hogan, 11-13; 20-21).

The ability to freely express the consequences of colonisation while providing the realities of the native people in contrast to the colonisers' makes the poem one of

writing back- “we sent you away / with burning arrows and your fat ran across the earth” (Hogan, 9-10).

Hogan closes the poem with the reclamation and reassertion of the innate spirituality and faith of the native people.

But to myself, for myself

I keep my soul.

Our gods, your people

will never take (Hogan, 30-33).

Grappling with issues that swirl around identity and cultural transformation, Native American poets assert their right to reclaim and redefine their histories, narratives and voices. However, the choice to do it through abrogation or appropriation stems from the means by which they wish to challenge the previously given colonial structures and preserve their distinct cultural heritage and identity. The decision of many native writers to write in the language of the colonisers results in challenging the hegemony of the colonisers’ culture. It enables them to assert their existence and strength within this structure. It gives them the power to retell narratives and misconceptions and, at the same time, establish their own historical and cultural perspectives.

Along these very lines, “Our Drums Will Forever Sound” by Roy Acosta provides a native perspective of the tragic history of Native American displacement and the lasting impact of colonialism. In the opening lines of the poem, Acosta speaks of the simplicity of the native existence and then moves on to juxtapose it with the destruction wrought by the colonisers.

Living at peace with all that lived

We were simple people...

Never expecting the evil of man
Wanting to own what has always been
"The heart beneath our feet"
Destroying the great buffalo
Driving us from our land (Acosta, 2-3; 6-10).

By providing the native narrative of colonisation, Acosta counters the often falsified and exaggerated accounts of the colonial powers pertaining to the indigenous population. The unjust and inhumane treatment meted out to the native population and the manner in which the natives were painted in a wicked light are highlighted in the following lines-

They killed us in great numbers
So we fought back
When they won a battle it was a victory
When we won it was a massacre (Acosta, 12-15).

By mentioning some of the ghastliest events in the history of the Native Americans- "Wounded knee, Trail of Tears, Sand Creek, Battle at Bear River, Ywahoo Falls, The Children of / Moonbow Falls. / Only a few, many more to remember" (Acosta, 17-19), Acosta draws attention to the land that is stained with the blood of the native population. In this regard, the natives will always be bound to their land, which is not just a representation of physical territory but stands as a symbol of their cultural heritage. The poem acts as a testament to the endurance of the Native Americans and their ever-lasting presence on the land.

Just as "Our Drums Will Forever Sound", Doreen Chavarria's "We Are The People Of Long Ago" speaks of the simplicity and freedom the native people enjoyed during pre-Columbian times.

Long ago we were a happy people.

Free to roam the Plains and the foot hills.

Our life was simple and good.

Our way of enjoyment back then was to feast and give thanks to our

Creator for everything we had.

Back then our children were our future, to carry on our line, our breed of people, for all time.

We loved and cared, and nurtured them, there was never a thing called hitting or violation (Chavarria, 1-3; 5; 11-12).

However, she draws a contrast with the contemporary times, when Native Americans are forced to exist in a world that is often cruel to them and can be considered dystopic to an extent. Chavarria very evidently speaks of the doomed fate colonisation left for the Native Americans.

"Not like now, all we know is sadness and a Welfare cheque once a month."...

But now we drink liquor and hurt ourselves, and others.

We have forgotten how to care!

We have forgotten how to survive!..

"But our children now of this time and age, suffer with anguish and indignities, their bodies are then left like a piece of rotting carcass.

All because our people are too lost, they are blinded by this world.

(Chavarria, 4; 8-10; 13-15)

The Post-Apocalyptic Stress Syndrome (Pass), coined by Dr. Lawrence Gross (*Anishinaabe*), is defined to occur “when a culture experiences such a

massive shock that it never fully recovers” (qtd. in Yunkaporta). The theory essentially reflects the extreme and permanent effects of colonial violence, displacement, and cultural disruption experienced by the Native Americans. For the indigenous population, *“Colonisation was our apocalypse, and we are already living in a dystopian future, so we are ahead of the game”* (Nayuka Gorrie, qtd. in Yunkaporta).

According to Gross, it takes at least a century for a population to adapt after post-apocalyptic stress syndrome. In the meantime there is an understandable need to express both mourning and bravado in response to world-changing events. You can see it as a therapeutic way of coming to grips with past trauma without drowning in victimhood and despair in the present (Yunkaporta).

By contrasting the lives of the natives before the arrival of the colonisers with the contemporary times, Chavarria’s poem draws attention to this almost apocalyptic existence of the Native Americans. However, in doing so, she establishes the ability of the native people to now be able to provide realistic narratives of their colonial experiences while attempting to withstand the after-effects of colonisation. It also cements the fact that, as a people, the Native American population has been able to survive such a catastrophic occurrence and is not a dying race as many claim it to be.

Joy Harjo (Mvskoke, first Native American U.S. Poet Laureate), in her poem, “An American Sunrise”, speaks of the constant conflict Native Americans must deal with in existing in a contemporary American world while trying to stay connected to their cultural roots. The opening lines of the poem- “We were running out of breath, as we ran out to meet ourselves. We / Were surfacing the edge of our

ancestors' fights, and ready to Strike" (Harjo,1-2), speaks of the struggle of maintaining their ties to their past while having to cope with their current realities. The beauty of the poem lies in its reclamation and retelling of the stereotypes and typecast attitudes with which the native people are met.

It was difficult to lose days in the Indian bar if you were Straight.

Easy if you played pool and drank to remember to forget...

We

made plans to be professional — and did. And some of us could sing

so we drummed a fire-lit pathway up to those starry stars (Harjo, 3-6).

One of the most common ignorant presumptions of the native population is that they are all raging alcoholics. However, Harjo provides an alternate perspective to this notion by implying that the issue of alcoholism in some of the natives lies in their desire to escape from the hardships of their realities. Yet despite how they are viewed, the native population are hardworking people oftentimes, having to strive harder than the average non-native because of the lack of resources. Harjo also addresses the issue of religion. One of the central arguments for the justification of the colonisation of the native lands was the religion of the natives or, rather, the perceived lack of it.

Sin

Was invented by the Christians, as was the Devil, we sang. We

Were the heathens, but needed to be saved from them: Thin

Chance (Harjo, 6-9).

The colonisers painted the Native Americans to be savage heathens who had to be either "saved" through the conversion to Christianity if not eliminated. The poet's embracing of the label of 'heathens' is done so with the intention of

distinguishing the indigenous population from those who wished to eradicate their culture and very identity under the guise of salvation. The very people who preached of 'sin' and the 'devil', were the perpetrators of suffering and brutality from whom the natives needed to be saved.

However, the native population can rely only on the bonds that tie them to each other to persevere. To help them forge ahead amidst the anger and fear, they revert to their culture- “We knew we were all related in this story, a little gin / will clarify the dark and make us all feel like dancing. We / had something to do with the origins of blues and jazz” (Harjo, 9-11). The poem concludes on the lines that the native people continue to seek justice for the atrocities committed against them. Despite the false belief that the Native American race is a dying race, the indigenous population will always exist in America, the land that will always belong to them. “[F]orty years later and we still want justice. We are still America. We / know the rumors of our demise. We spit them out. They die / soon” (Harjo, 11-13).

In the 21st century, Native American writers strongly push for the reclamation of their narratives and the challenging of colonial narratives. They reassert the need to uphold their perspectives and identities through literature and other forms of expression. For many native writers, the process of writing back is extremely crucial as it is the rewriting of a distorted colonial history. *“I feel like, for Native writers, there's a kind of burden to catch the general reader up with what really happened, because history has got it so wrong and still continues to”* (Laubernds and Orange).

Gail Tremblay’s (Onondaga and Mi’Kmaq) poem “Indian Singing In 20th Century America” speaks of the native existence in white American society

centuries after colonisation. She expresses the duality of their existence and identity, which is neither wholly native nor entirely American.

We stumble out into streets;
patterns of wires invented by strangers
are strung between eye and sky,
and we dance in two worlds (Tremblay, 5-8).

While trying to grapple with the clash between their heritage and the contemporary world, the native people also face constant condemnatory and hackneyed stereotypical attitudes of the non-natives.

exotic curiosities in the other
which rushes headlong down highways,
watches us from car windows, explains
us to its children in words
that no one could ever make
sense of. ...
we go to jobs, the boss
always watching the clock to see
that we're on time (Tremblay, 10-15; 28-30).

Through evocative language and imagery, Tremblay confronts historical injustices, celebrates indigenous heritage, and reasserts the enduring presence of Native voices in the face of colonisation and cultural erasure while they continue to be treated like outcasts on their own land- "He tries to shut / out magic and hopes we'll make / mistakes or disappear" (Tremblay, 30- 32).

Tremblay's poem ultimately confronts the silencing of Native American narratives and experiences while maintaining the need to amplify the native voices in

contemporary society. The poem urges people to recognise the discrepancies of colonial legacies while striving to comprehend, recognise and respect the rights and cultural autonomy of the Native American people.

Change moves relentless,
the pattern unfolding despite their planning—
we're always there—singing round dance
songs, remembering what supports
our life—impossible to ignore (Tremblay, 35-39).

From illustrating the colonial-generated misconceptions and stereotypes that govern the non-native's treatment of them to drawing attention to the struggle with identity in mainstream American society to highlighting the Native Americans' strength to persevere despite always being dealt a bad hand, this chapter stands as a testament to the powerful existence of the native people. In America today, Native Americans are vociferously fighting to reclaim their identity and land which were stolen by colonisers. Each poem in this chapter has vividly expressed the urgency to eradicate the negative notions that engulf the indigenous population and instead embrace them as the survivors they truly are. The poems call for the celebration and the need to help preserve the Native American culture from slipping into oblivion.

Through their empowering words, the native poets give their brethren a chance to reclaim their identity and push forth more accurate alternatives to the colonial narratives that governed their lives for centuries. This chapter, therefore, accomplishes the goal of this dissertation, which was to explore the impact of colonisation on the Native American people while also serving as an ally to the causes of the indigenous population.

CHAPTER FIVE- CONCLUSION

"You have to look deeper, way below the anger, the hurt, the hate, the jealousy, the self-pity, way down deeper where the dreams lie, son. Find your dream. It's the pursuit of the dream that heals you."

-Billy Mills, Oglala Lakota

The United States of America is known as a nation of immigrants (Lind). It is a nation where thousands enter its golden shores or cross over its border walls in hopes of a better life for their families, also known as the 'American Dream' Yet, for a country that calls itself the land of the free, it holds a bloody, inhuman, and wicked past at the hands of white megalomaniacs.

For centuries, Native American literature was stamped out by colonial narratives that propagated outrageous, xenophobic claims against the indigenous people and their way of life (Leigh). With time, Native American writers have increasingly represented their people's version of history, which is indisputable in its authenticity. Native American poetry, in particular to this dissertation, celebrates and expresses the Native American identity and brings the community together through shared experiences and struggles.

5.1 Key Components of this Study

The goal of this dissertation was to explore the impact of colonisation on the Native American people while also serving as a spotlight on the issues plaguing the indigenous population to this day. Through close reading and analysis of the select poems vis-à-vis the theory of Postcolonialism and the concepts of 'colonialism', 'hegemony', 'other', 'subaltern', 'exoticism', 'worlding', 'identity', and 'writing back', this dissertation has aimed to prove that the application of the theory of

Postcolonialism to the select Native American poems will aid in a better comprehension of the consequences of the European colonisation of the Native American lands. By exploring particular aspects of indigenous life, such as identity, living conditions, and representation, this dissertation examines the dire impact of colonialism on native life.

Chapter One provided a stepping stone into the desired projection of this dissertation. In addition to recording the critical framework that included the objectives, research questions, scope, limitations and chapterisation, the chapter established the importance of this study by highlighting its relevance in not just literature but society as well. It articulated the guiding theory of Postcolonialism and defined the concepts employed in the analysis of the selected poems.

One of the most critical aspects of this chapter was the literature review. Necessary to identify the research gap, the literature review spanned various articles, research papers, essays, and studies conducted on Native American poetry and literature in general, as well as those that focused on a postcolonial analysis of the native literature. Additionally, since the theory used is Postcolonialism, including historical overviews and research on the Native American lands and people and their contemporary position in the United States of America appeared necessary.

Historicising Native Americans in Chapter Two puts into perspective the atrocities committed against the indigenous population. This knowledge provides insights into how the encounters with the European colonisers have shaped the current socio-cultural and political conditions in 21st century America. Recognising the injustices faced by Native Americans throughout history, such as displacement, assimilation policies, and cultural erasure, is crucial for addressing ongoing issues

of inequality and promoting social justice. Similarly, understanding the history of the indigenous people through their literature plays a crucial role in preserving and promoting their cultural practices, knowledge systems, and languages, which is critical in ensuring the survival and growth of Native American communities.

In "A Poetic Depiction of the Native American World during Colonisation" (Chapter Three), seven poems were analysed using the concepts of 'colonialism', 'hegemony', 'other' and 'subaltern', to poetically bring out the history of the native population during the period of European colonisation. From capturing the perpetuation of exaggerated stereotypes and fallacies through narratives such as the colonial captivity narratives to the systematic displacement and genocide of the indigenous population, the poems in this chapter paint a gory yet realistic version of the experiences of the Native American people. It also emphatically analysed the horrendous position of indigenous women, a direct consequence of the colonisation of their lands. The native woman was seen as promiscuous, unstable, crazy and innately uncontrollable, and the belief held was that the mixed race was a result of native women seducing the white man. This view is reflected in the 'savage v/s civilised' argument used to justify the colonisation of the native lands.

In historical continuance to Chapter Three, Chapter Four-"The Colonial Aftermath and Poems of Perseverance" focuses on the conditions of Native Americans post the period of colonisation up to the current 21st century. Analysing eleven poems in this chapter using the concepts of 'exoticism', 'subaltern', 'worlding', 'identity', and 'writing back', aids in comprehending the fact that despite going from British colonisation to the formation of the United States of America, the plight of the Native American never alleviated. Native Americans still live lives filled with stereotyped attitudes, and native women are battling to bring an end to

the centuries-old violence against them. While white women were oppressed under a patriarchal system, native women were treated as exotic objects and were overly sexualised by the colonisers of their land, ultimately falling into the space of the subaltern where they still exist today.

However, the ever-growing ability of native women to articulate their plight ensures that they do not remain unseen and unheard. As Azar Nafisi (author of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*) states, “*We articulated all that happened to us in our own words, and saw ourselves, for once in our image*” (qtd. in Yardley). The quote is apt in the case of the poetry of Native American women, who, through their words, express the brutality that they have faced at the hands of the colonial powers and continue to face today.

While Native American poetry often appears dystopic, and the application of Post-Apocalyptic Stress Syndrome may seem to push forth the assumption that it is bereft of hope, it is the contrary. The simplicity yet beauty of Native American poetry lies in its ability to convey the lives and struggles of the native people in a compact form. In this manner, the poetry of the Native American people is a poignant ode to the homeland while sharing a respect for nature and life. It strives to preserve and promote indigenous culture, and consciously aims to educate readers on the realities of the colonisation of their lands. The hypothesis presented in this dissertation has thus been corroborated.

5.2 Reaffirming the Relevance of this Study

The introductory chapter of this dissertation delineated its literary and societal relevance. After the completion of the study, reaffirming the same appears necessary. In the field of literature, the postcolonial study of Native American poetry sheds light on the history, culture and experiences of the Native American

population during the pre-Columbian era and post the advent of the colonisation of their lands. Since this study included native poems written in English, it stresses the intentions of the indigenous poets to write in the language of their colonisers as an act of defiance and reclamation of their history and identity.

Most importantly, in tracing the impact of the European colonisation of the Native American people, albeit through poetic means, the research is relevant for bringing to the fore the issues that plague the indigenous population in 21st-century America. In doing so, it advocates for the cognisance of the Native American experience and narrative.

5.3 Scope for Further Studies

There is still much to learn about the Native American realities, so continuous efforts need to be made to study the historical and socio-cultural aspects of the native population. However, this must be carried out in collaboration with the population to ensure the meticulous and sensitive representation of the diversity of the indigenous people. With the growing interest of the younger generations of the Native American population in poetry and literature, there is no dearth of native literature available for research purposes. While this dissertation focused on select poems and concepts under the theory of Postcolonialism, further studies can put into perspective the poet's tribal affiliations and the possible influence on the poetry produced. Under the critical approach of Postcolonialism, especially concerning Native American literature, Gross' Post-Apocalyptic Stress Syndrome can also be explored on a wider scale across indigenous literature. In this manner, by broadening the research areas on the literature of the native population, distinct and nuanced perspectives can be discovered.

Unfortunately, nothing can undo the horrors that the Native American people have been through, beginning with the colonisation of their lands. Nevertheless, formal measures must be taken to guarantee that the native population receives the representation, recognition, respect, dignity, and compassion they deserve. It is also crucial to implement rigorous initiatives to improve the current living conditions of Native Americans in the United States of America. After all, they are the original inhabitants of the land.

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