



Cultural Disintegration as Witnessed through A.M.Klein's poem, "Indian Reservation: Caughnawaga"

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Abstract

Canadian literature like other colonial literatures was slow in its development. These are obviously the causes which delayed the growth of Canadian literary tradition. Therefore, Canadian literature developed gradually. The impact of globalization is manifold, with all its facets on literature.

Though cultural globalization paves way for cultural dissemination, it also leads to cultural disintegration and degeneration. The exchange of cultural practices and values gave way to the convergence of traditions of different countries due to globalization. Sharing of knowledge and expression of ideas have become feasible through globalization. Cultural globalization has introduced us to myriad cultures of the world, but has also alienated people from their own culture, ancestral roots, personal past and identity.

Globalization has pushed the Indigenous people today to a bewildered condition. This paper intends to analyse this idea from A.M.Klein's perspective through his poem, " Indian Reservation: Caughnawaga."

Every colonized country had indeed its share of suffering and bitterness, but what distinguishes the Canadian predicament from that of the other countries is the continuation of the identity-crisis over an inordinately long time span. Despite the fact, that Canada attained its sovereign status as a confederate country by the British North America Act of 1867, the quest for a distinctive national identity continued to

remain a deferred dream in Canada. The deep scar of colonial rule has its permanent mark on the Canadian psyche. Colonization had a rather destructive effect on the native Canadian society and culture; it brought into the land a number of new ethnical and cultural patterns. “Canada witnessed cultural interaction, absorption, assimilation, and synthesis of various cultures, leading often to cultural conflicts” (Moss, John 03).

Canada has been a colony paying allegiance to several mother countries. Cultural pluralism and disparity are yet other factors which added to the continuation of the Canadian enigma of identity. Quite often, the overwhelming and at the same time frustrating multiplicity and heterogeneity of Canadian cultures give rise to ex-centric attempts to look for regional identities as an alternative to the goal of seeking a homogeneous or homogenizing national identity. These tendencies, while they reflect and reveal the Canadian preoccupation to discover alternative modes to resolve the Canadian problem, they at the same time intensify the problem by further compounding and subverting the already complex problem of acquiring a centered Canadian identity.

In such circumstances, it may seem almost quixotic to speak of a Canadian literary tradition, indeed a number of critics and commentators have offered cogent reasons regarding the delayed establishment of Canadian literature. According to them, “the psychological effects of a colonial past; a narrow and emotionally crippling Puritanism; excessive openness to foreign influences or sometimes, an obstinate and parochial rejection of them; the general dullness of Canada and the Canadian people; and the lack of an authentic history are obviously the causes which detained the growth of Canadian literature (qtd. in Daymond 02). Hence Canadian literature like other colonial literatures was slow in its development. These are obviously the causes which delayed the growth of Canadian literary tradition. Therefore, Canadian literature developed gradually.

Most of the Canadian writers felt that Canadian literature had no tradition, but it was quite possible to establish one and so, they toiled to the core for the evolution of a whole and meaningful Canadian literary tradition, which in turn gave way to the evolution of distinctive Canadian identity.

It was in the post - 1960s, however, that women in Canada began to assert more consciously and confidently the authenticity of the feminine sensibility. Then evolved a feminine discourse, which was different and divergent to the patriarchal discourse. The postmodernism and the womens movement in the 1960s acted as catalysts to generate a greater awareness of the need for self-definition and self-assertion among Canadian women as it did elsewhere in the world. Also, the wide spread preoccupation with the quest for a distinctive cultural identity in Canada in the post - 1960s, contributed to strengthening the desire to assert a distinctive feminine identity in accordance with the masculine one in literature and in culture.

The impact of globalization is manifold, with all its facets on literature. Globalization encompasses diverse aspects of the modern world. It has brought together the nations of the world close to each other; into a single community via media, education, business transactions, politics, culture, technology, economics and social interactions; making an ever transforming world.

Though cultural globalization paves way for cultural dissemination, it also leads to cultural disintegration and degeneration. The exchange of cultural practices and values gave way to the convergence of traditions of different countries due to globalization. Tremendous growth has been witnessed in the business and trade. People have got to know the conventional practices and business consumer culture of each other across the globe resulting in the development and economic growth. Globalization has improved international business tie ups and deals while strengthening global communication. Sharing of knowledge and expression of ideas have become feasible through globalization. Cultural globalization has introduced us to myriad cultures of the world, but has also alienated people from their own culture, ancestral roots, personal past and identity. Globalization has pushed the Indigenous people today to a bewildered condition:

In many ways, indigenous people challenge the fundamental assumptions of

globalization. It sounds more like an assumption to think that humanity will

benefit from the construction of a world culture of consumerism. Indigenous

people are acutely aware, from their own tragic experience over the past 500

years, that consumer societies grow and prosper at the expense of other

peoples and the environment.

(Daes)

This is absolutely true of all native people; which no doubt includes the First Nations of Canada.

"Globalization has certainly had an impact on the world's indigenous communities and sustainable ways of life, and the surrounding ecosystems in which they live," said Iqbal in his Article, " Globalization and its Impact on Indigenous Cultures." The Natural resources have been exploited and explored due to globalisation. There is deterioration in the conservation of biodiversity. Globalization has led to climatic changes and global warming with modernization. A drastic change has been witnessed in the lifestyle and the regions inhabited by the native people. indigenous territories are intended to " safeguard the rights of indigenous people to their land and livelihoods for social, cultural, and equity reasons" (Walker). The indigenous territories with majority of the population being displaced and scattered has resulted in deforestation and more emission of carbon di oxide. The dislocation of the indigenous population has not only reflected in cultural degeneration, but has given way to the enormous loss of biodiversity on earth. Some volunteered for a cultural transformation in order to acquire modern education and some acted under constraint by shedding their valuable ancestral knowledge of their indigenous community.

A.M. Klein (14 February 1909 – 20 August 1972) was a Canadian poet, novelist, short story writer, lawyer and journalist. He is often portrayed as 'one of Canada's greatest poets in Jewish-Canadian culture.' A.M.Klein is known for his novella entitled, *The Second Scroll* (1951) along with his numerous poetry collections, short stories, essays and critical reviews. Klein's poem, "The Indian Reservation: Caughnawaga" details on the transformation that has come over the indigenous territories and communities. It was published in *A Magazine of Verse* in 1945. This poem has the parallel theme of preserving the conventions and traditions of the indigenous population like that of Oodgeroo Noonuccal's "No More Boomerang."

"Indian Reservation: Caughnawaga" is one of his excellent poems, where Klein imparts the idea of preserving the cultural values of the Red Indians. Though they occupied the borders of North India, they were only considered as Canadian Tribal people whom Klein had been admiring and observing right from his childhood and school going days:

Childhood, that wished me Indian, hoped

that one after-school, I'd leave the classroom chalk, the varnish smell,

the watered dust of the street, to join the clean outdoors of the Iroquois.

(Lines 8-11)

Klein disapproves of those who disrespect their traditions and he dismisses them as mere ghosts. Like the other colonized countries, the impact of Western culture is quite evident In this poem. Klein throws light on the negative impact that the western culture has left on the traditional life style of the indigenous people.

A.M.Klein bemoans the transition of the ancient Red Indian Race in the major part of the poem caused due to modernization which in turn led to cultural globalization:

And the monosyllabic chief who spoke with his throat?

Where are the Tribes? the feathered bestiaries?-----

O' Aesop's animals, erect and red,

With fur on their names to make all live things kin! -----

Chief Running Deer, Black Bear, Old Buffalo Head?

(Lines 3 - 7)

In the very first stanza, we hear Klein reminiscing his past experiences when he got to see the Chief of the Red Indian Tribe wearing the traditional feathery costume. Once the Red Indians lived along with nature; being one with nature. But later were caged and captivated by the colonizers. Klein also recalls the

names of the tribal Chiefs; their names no wonder show their association with nature. Klein depicts the aggression and agony that the native people experienced at the hands of the Westerners. Nevertheless some got attracted towards Western culture. Here the poet seems to highlight the gradual transformation that came over the Red Indians due to colonization and cultural globalization.

Hence Klein regrets and feels sorry for the Red Indians who were drawn towards cultural disintegration of their civilization being enamoured by westernization. The Red Indians have even ceased themselves from painting their bodies and wearing Bronze accessories (part of their culture).

The native people have yielded to modernization and have become negligent towards endorsing their cultural heritage, one can sense the materialistic attitude in them. The performance of traditional dance happens not as a custom; but as a commercial performance in front of a white Mayor after receiving a bribe. Their children pick through the dust the brown pennies thrown by the tourists at church doors.

Klein regrets to witness the relics of Red Indians being exhibited and sold as commodities. It is like selling their past through which they are selling their culture ignorantly. As remarked by the Historian, Fredric Jameson, "Cultural forms are not without cognitive value, for they unavoidably (if indirectly) express the historical situation's 'moment of truth'" (qtd.in Simons 253). Klein laments at the negligence of the Red Indians through this poem. Hunting is no more a part of their daily routine. They have shed their native religion for Western Christianity. Klein dismisses their new life style as unoriginal and fake. He eventually mocks at them by referring to them as:

Bleached are their living bones. About them watch

as through a mist, the pious properous ghosts.

(Lines 34 -35).

This poem, "Indian Reservation: Caughnawaga" [Caughnawaga - name of the colony inhabited by Red Indians] depicts Klein's nostalgic feelings of the past and the cultural heritage of the Red Indian civilization that has deteriorated and diminished at the cost of colonization, westernization, cultural

globalization and modernity. There is less hope for its revival. Cultural significance plays a vital role in every individual's life. It was aptly said by Mahatma Gandhiji, " A nation's culture resides in the hearts and in the soul of its people." This quote in a nutshell exemplifies the vitality of cultural values in a contemporary world of globalization.

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