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THE RICH LEGACY OF NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURE AND SURVIVANCE

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Abstract

Native American literature encompasses the written and oral traditions of Indigenous people of America, reflecting their diverse history, culture and perspective, including stories, poems, and other forms of expression. This article explores the legacy Native American literature with its vibrant folktales, pictographic plots and cultural life. It reflects the sacred true lives of native people is the real essence of Native American literature. This rich legacy of Native American literature still needs to be explored as allusions and myths deep rooted in its culture exhibits characters and events not with "once upon a time" but with any topic in any weather between dawn to dusk. Its legacy is trickster stories, rituals, ceremonies, chants, plains and mountains with tales of survivance and resistance. In Native American literature, there is a recreation of man after each incident, and all incidents also assemble to make confusing and contradictory tales of pure, simple and down to earth Natives. Their legacy is a diamond on earth, the more it is explored, the richer dimensions are out layered.

Key words: Survivance, Post Indian survivance, Native American literature.

Introduction

Native American literature defies the literary exclusion of Native Americans. It addresses through its culture the different challenges posed by Euro-Americans. It presents the reality and truth about the 'Indian' to the world. As pointed out by Momaday: "And how can that be, without we people who have been here for all time" (2009, p.401). Native people and their literature is centuries old. It is a literature of survivance. The term "survivance" in Native American literature was envisioned by Gerald Vizenor, who exposed the Native spirit of endurance and survival. It creates an understanding of the actual values of Native Americans. It is a paradigm of reclamation of Native American identity and culture. It negates the victimization and subjugation by the Euro-Americans. Native authors "used their gifts for storytelling to represent and preserve their Native culture and spirituality, while Gerald Vizenor (White Earth Anishinaabe) aimed to portray that literariness has long been present in Native Nations and has evolved" (Chown, 2022, p. 8). Post-Indian survivance emerges through the presentation of actual Native American endurance, portraying them not as victims but as examples of endurance, resilience, and survival. It deconstructs the colonial discourses that depict Native Americans as passive and extinct; "survivance is a chief concern of Indigenous American literature" (Sharif & Murtaza, 2022, p. 722).

Native American literature is a literature of presence. It is a centuries-old literary tradition that evolved from oral to written forms. The progression of Native American literature from oral to written under the subjugation of Euro-Americans is a period marked by the negation of Native American epistemological framework. That is why intense disharmony was present from the very start between the Native American culture and the Euro-American culture depicted through

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literature. Native American Literature has historical depth. This literature is not a newcomer in the course of literary resistance to dominance (Premat, 2019, p. 76). This literature has challenged colonial dominance since the time of its emergence on the world stage: "Literary texts from the First Nations reveal an attempt to create a counter-narrative on the daily life of the Indigenous communities" (Bhabha, 1994: 66). Since the time of Columbus, the native culture has been facing assimilation policies to eradicate Native Culture. Native American literature seeks to revitalize and preserve culture. It saw many currents of history, from subjugation to slavery, forced assimilation, and misconception of identity by Euro-American Literature. This literature develops the technique and use of the colonizer's language for this purpose. The Native writers, while writing, utilized Euro-American techniques to address the Native Americans in their writing, as observed: "These writers use the language of the colonizer to address a message on the future of the First Nations" (Premat, 2019, p. 76). The dominant literature, which drew on their traditions and culture. This culturally based literature created a counter-narrative against the literature of dominance on the foundations of Native American identity.

Native American literature encompasses a diverse range of genres, including poetry and fiction, that collectively represent all aspects of Native American culture and society. This literature is original as it is based on the oral traditions of Native American people. Storytelling in the culture of Native Americans provided them with a cultural platform to understand and present their stories of endurance and survival in various literary genres that were already practiced orally. Oral tradition plays a significant role in Native American literature. It has myths, legends, poetry, stories, and ceremonies. Before it was written down, it was passed down from one generation to another orally. Through storytelling, Oral tradition gave them their creation myths, symbols, love of nature, and spiritual lifestyle patterns. Native American Literature is deeply rooted in culture, community, and nature. This oral tradition is adaptable and exposes the unified communal voice. "Oral storytelling events modify their narrative; these are face-to-face encounters" (Meek 2020, p. 378). It is being carried on through a shared authority and cultural will. Their literature serves as a cultural link between the past, present, and future. Oral tradition has preserved the Native American identity and their cultural rituals. It has become the most crucial living source of Native American cultural expression.

This literature provides Native Americans a platform to preserve their cultural traditions and revitalize their indigenous identity. It has and still is facing challenges of historical subjugation and misconception about the Native American identity. The Native American identity in Native American Literature is deeply rooted in its traditional practices, land, spirituality, community, time, symbols, language, and tribal welfare. The rich oral traditions of Native Americans are a set of communal settings that give storytellers a chance to participate in front of the Native American tribes. This communication serves as a means of preserving tribal knowledge, cultural values, and survival skills. This oral tradition strengthened the Native American argument that they had a profound civilization and culture, which the Euro-Americans negated. This oral tradition forms a connection between Native communities and their ways of life. Oral tradition is practiced through mediation and performances on various occasions, accompanied by gestures and oral worship. It connects the Native Americans' written culture to their oral tradition before the world. It provides a strong foundation for the depth of Native American culture, which is a crucial aspect of post-Indian survivance, as evident in stories in Native American literature.

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Native American literature, as divided by Paula Gunn Allen (1996), emerged in three waves: from 1870 to 1970, loss of land was the thematic issue in literature, then from 1974 to 1990, she finds rituals, traditions, renewal, Identity and ceremonies (p.8) and lastly internal conflicts which were visible in the third wave of literature which is marked with "transformation of alien elements into elements of ceremonial significance" (p.13). This division provides insight into how Native American literature addressed various issues at different times. The history, mythic realities, colorful images, generational conflicts, individual obsessions, intricacies of families, forests, lands, entities, and other perspectives on Native American life have been explored. This literature utilized wild words, puns, vivid imaginations, conventions, and traditions to portray the images and reality of Indians.

Native American literature faced many transitions due to subjugation and oppression. The Natives had to face tremendous economic, political, and social pressures to conform to Christian traditions. They faced a deliberate plan of poverty imposed by Euro-Americans to hinder their intellectual development. "The expansion of colonial territory forced the community of Indians to confront a new political and economic regime, motivated mainly by a white desire for land and resources" (Ramm, 2022, p. 15). Native American literature was often perceived as lacking civilization. "The belief in Native peoples' ability to adopt Christian civilization was almost completely abandoned with the image of bloodthirsty savages of the captivity narratives" (Al-Attar, 2020, p.2). The Native Americans were seen as not even worthy of adapting to Christian civilization. Al-Attar states how James Coober painted the Native Americans as a race deeply involved in self-destructive practices. The Euro-American literary goal was the cultural uprooting of Native Americans. This belief was practiced as "white culture depends on the exploitation of land, people, and life itself" (Gordon & Lindsay,2019, p.2). This colonial mindset persisted in Euro-American literature as "colonial relations continue to this day, both between settler states and Indigenous peoples" (Panich &Gonzalez,2021, p.1). Writers such William Apess and Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins in the 19th century brought to light through the genre of autobiography the injustices perpetrated by Euro-Americans, offering a critique of colonial oppression. This is the result of the colonial settlers' structure. It develops around points of social, political, literary, and economic structure in the life of Native Americans.

The 20th century marked a turning point with the publication of *House Made of Dawn* (1968) by N. Scott Momaday, setting the stage for Native American literature to be recognized before the world. The Pulitzer Prize for this novel showed the world the wide range of Native American traditions and culture. It was a recognition of indigenous cultural and traditional treasures by the academia on the world stage. It was an answer to the planned cultural homicide by the Euro-Americans, which aimed to erase Native culture as "The boarding schools that all tribes were exposed to, Kiowa included, decimated their culture" (Brown, 2021, p.48). It was a being at the center stage for the intellectual community, especially for promoting the Native American voice. It presented the image of Native Americans not as a stereotyped Indian but as a culturally rich race before the world.

Spirituality is a unique presence in the lives of Native American people, making them a more connected entity with the universe than Euro-Americans. The negation of this spirituality by the Euro-Americans was aimed at constructing false images of Native Americans. Whereas it is their strength, and they practice it through their ceremonies, rituals, and traditions. It is a strong foundation of Native American literature. The Native American people maintained a spiritual

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connection with various entities, which is also reflected in their literature and traditions. Spirituality forms a distinct and unique part of Native American literature; Irwin (1996) discusses the "intrinsic worth of Native spiritual beliefs" (p. 309). Myths and rituals of the Native Americans are associated with spiritual figures such as Yellow Woman, Thought Woman, Hand Talkers, Shamans, and Healers. All play an essential role in Native American literature, as evident in the works of Momaday, Silko, Vizenor, Alexie, Allen, and other contemporaries. Irwin firmly believes that all the thematic issues and voices of Native Americans recognize the Individuality of any Native experience and lead to the formation of "spirituality." Spirituality in Native Americans is different. It lies in the way of representation. Irwin notes that their "wilderness" (p. 316) reveals their spiritual perspectives. Their spirituality is connected to their life cycle and that of other living organisms. That is why it respects and pays homage to other creatures. Words in Native American literature possess both worldly and spiritual meanings for Native Americans. Words and silence both play essential roles in the spiritual traditions of Native Americans. The Native spiritual beliefs in literature are evidence of Native civilization, culture, and imagination. Native Americans are children of dreams and visions. Their spirituality was viewed with fear and disdain rather than admiration by Euro-Americans. Their spiritual ceremonies and practices are integral to their life, civilization, and literature.

Native American writers transformed their novels into unique cultural experiences. It was an understanding of this genre on their part to introduce a novel in Native American literature "to find their way to modern readers" (Murtaza and Minhass, 2022, p. 19). It is a technique to present the Native American people with a rich culture and civilization in response to ignorant Indians. Traditional storytelling was interpolated through culture and history. This is an introduction to the Native American identity and culture before the world, which addressed the absence of Native American identity and culture by Euro-Americans. The notions of cultural resistance, endurance, and survival presented the pain and loss experienced by the Native Americans.

The thematic journey of the Native American novel offers us an understanding of the profound wounds inflicted by Euro-Americans. The themes in the novels are natural, as "Contemporary African American and Native American writers are compelled to reach back into the past to not only correct the' official narrative 'and retrace their roots, but also reconnect with their ancestors and confront their painful legacy" (Runtić, 2023, p. 1). The painful colonial experience in Native novels describes different thematic phases.

Native American literature was victimized and subjected to economic hardships, just like Native American. It was supposed to be merged through tyranny in white literature. The white design of economic hardship for the Native Americans was aimed at community division through assimilation, "The economic hardships also cause the dissolution of the tribe, creating a community divided from within based on the degree of their assimilation into the White society"(Runtić, 2023, p.32). The Euro-Americans, amid economic manipulation, were reduced to their lands, lacking bread and butter. The Native American novel takes shape as a form of resistance and reimagination. Hybridity becomes a means of engaging with the colonial narrative in the lives of Native Americans. It becomes a platform to reclaim history and identities on the one hand, and the other hand checks the eclipsed image of the Native Americans.

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Thus, Native American Novel becomes an embodiment of endurance. The novel, as a genre, is instrumental in bringing forth a cultural critique that decolonizes, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, presents the Native Americans in their true spectrum through the framework of post-Indian survivance. It is a breakthrough from the dynamics of pain and loss into the realm of reclamation and resilience. It has infused Native American traditions through contemporary realities before the world. This approach is relevant to the Native cultural approach. Survivance, a term coined by Gerald Vizenor, subverts and deconstructs the colonial narratives through the reimagination of history, bringing forth Native American resistance through novels. Gerald Vizenor, in his novel *Heirs Of Columbus* (1991), creates a broader vision through his imagination to dismantle colonial suppression. He recreates stories. Leslie Marmon Silko and N. Scott Momaday all used stories to present the case of Native Americans as deeply rooted in their culture.

A Native American novel viewed through the lens of post-Indian survivance becomes a site to question and portray endurance, resilience, hybridity, and cultural reclamation. This reimagination is through the representation of Native identities. In this manner, the novel is a crucial component in the overall scheme of survival. Vizenor, within his framework of survivance, employed survivance stories as a touchstone for representing endurance, resistance, and restoration by reimagining the historical narrative in his novels. Vizenor celebrated the Native agency in the reimagination of identity. In his novels, Vizenor embodies the movement initiated by Native American writers to subvert the Euro-American oppressive narrative. Momaday and Silko undertook a restructuring of novels by situating them within cultural and historical contexts, thereby connecting the novels to the concept of survival. Vizenor opened a new perspective with the theme of reimagination and recontextualization. He mingled humor as a strategy to reimagine Native identity. The colonial erasure of Native Americans shaped the Indian novel as a site for inquiry and investigation. The novel becomes a means to question the absence of Native Americans from the Euro-American literary scene. The Native American novel transcended borders and became a focal point for examining the cultural persistence of Native Americans. This investigation opened to understand and question hybridity in Native American novels. The artistic themes in the novels of Momaday and Silko were presented in conjunction with the theme of hybridity, making it a line to be followed by others. Native American novels became a platform for resistance, challenging the stereotypical images of Native Americans. Predominantly, identity, culture and environmental justice were placed before the world through stories focusing on colonization and suppression of human rights.

Native American writers readily embraced the novel, as it is a "tale, piece of news...; the length of a novel varies greatly" (Cuddon, 2012, p. 560). The novel, as a genre, suited the Native Americans, as it is a story, long or short, and it is a technique rooted in their culture. It describes their pain and happiness, becoming a source of representing their actual characteristics of identity before the world, as in the case of their post-Indian survivance. The novel as a genre attained the status of a way to present Native American survival before the world. The Native Americans adapted it from Euro-Americans in terms of genre but infused it with a spirit of Native American culture, unfolding their true strength. The novel becomes a site of their survivance, not a site of victimization. Native Americans became a means to explore the historical dimensions of their identity and culture. Native American writers, through their novels, were able to take on the task

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of gauging the historical forces responsible for the present (Cowart, 1987, p. 2). The novel serves as a vehicle for presenting Native American themes related to colonial subjugation, and it is an essential part of post-Indian survivance in Native American literature. Native American Fiction has been divided into distinct sections. It saw a zenith after Momaday published *House Made of Dawn* (1968). Native fiction focuses on the connection between Native people and Native culture. It presents the sense of imagination and freedom of Native American Culture through fiction. Native writers highlighted the stories of Native Survivance, their survival and their endurance, resulting in their resilience through characters who shaped themselves before us as post-Indians. They stand before us in the darkest hours of their lives as a story of survivance, not a story of victimry. Fiction developed Native American literature, drawing on the cultural stories and autobiographical narratives of Native Americans.

Rouff (1990) discusses Native American writers before 1968 in prose, poetry, short stories, and fiction. According to Rouff, Chamberlain (1841) discussed all the injustices prevalent in society against Native people in her novels. She published thirty-three prose works in *Lowell Offering*, One and Lowell Offering, Two (1842). These works provide us a chance to understand and witness the massacre of the Native Americans. Then, her other four works in *The New England Offering I* (1848) were all written by women who worked at Lowell Mills. They provide us with an experience and the understanding of Native American zeal to never give up. A 'fireside scene' about the burned Miami Indians in the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794 describes a situation where the question of where to live was the most challenging to answer. It is about 'Cruelty' over Indians and then 'help' by the same Indians in their time of need. It is replete with memorable portraits and dialects. Her works depict the legends about women in the Native American Culture.

Native Americans remained in search of freedom through imagination. Ridge also discussed the themes of freedom and imagination in The life and adventures of Joaquin Murieta (1854). It was the first Novel by a Native author that tells us about the sale of Cherokee lands and how the fathers and grandfathers were assassinated in this context. The brutality of the Euro-Americans through the life of Joaquin Murieta was discussed on the one hand. Still, on the other hand, it describes how the Native Heroes survived in the face of brutality through their imagination and sense of freedom. The overarching theme is one of freedom and imagination. It explores Native, mixedrace and non-Native characters with moral lessons. In all these stories, we find a taste of Native American Culture, which looms large over the environment. The Sioux World remains one of the essential topics in Native American fiction. Charles Eastman, also known as Ohiyesa (1858-1939), portrayed the Dakota or Sioux worldview and history in his stories, which incorporated the concept of respect for animals. Red Hunters and the Animal People (1904) are among the works in this category. Old Indian Days (1907) is about warriors and women, depicting Sioux history, values, and customs. It is a cultural record of the Sioux World in which the Native world can be understood through its artistic character. It also explores ethnographic fiction related to the attitudes of Native Americans toward women. It provides information and a cultural overview of tribal life and its connection to the Native World. Eastman also depicted traditional stories for children in Wigwam Evenings: Sioux Folktales Retold (1909). These stories are deeply rooted in Native American Culture and serve as a source of inspiration for Native People and their children. It also creates a world of Native Culture in the youth of the Native World. A long lance (1928) presents autobiographical fiction. He discusses the buffalo, a child's long lance, as a symbol of a Blackfeet chief. His character is of mixed blood, as a child of ex-slaves. Long met members of the Blackfeet

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tribe when he became a Journalist in Alberta after serving in the Canadian Army during World War I. In his autobiographical fiction, In Long Lance (1928), he describes himself as 'Buffalo Child Long Lance, a Blackfeet chief.' In 1930, he co-starred in *the Indian film Silent Enemy*.

The themes of Indian territory and the issues faced by settlers were explored in Oskison's fiction. John Milton Oskison, with his works Wild Harvest (1925) and Black Jack Davy (1926), addresses the issues of Indian territories and settlers. He describes the problems and the panic created by the Euro-Americans to get hold of Indian soil. He deals with Indian life and discusses city life in Brothers Three (1935). He also provides us with a historical novel in the form of The Singing Bird: A Cherokee Novel (2007), which is considered one of the first historical novels by a Native American author. His works highlight the Native Americans who are present and engaged in various aspects of life. They have been trying to find their way through difficult circumstances. The theme of social and economic subjugation was depicted in Mathews' novels. John Joseph Mathews, in his works, raised social and economic issues and particularly highlighted the devastating impact of the federal government's assimilationist policies on Native American tribes. In Sun Down (1934), Mathews addressed the sovereignty issues of Native lands and people. He also addresses and revisits these issues in Wah'Kon-Tah (1932). His works portrayed how Native Americans resisted and continued to stand for their identity and culture. The works of D'Arcy (1904-1977) depicted the problems in Native American society, the strength of Native American culture, and the sense of place. The Surrounded (1936) by D'Arcy MC Nickle is one of the bestwritten and most widely published novels. The Surrounded is about searching for a mixed-blood person in his place, exploring oral traditions, and cultural survival. It stresses the Native Sovereignty over culture and lands as well as the destructive role of the Catholic Church in its attempts to acculturate the Salish. MC Nickle's The Runner in the Sun (1954) evoked the life of the old cliff dwellers of Chaco Canyon, featuring many adventures. The protagonist tries to save his people from starvation. The same connection is passed from The Runners in The Sun to Wind From An Enemy Sky (1978), which portrays conflict and clash between two cultures and individuals. Tragic events and the death of the participants in the novel symbolize the violation of Holy places and values of Indian cultures. We find the same connection in The Hawk is Hungry and Other Stories (1992), which is also related to Indian history. Themes of mystery are seen in Downing's works. Todd Downing (1902-74) wrote about mystery. His detective fiction includes The Cat Screams (1934), Night over Mexico (1937), Death Under the Moon Flower (1938), and many more. He blends the sense of mystery and adventure in Native American fiction. He employed the travelogue technique in his novels. The method of a 'travelogue' has been used by Downing to convey Mexican history as understood by an Indian.

Native American fiction up to 1968 portrays the stories of Indian people in a realistic and dignified manner. Fiction revolves around the characters of Native Americans. These characters come before us as their tribal chiefs. Knowledge about tribal life and individual experiences was brought to the world through a transformative experience. Works such as *Black Elk Speaks (1961)* by Neihurdte and *The Teachings of Don Juan: A Yaqui Way of Knowledge (1968)* by Carlos Castaneda provoke a wave of interest in understanding social life, cultural life, history, tribal life, individual life, values, and the Philosophy of Native American tribes. These autobiographies help us understand Native survivance through the cultural depth of Native American individuals and social life. The accurate portrayal of the Native American image in the lives of Native Americans challenged Euro-Americans. These autobiographies reveal the world, its rich culture, and the dynamic Native

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American individuals, as Native fiction comes before us in stories of endurance and survival. They present their actual image of endurance before the world. People are interested in learning about Native American perspectives.

Native American fiction reveals the pure essence of Native American identity, which is why the theme of identity is a fundamental aspect of Native American fiction. Native Americans have shown their endurance and survival through their culture. It is part of their identity never to give in, that is revealed through Native American Literature. 'Identity' means a lot to Native Americans. Hobson (1979, p. 9) considers Identity not only in terms of Indian blood. Instead, he identifies specific cultural, social, and traditional merits to support his claims. Richard White (1986) notes that the mainstream perception of society is often tied to the perception of Indians. Those who believe in a benevolent nature consider Indians as noble, while those who view nature and wilderness as violent and hostile see them in a different light.

Themes in the literature of endurance and survival include the language, storytelling, myths, and spiritual bonding of grounded tribal communities with their landscapes. Robert Nelson, in his Study *Place and Vision: The Function of Landscape in Native American Fiction (1993)*, argues that Landscapes are "inviolable referents" in fiction. Natives consider the land a life-giving force: "Kuuti, the force that gives us life" (Lester, 1993, p. 10). So, land is not only a physical territory but a spiritual resistance. Lands are deeply rooted in Indian culture and traditions. Lands are their possession, and for Native Americans, they symbolize their rights. "…and they depend on such rights" and access for material and cultural survival. (UNPF11 2007c, p.6)

The emotional and sentimental bonds of primitive traditions are rooted in oral traditions and land culture. Anderson develops this relationship as "a renewed relationship and spiritual tie with the land is a strong factor in forming a healthy identity" (2000, p. 181). Land deepens strengths and passions, providing a platform to identify the existence, ownership, and concept of self-realization and culture. Holm *et al.* (2003) consider four features of resistance related to identity, which are "languages, ceremonial cycles, land, and sacred histories" (p. 14). So, lands are critical in the lives and literature of post-Indians. They identify with their lands; they possess their lands and have a spiritual attachment to them, which provides them with strength and a spirit of survivance. Post-Indian survivance provided a distinct lens through which to view the novels, not as stories of pain but as stories of survivance. The native novels have shown different currents and counter-currents throughout history, but at the same time, they have presented Native American life through endurance and survival, which forms survivance.

Conclusion

Native American literature is a literature of survivance. Survivance becomes a source of understanding the rich legacy of Native American literature. Native American fiction describes the endurance and survival of Native Americans. It depicts the understanding of real values of native Americans. It is a literature of deep historical depth with an active presence of natives. No doubt, it suffered misrepresentations like the manipulations of Native people in the falsehood of term Indian but Native writers have successfully shown the world that native literature is pure and real just like the true and spiritual characteristics of Native Americans. Native American culture serves as a source of inspiration for the Native American literature. Native fiction blends the sense of reality and imagination. Native American literature with its dynamic perspectives enjoys a rich legacy of literature.

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