

Exploration of Major Trends in the Realm of Native American Fiction

Dr. Rajesh Vishnu Yeole*

Head, Department of English, C. K. Thakur A. C. S. College, New Panvel, District – Raigad, Maharashtra

-----X-----

The Native American novels are primarily associated with representation of Indianness, culture, traditions, mythology, reservation, story-telling, identity and mixed blood and community. N. Scott Momaday's world famous novel entitled "House Made of Dawn" (1968) created a revolution in the history of Native American literature by achieving the Pulitzer prize in 1969 and ushering an era of Renaissance. It was prominent critic Kenneth Lincoln who used the term Native American Renaissance on account of remarkable contribution of N. Scott Momaday, James Welch, Gerald Vizenor, Leslie Marmon Silko, Simon Ortiz, Louise Erdrich and Paula Gunn Allen in the development of Native American fiction.

The major trends depicted by the Native American novelists are as follows:

1. Element of Tricksterism
2. Survivors of the Relocation
3. Mythic Reterritorialization
4. Storytelling
5. Narrative Strategies

ELEMENT OF TRICKSTERISM:

The trickster figure is one of the richest aspects of American Indian oral traditions. The trickster figure is vital to American Indian continuance and provides one of the best forms of healing for a fragmented culture. The trickster's lessons are sometimes deadly serious or quite silly and appears in the form of a crow, rabbit or old man. Alan R. Velie in his article "Gerald Vizenor's Indian Gothic" Comment on the validity of the trickster figure as:

"Any society that has oppressive rules of moral and ceremonial behavior needs mythic and ritual sources of rebellion which allow tribal members to flout the rules through surrogates. The surrogates were irresponsible amoral figures who mocked everything sacred with immunity to the delight of the rest of the community which remained obedient and orderly".

The trickster figure acted out immoral impulses or temptations for the tribal members in order to reduce any desire they have to carry out the act in reality and break tribal codes of conduct leading to ostracization.

Gerald Vizenor has employed trickster figure effectively in his novel "Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles". He also tricks about the dangers of terminal creeds and ecological exploitation. There is a reflection of a postapocalyptic wasteland of nearly total destruction in Gerald Vizenor's novel.

According to Alan R. Velie Vizenor reverses the values of the ideological constructs of the frontier which defined the forest as evil and civilization as good. By reversing historical and ideological constructions of the wilderness into a place of health and balance, Vizenor relocates sources of evil and corruption away from the forest and into places of development to expose who pose real dangers to human survival. Gerald Vizenor used Proud Cedarfair as the main trickster figure in his first masterpiece "Bearheart the Heirship Chronicles". The trickster figure in this novel is the one who survives despite all the obstacles because he is such as integral part of the oral tradition and embodies the beliefs and values of Native attitudes toward transformation and environmental respect.

In N. Scott Momaday's novel 'House Made of Dawn' Tosamah is a trickster who takes on the dominant society's imposition of gospel truths, as he mocks ridicules and challenges every fixed meaning or static definition, his antic posturing, his deconstruction of his own discourse his hilarious code – switching are all trickster signs as he is witty, gossipy and implicitly self –critical. The trickster figure acted out immoral impulses or temptation s for the tribal members in order to reduce any desire they have to carry out the act in reality and break tribal codes of conduct leading to ostracization.

Gerald Vizenor has employed trickster figure effectively in his novel "Bearheart: the Heirship Chronicles." He also tricks about the dangers of terminal creeds and ecological exploitation. Vizenor

in the novel depicts a postapocalyptic wasteland of nearly total destruction. According to Alan R. Velie, Vizenor reverses the values of the ideological constructs of the frontier which defined the forest as evil and civilization as good. By reversing historical and ideological constructions of the wilderness into a place of health and balance, Vizenor relocates sources of veil and corruption away from the forest and into places of development to expose who pose real dangers to human survival.

In N. Scott Momaday's novel "House Made of Dawn" Tosamah is a trickster who takes on the dominant society's impositions of gospel truths, as he mocks ridicules and challenges every fixed meaning or static definition, his antic posturing, his deconstruction of his own discourses, his hilarious code – switching, are all trickster signs, he is witty, gossipy and implicitly self – critical.

Louise Erdrich's four novels connected by geography, history and genealogy, invent a trickster cycle that challenges traditional American history and contemporary popular attitudes towards Native Americans. The evolving narrative forms of "Love Medicine, Tracks, and Bingo Palace" express the history of a Chippewa community in trickster terms emphasizing on variety and vibrancy. She has successfully created feminist revision of the trickster through the characters of Fleur and Lula in her novel "The Beet Queen".

According to Paul Radin, the trickster figure as a cultural hero is a universal archetype found in all the world's cultures in the preface to his book entitled "The Trickster" "he wrote "Trickster is at one and the same time creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself he wills nothing. At all times he is constrained to behave as he does from impulses over which he has no control. He knows neither good nor evil yet he is responsible for both". Thus, tricksterism has been a striking trend reflected in the realm of Native American fiction.

SURVIVORS OF THE RELOCATION IN NATIVE AMERICAN FICTION:

This is one of the most prominent trends in the novels reflected by Native American novelists especially George Pierre's "Autumn's Bounty", James Welch's "Winter in the blood" and Leslie Marmon Silko's "Ceremony" and Nasnagan's "Indian Summer" respectively. Many characters in these novels are descendants of those who were relocated – individuals and groups of people who have survived because they adopted themselves to their dual world that surrounded them. There is also reference to the changed attitude towards life on the reservation in the fiction of Native Americans.

George Pierre's novel "Autumn's Bounty" is about an argument against the breakup of the reservation

system. There is depiction of Indians who have prospered on the reservation in James Welch's masterpiece "Winter in the Blood", Leslie Marmon Silko in her prominent work entitled "Ceremony" depicts the town that surround the reservation are described as parasites living off the blood of Indian labourers. The novel "Indian's Summer" written by Nasnagans is also about the pan Indian movement finding its greatest number of followers at the grass roots level on the reservation.

George Pierre's novel "Autumn's Bounty" describes as a protagonist who is an old man and respected hunter for last 50 years and chief of his people. The novel is set in the Okanogan valley in the cascade mountain. Alphonse is isolated from his family and his people and others made fun of him. The old man is having lot of concern for the reservation and wanted to prove himself as a great hunter. Alphonse wants that the reservation to remain in common trust for all of his people. Therefore he remarks "it is the white people who want you to sell out the reservation so they will get rich – that is the way it has being with the tribes that sold out James Welch's novel entitled "Winter in the Blood" exclusively deals with the reservation that permits one to retain and affinity with the land. The successful characters in this novel like Teresa and Lame are farmers whose livelihood comes from the soil. The four parts of the novel are mainly confined to the reservation itself. Welch also creates a sense of exile for his narrator during these episodes in the neighboring towns, of estrangement from the heartbeat of the so called Indian life. The narrator in the novel remarks "it was good to the home, the weariness I had felt earlier vanished from my bones".

According to James Welch, the reservation is not only home, a safe refuge from the outside world, but also a place of warmth and fulfillment, where the survivors of today find a life affirming sense of belonging in his work.

Silko wrote world famous novel entitled "Ceremony" and it beautifully depicts the reservation called "Laguna Pueblo where the novelist was born. According to Silko life is a continual struggle, a never ending ceremony to purify the world around us. She points out that the origins of evil were brought about by the Indians themselves on the reservations. The protagonist in this novel is an American Indian named Tayo who comes to reservation after a period of time. There is an element of a ritual cleansing or purification along with mythic overtones and obscure narrative techniques. Tayo considers that the land is parched and barren, threatening to dry up completely and destroy his livelihood and he himself is responsible for the drought because he prayed the rain would go away.

Tayo is informed by his teacher to respect the land. The teacher also said to the protagonist "There are

some things worth more than money, this is where we come from this sand, stone, trees, vines and earth keeps us going". The protagonist also experience cycle of restoration and purification. On the individual the ceremony is necessary to purge Tayos sense of guilt, and on the collective level, the veteran rampages must be destroyed before they bring total havoc to the reservation. In Silko's masterpiece "Ceremony Tayo,s journey away from his people and subsequent rediscovery of the traditional life –force is also the journey of the collective sprit from exposure to evil in the universe through purification to redemption.

Nasnaga's novel entitled "Indians Summer" also highlight on the signification role by reservation in the life of Native American people and the potential force known as pan – Indianism during the unfolding of his novel.

Louise Erdrich another pioneer Native American novelist has also depicted life of smalls group of Chippewa living on the Turtal Mountain Indian reservation in North Dakota in her world famous novel entitled "Love Medicine".

MYTHIC RETERRITORIAIZATIONS:

My the reterritorializations take place when novelists salvage the stories and places from the past and rewrite them in order to claim an identity and establish a sense of place concurrent with their present sense of self . The stories connect the people to their land, history and cultural identity. Lee Schweninger also aptly posits that the earth, the word, the speaker of the word and the story are inseparable and they exist within the same lines of dependence as the biosphere.

Joy Harjo and N. Scott Momaday present innovative methods of recalling the landscapes of the past to influence those of the present by using tribal stories in the Native American fiction. There is reflection of sense of place to relate writer's sense of self with regards to contemporary American Indian writers. N Scott Momaday's work entitled "The Way to Rainy Mountain" links the oral traditions of the past with his sense of the world and his conceptualization of his own identity. This work is divided into three parts highlighting on legends and myths form the tribal heritage. In structuring the work, with the three linking voices Momaday explores his past and links it to the present to reflect on what his tribal history means to him as a contemporary American Indian writer. The work is journey from past to present, from present to past and form the mythical to the modern. It is also a physical journey back to his grandfather's grave and tribal lands where the novelist comes to a deeper understanding of his own existence.

According to Kenneth Roemer 'The Way to Rainy Mountains" serves as an expression of the Kiowa

community and its commitment to survive despite the physical and psychological removals of the culture. Jean Henley also aptly points out that as the author moves through his narrative ,the distinctions between the parts of the sections become blurred and the personal experience turns back into myth with regards to Momaday's masterpiece "The Way to Rainy Mountain". The landscape descriptions in the work verify Momadays intimacy with the landscape and his deep abiding love for it .Another prominent Native American novelist Paula Gunn Allen in his work entitled "The Scared Hoop remarks that American Indian thought is essentially mystical and psychic in nature it also communicates realities in symbolic modes that are tribe specific. Thus, Momaday reterritorialize the landscapes of the past to influence those of the present using myths and oral traditions.

STORYTELLING AS A TREND IN NATIVE AMERICAN FICTION:

There is dominant reflection of storytelling in the novels written by Native American novelists especially James Welch, N. Scott Momaday, Silko and Louise Erdrich. The stories are especially pertaining to Native American culture and mythology. James Welch in his remarkable novel entitled "Fools Crow" describes vital function of stories in the process of safeguarding one's identity and culture. He emphasizes the importance of storytelling in the American Indian culture in order to ensure survival and preservation of tradition.

The protagonist in this novel tells the story of Poia. According to Welch the stories also act as an explanation for tribal healing power and traditional inheritance of medicinal powers. Lee Francis believes that the identities of American Indians are inextricable interwoven in the stories they were told and for native people story was and continues to be essential to an individual's identity construction and development. Silko as a distinguished American Native novelist with regards to the significance of storytelling in her finest work "Ceremony" remarked "You don't have anything, if you don't have the stories".

She tried to depict Indian culture with the help of storytelling and maintained the integrity of the traditional narrative forms with reference to the characters of Tayo and Betonie in "Ceremony". With regards to Jim Ruppert's observation about nature of story in Silko's novel "Ceremony" it is illuminated by the assumption that the story has a greater, truer reality than the objective reality of the world around us and characters and readers must believe as much as the author that the world exists in the story which also gives objective reality its meaning. Momaday has also represented device of storytelling in his masterpiece entitled "House Made of Dawn "especially about Kiowa oral tradition. He remembers

a tradition of storytelling peculiar to a relatively small and self-contained tribe of north American people. His another novel "The way to Rainy Mountain" also deals with stories focusing on Kiowa language comprehensively.

As Charles Larson pointed out that in "House Made of Dawn" the first word of prologue 'James Pueblo conventional form for beginning a story, tells us that Momaday wants us to regard his novel as a traditional story, a part of oral tradition designed to teach a moral. Louise Erdrich another prominent Native American novelist also incorporated stories of several families living on North Dakota in her masterpiece "Love Medicine". There is special reference to tales related Ojibwe community in her novels in the realm of Native American Literature.

NARRATIVE STRATEGIES IN NATIVE AMERICAN NOVELS:

Silko one of the most famous novelist in her masterpiece entitled "Ceremony" has used impressive narrative techniques. The prose section of the novel is primarily narrated in third person with limited voice. The poems are presented between first and third person narrators. Silko with the help of narrating techniques, demonstrate her concern with the preservation of Native American culture including traditions, languages and natural resources in combination with an awareness of the reality of cultural mixing especially the stories by Tayo as a protagonist in the novel. She also produces a novel that emphasizes on the use of a nonlinear narrative structure. According to the critic Robert Nelson Tayo must revisit the land itself in order to reestablish contact with the power of healing that he may find there.

N. Scott Momaday has used the varieties of narrative techniques in his masterpiece "House made of Dawn" that deals with exploration of Kiowa traditions. There are multiple narrative voices and omniscient narrator and limited point of view. The opening prologue is an example of omniscient narrator. There are many passages in the novel from Abels point of view with authoritative story telling voice. Stream of consciousness as a narrative technique is present in the novel. This includes distortion of time and disruption of chronological sequence. Reverie and day dream is also associated with stream of consciousness through the character of Francisco. There is also a first person narrator and internal monolog in the third section of the novel called "The Night Chanter." Momaday has incorporated two formal sermons preached by Tosamah about sun in his prominent masterpiece "House Made of Dawn".

Louise Erdrich has also successfully used innovative narrative techniques in her novels entitled "Love Medicines". She explores sixty years of a small group of Chippewa living on a fictional reservation in North

Dakota. There are multiple narrators in the novel in each chapter is narrated by different characters. These narratives are very conversational often from first person perspective. The narratives are following loose chronology the tone of the novel is conversational and indicative of the story telling tradition of Native American culture. The narrative also focus on love triangle among Lulu, Marie and Nector along with thematic concerns such as abandonment, connection with land, search for identity, self-knowledge and survival in her work "Love Medicine." Louise Erdrich skillfully maintained multiple narratives in her prominent works such as - The Beet Queen, The Bingo Palace, Tracks and Tales of Burning Love.

These are the dominant trends reflected in Native American fiction by N. Scott Momaday, James Welch, Gerald Vizenor, Leslie Mermon Silko, Simon Ortiz, Louise Erdrich, Paula Gunn Allen and created successful Renaissance in Native American fiction.

REFERENCES

- Alan, R. Velie (1992). *Gerald Vizenor's Indian Gothic. Multi- Ethnic Literature of the United States*, Volume 17, Issue 1, 1 March 1992, New York, Pages 75–85.
- Louise, Erdrich (2004). *Tracks*. New York: Harper Perennial Publisher, 2004. Print.
- Louise, Erdrich (2006). *The Beet Queen*. New York: Harper Perennial Publisher, 2006. Print.
- Louise, Erdrich (2006). *The Beet Queen*. New York: Harper Perennial Publisher, 2006. Print.
- Louise, Erdrich (2006). *The Bingo Palace*. New York: Harper Perennial Publisher, 2006. Print.
- Louise, Erdrich (2009). *Love Medicine*. New York: Harper Perennial Publisher, 2009. Print.
- Momaday, N. Scott (1976). *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. New York: University of New Mexico Press, 1976. Print.
- Momaday, N. Scott (2010). *House Made of Dawn*. Harper Collins Publisher, New York: 2010. Print.
- Pierre, George (1972). *Autumns Bounty*. New York: The Naylor Books, 1972. Print.
- Radin, Paul (1972). *The Trickster*. Schocken Books Inc. New York: 1972. Print.
- Silko, Leslie Marmon (1986). *Ceremony*. New York: Penguin Books, 1986. Print.

Vizenor, Gerald (2001). *Bearheart the Heirship Chronicles*, Minneapolis University of Minnesota Press, 2001. Print.

Welch, James (1974). *Winter in the Blood*. New York: Penguin Books, 1974. Print.

Corresponding Author

Dr. Rajesh Vishnu Yeole*

Head, Department of English, C. K. Thakur A. C. S. College, New Panvel, District – Raigad, Maharashtra

E-Mail – rajesh.yeole001@gmail.com