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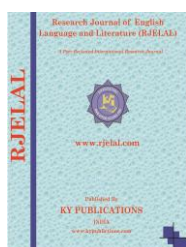
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'IN HARMONY WITH NATURE': ECOCRITICAL CONCERNS IN THE WORKS OF CANADIAN NATIVE WOMEN WRITERS

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ABSTRACT

The environment consists of everything that makes up our surroundings— air, water, land, plants and animals— and it's being good or bad affects our ability to live on the earth. In recent decades, extensive research has been carried out to examine the ways how people affect the environment. Reports state that air pollution, deforestation, acid rain, and other environmental hazards are man-made disasters which will eventually take a heavy toll both on humans and non-human entities. This paper discusses the ecosystem of native reserves of Canada that has adversely affected by colonisation and capital imperialism. Canadian Native writers like Jeannette Armstrong, Ruby Slipperjack, Lee Maracle and Beatrice Culleton have raised concerns regarding environmental degradation and mindless exploitation of natural resources in Canada in the name of development and globalisation. They too have presented in their works how their native lifestyle and belief system is in much harmony with Nature and they have all respect and care for her and the flora and fauna, residing in her lap.

Keywords: Native literature, ecocriticism, globalisation, postcolonialism, land, nature

The earth was created by the assistance of the sun, and it should be left as it was. . . . The country was made without lines of demarcation, and it is no man's business to divide it. . . . I see the whites all over the country gaining wealth, and see their desire to give us lands which are worthless. . . . The earth and myself are of one mind. The measure of the land and the measure of our bodies are the same. Say to us if you can say it, that you were sent by the Creative Power to talk to us. Perhaps you think the Creator sent you here to dispose of us as you see fit. If I thought you were sent by the Creator I might be induced to think you had a right to dispose of me. Do

not misunderstand me, but understand me fully with reference to my affection for the land. I never said the land was mine to do with as I chose. The one who has the right to dispose of it is the one who has created it. I claim a right to live on my land, and accord you the privilege to live on yours.

Heinmot Tooyalaket (Chief Joseph)
Of thee Nez Perces from Dee Brown's
Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee
(Quoted in Rice)

The environment consists of everything that makes up our surroundings— air, water, land, plants and animals— and it's being good or bad affects our ability to live on the earth. In recent

decades, extensive research has been carried out to examine the ways how people affect the environment. Reports state that air pollution, deforestation, acid rain, and other environmental hazards are man-made disasters which will eventually take a heavy toll both on humans and non-human entities. To examine the root causes that have caused the present deplorable condition of Nature and Earth, one can easily cite four –five reasons behind it: industrialization, greenhouse gases, over-exploitation of natural resources, a sea change in lifestyle and greed for more wealth and the power associated with it. Such insatiable appetite of present capitalist sovereign nations is suggestive of the Weendigo spirit described in the traditional narratives of native societies of Canada. Basil Johnston in *The Manitous* describes the "weendigo" as an ever-hungry spirit (not to be confused with evil spirit) which constantly keeps on feeding itself on everything it can have, an attribute strikingly similar to capitalism:

As the Weendigo ate, it grew, and as it grew so did its hunger, so that no matter how much it ate, its hunger always remained in proportion to its size. The Weendigo could never requite either its unnatural lust for human flesh or its unnatural appetite. It could never stop as animals do when bloated, unable to ingest another morsel, or sense as humans sense that enough is enough for the present. For the unfortunate Weendigo, the more it ate, the bigger it grew; and the bigger it grew, the more it wanted and needed. (222)

The First-World and the Second-World countries are mainly capitalist, industrial civilization as they are absorbed by material self-interests manifested in the accumulation of personal wealth at the expense of the physical environment of Planet Earth. This monster of capitalism has come into existence following the expansion of colonization of unexplored and/or less popular non-European lands with promising natural bounty. Jack Forbes, in *Columbus and other Cannibal: The Wetiko Disease of Exploitation, Imperialism, and Terrorism* (1992), calls such impulse for unrestricted greed a human "psychosis": "I call it cannibalism, . . . this wetiko

(cannibal) psychosis . . . is the greatest epidemic sickness known to man. The rape of a woman, the rape of a land, and the rape of a people, they are all the same. And they are the same as the rape of the earth, the rape of the rivers, the rape of the forest, the rape of the air, the rape of the animals" (10). Forbes calls the European explorers as "infected" people who imported the fatal disease to the Western Hemisphere through colonization which eventually resulted into genocide, greed, brutal oppression of local people, unlawful grabbing of native lands, exploitation of reserves and natural wealth. In modern times the world map began to show the 'growing' boundaries of the colonizers like Great Britain, France, Spain and others as they set on an imperial sweep across the globe, colonizing new continents like Australia, America, Africa as well as third-world countries like India. The native people were cornered, then colonized and made to learn the lesson of 'civilization'. Their traditional ways of living and spiritual beliefs were challenged and disturbed. As this paper discusses the disturbances caused in the ecosystem of native reserves of Canada, it is very significant to mention how native tribes of this nation lived before Columbus stepped on the American shores. Prior to European contact, the native tribes lived in great harmony, justice, and compassion for community members and other-than-human persons. As Richard Wagamese in *The Terrible Summer* (1996): "The Indian, born of the land, had no need to own or control it because there is no ownership of something of which you are an active part" (36). The major difference between the native and the European ideologies is that the former holds emotional reverence for the land, fellow human beings as well as plants and animals which have enabled aboriginal people to maintain culture and belief systems till today. They treat the natural world as one extended family. Kateri Akiwenzie-Damn, an Anishinabe writer, explains this connection in her essay "We Belong to this Land": "The Native peoples of this land are fundamentally different from anyone else . . . , fundamentally different from [mainstream] Canadians. The basis of the difference is the land, our passion for it and our understanding of our relationship with it. We belong to this land. We believe that this land recognizes us

and knows us" (quoted in Eigenbrod 37). On the contrary, the latter considers birds, animals and non-living entities as resources to be used for their comforts. Unlike the white colonisers, the natives have never imagined owning any land. For them, it is as free as air, water and forest fruits. The concept of ownership of land— being bought or sold— was brought in and made popularised by the white colonizers who tried every cunning trick to grab native lands. To achieve their colonial goals they dislocated the original inhabitants out of their natural home. In 1876, Chief Crowfoot raised his objections against the purchase of native land by the white colonizers during treaty negotiations:

"Our Land is more valuable than your money. It will last forever. It will not perish as long as the sun shines and the waters flow, and through all the years it will give life to men and beasts. We cannot sell the lives of man and animals and therefore, we cannot sell the land. It was put here by the Great Spirit and we cannot sell it, because it does not really belong to us. You can count your money and burn it with the nod of a buffalo's head, but only the Great Spirit can count the grains of sand and the blades of grass on these plains. As a present to you, we will give you anything we have that you can take with you, but the land we cannot give. (quoted in Fadhil Al-Issa 27).

The aboriginal people of Canada, encompassing a variety of social and cultural groups— Okanagan, Mohawk, Micmac, Ojibway, Cree, etc. — share the same feeling of compassion and reverence for Mother Nature and her associated forces. They live in tune with nature and the natural and hold great respect and compassion for them. They never think of causing any harm or misery to the non-human entities. If we have a close look to the native songs, preserved and passed on to posterity by native elders, we will find in them the essence of tribal ideas, insights, values, beliefs, theories, sentiments and rituals and ceremonies. They are often addressed to the invisible life forces around and are responses to the power of the natural forces. They are often meant to harness them and thus to help a man in his fight for survival.

The Sun and the Moon have great importance for the Native Canadians. The Sun is the father of the day and the giver of life and light. He is the guide in their quest for daily food and support. John Robert Colombo in his *Songs of the Indians I* records: "Our Sun, / or our God, / give us something to eat" ('Prayer for Food' [Micmac], 25). The Moon is the beautiful spouse of the Sun who would help the Natives during their hunting expeditions to discover the tracks of the animals during the night. Along with this, they ask the power of the Moon to "Give to our women the strength to support the pains of childbirth, render their wombs prolific, and their breasts inexhaustible fountains" (Colombo I 27).

The Native Canadians have believed in a dynamic universe in which all things are essentially related. Each creature is part of a living whole. They are very spiritual and recognized powers greater than man. Every petition for favour has been addressed to these unseen powers:

Great Spirit,
Bless us all,
Man, woman, and children.
Sacred Medicine Bundle,
Help us to live a straight life.
Sacred Medicine Pipe,
Bless us, also the rivers,
Mountains, prairies,
Animals and birds.
Mother Earth,
Provide for us Until we die. ("Song of the Great Spirit", [Blackfoot], Colombo I 59)

The native society has grown up with trees, flowers, fruits and the changing seasons. Since ages, it has continued to grow in keeping tune with sounds of nature and beating time with its pulsations with a profound belief in its sanctity and harmony. This exclusive bond with nature and her associated forces belonging to both the flora and fauna is referred to and discussed in numerous Native works. Native women writers of Canada make a refreshing contact with the real natural world of animals, trees, rocks and lakes in their works. Mother Earth, the land on which the Indigenous people have been living since ages, holds the closest bond with them. Native writers like Jeannette Armstrong in the

opening paragraph of her essay "Land Speaking", she states that the two strong influences that laid her foundation as a writer are the Okanagan language, the language of her people, and her experience of the land, which sources and arises in her poetry and prose.

In the past five hundred years, the monstrous forces of colonisation and capital imperialism have jointly alienated native communities of the world within their ancient homelands. And land has been at the heart of the conflict between the natives and the whites. With sham treaties, the colonial powers succeed in grabbing almost the whole of Canada and restricted the natives to few reserves. Jeannette Armstrong, Ruby Slipperjack, and Lee Maracle portray in their works a great attachment of the native tribes towards nature and land and how colonisation has brought in exploitation and destruction in the physical environment of the native reserves.

Ecocriticism is an interdisciplinary study of literature and the physical environment where scholars analyse texts that illustrate environmental concerns and examine the various ways literature treats the subject of nature. It is true that human culture is connected to the non-human world, affecting it and affected by it. Tidita Abdurrahmani states her observation in "Eco-criticism and Nature writing: The Traits of the American Approaches": "Through ecocriticism we do not just analyse nature in literature; we move toward a more biocentric world-view, an extension of ethics, a broadening of humans' conception of global community to include non-human life forms and the physical environment" (268). This observation proves accurate when we analyse Canadian Native societies that majorly reside on different rural reserves, far away from the din and bustle of modern cities. They live in the lap of lush green nature, interacting with the natural world around it. For them, nature is to be respected as it is benign enough to provide them with necessities for food, medicine and spiritual comfort. In *Rediscovering the First Nations of Canada* (1997) John W. Friesen talks about the ancestors of these native tribes who were remarkably different from present-day insensible capitalist empires:

"[The pre-contact natives] were peoples who were content with *being not bent on doing*. They appreciated the gift of life and nature's resources and did not want to destroy them. They were inventive cultures, but totally committed to working in harmony with the dictates of nature. They were not out to amend, change or conquer the forces of nature. Those forces or processes were a gift from the creator and were to be received as such-with gratitude". (23)

This ideal relation is well exemplified in Ruby Slipperjack's works. Ruby Slipperjack, an eminent Ojibway or Anishnabe writer, presents the beautiful country world on White Water Lake, Ontario. She attaches great value to the motherland and her natural surroundings. Indigeneity is synonymous to closeness with the land and the natural environment. Slipperjack explains in her interview with Hartmut Lutz: "Everything is tied with nature. They may be just rocks to you, but that is old Sammy, there . . . You have given it a name . . . The land, rocks, trees are part of our history, a part of us. They live longer than we do. If you stay in one place, a tree will watch you crawl, run, walk, shuffle, and eventually see" (*Contemporary Challenges* 214). On the back cover of *Silent Words*, she frames her text with the following context: "I have been to all the places I write about. I know the smell, feel, and texture of the earth I walk on. I belong to it". In her novels, nature and the natural cannot be ignored as they are not inarticulate and play their part in the routine life of the humans.

Slipperjack's novel *Honour the Sun* (1987) presents the story of a young girl, Owl, passing through puberty to adolescence, who feels torn between her native lineage and the white promising future. The story of her quest for identity is narrated by Owl in First-person voice, but her story is woven with the harmony of seasonal imagery: "Spring, summer, fall or winter" (36). The whole novel is set in the idyllic, serene natural landscape where villagers and their children are seen busy in the traditional routine of fishing, rowing boats, berry-picking, hunting, gathering foods from the wild woods and bird-trapping. In tribes societies, hunting

is considered necessary for survival. Unlike Europeans who consider hunting as an adventurous sport, tribal people believe that the powers of Nature grace and guide them in a successful hunt. Even before killing a bird, fish or animal, they show gratitude to it for yielding to their needs for food. They believe that the creatures they are killing, are souls like them and therefore no animal or bird should be slain needlessly and no body part is to be wasted. In Slipperjack's second novel, *Silent Words*, the hero Danny carries home the meat of a moose with his friend young Jim. They forget about the respect they should be showing to the dead 'brother' who has sacrificed his life for their living. They start to make fun of it:

I burst out laughing and tried to swing the meat out to throw at him, when suddenly, Henry's face changed. He put his head down and I turned to see Shornis. He stood there glaring at us, then turned around. I slowly put the meat down and asked Henry, "What's with him?" Henry shook his head. "I should not have done that. We should not be playing with the meat." (85)

The silent disapproval of the Elder at the profane laughter of the boys guides the boys to realise their mistake. They should sensitise themselves to the life-and-death struggle that exists in order, that all beings may survive. Later in the novel, Danny meets Ol' Jim in whose company he re-lives the traditional pre-contact life of the Natives. He realises that he is gradually becoming a part of the land. He delights in listening to "the gentle crackling of the wood in the fire, the seagulls having a big argument, the laughing mallard ducks having a party in the bay and the occasional fish taking a breath of air above the water" (141). He celebrates "the new feeling of being alive, well and happy" (141). Under the guidance of Ol' Jim, Danny learns about leaving tobacco offering for other-than-human beings, i.e. inhabitants of the spiritual world, as a sign of reciprocal respect':

He took a pinch of tobacco and mumbled to himself, then reached out and put it on a rock ledge.

The canoe rocked to the side, and I figured he must feel it was important enough to send both of us into the water. Then a thought occurred to me. "Ol' Jim, is there someone there?"

Why would you leave tobacco if there was no one there to take it?" (97)

Ol' Jim informs him about the invisible but spiritual presence of the Memegwesiwag, the other-world relatives of the Aborigines, with whom human beings have lost communication under the influence of capitalist, colonial rule and consequent effects of urbanization. Leaving tobacco for the Memegwesiwag would ensure that their canoe would not capsize, or that they might have luck in fishing. This idea of respect and reciprocity among all beings, dead or alive, is common to most Aboriginal groups. Reciprocity has always been one way by which Native people maintain respect, balance and co-existence between all living and non-living beings. Ol' Jim is a role model for Danny and he models himself after his mentor.

Another character in *Silent Words*, Mr Old Indian, teaches Danny about the sacredness of Mother Earth in his strange accent in English: "To honour da Eart, boy, is you mus' un'erstan dat it is alibe. Da men wit da machines are like lice dat feed on da libin' sclap o' Mudder Eart" (55). Slipperjack presents before her readers the bold image of human beings with their environmentally destructive, disrespectful machines as "lice" feeding on an alive planet Earth. He talks about the artificiality of the capitalist, modern world:

Today, man is bery much use' to da manmade tings dat dey know nuttin else. Dey e born in a manmade place, an dey die in a manmade place. You mus' un'erstan dese tings, boy. We are da child'en of da Eart. [. . .] Da chile of da Eart is some one o' as learnt dat da ting dat gibe m life is, da groun' dey walk on. It is da groun' dat gib all life, an all life reach up to da sun. We 'ab da knowledge to talk to an un'erstan da creator, an we 'ab da knowledge to lead da res' of da worl' to peace an 'eal da sufferin Eart. (56)

Mr Old Indian's words explicate regret and intense worry for the unmindful exploitation of the land by the giant mining machines. Dee Horne in his essay "Listening to Silences in Ruby Slipperjack's *Silent Words*" analyses Old Indian's words as teaching that "all human beings are part of the web of creation and, like 'da leaf', follow the natural cycle from birth to death" (127).

The Sun is considered very important life-force in native societies. Basil Johnston reports in *Ojibway Ceremonies* (1982) that to the Ojibwa or the "Anishnabeg, each new rising of the sun was tantamount to a new life, a time new and different from that which passed the previous day" (136). This spiritual aspect is evident in Slipperjack's *Honour the Sun* where the mother of the protagonist, Owl, inspires her children to wake up before dawn to honour the rising sun and seek its blessings. Once, a violent brutal attack is made on Owl's family in which Owl's mother is raped, though the children flee from the cottage. Though angry and still in pain, she follows the spiritual practice. She gets up early in the morning, heats water from the frozen lake and wakes up her children to face the rising sun. She tells them: "When the sun comes over the horizon, he will see you and be very pleased that you're all ready to greet him and he will bless you" (101). Owl never falters to follow this practice until she leaves for her boarding school. Her life becomes torn between the white and Native values. Still, she recalls the wise lesson even when her loved ones are no longer with her. But she finds consolation in the Sun's warm ways: "I take a deep breath of the clean, fresh air and water the sun's rays dance on the water's surface and think, 'The Sun will keep coming up till the end of time but the people it shines on are here, then gone. Is that what Mom meant? What was it she used to say? 'Honour the Sun, child, just as it comes over the horizon, Honour the Sun, that it may bless you come another day . . .'" (211).

Native societies believe that an anxious soul could always find relief in the refuge of nature. Owl's mother inspires her girl to follow this. Owl is a sensitive young girl who finds hard to adjust herself to changes flooding in native societies due to the white colonial influence. The drunk men of her

village repeatedly attack her family; her mother becomes alcoholic; her siblings start leaving the family— all these things have caused Owl great anxiety and she finds no hope in future. But still, her mother blesses her with her spiritual wise words: "When you feel your emotions all in turmoil inside you, listen to the silence . . ." (184). Initially, Owl does not understand: "How do you listen to the silence when silence doesn't have a noise? Or does it? I sit and listen. I can hear . . . a bird chirp from across the bay, . . . a slight wind overhead above the trees, a train coming, a dull hum in the air, and always my heartbeats. I smile at Mom. Yes, it is very calming" (184). The youth of present generation is fast losing access to spiritual teachings of Native heritage as they can hardly imagine that "anything noiseless cannot be heard as [they] equate[s] noise with a human parole" (Tripathi & Roy 262). This lesson may sound irrelevant as today's ultra-modern culture consider loud music and over-crowding discotheques as 'cool' and signifier of progressiveness. But still the youth suffers from the spiritual vacuum at heart because their fast-pacing life and throat-cut competition spare them no chance and time to establish a soulful connection neither with themselves nor family or fellow beings, so not to talk of nature, the non-human environment. Owl, in *Honour the Sun*, shows such youth a direction as she corrects herself and connects with nature and the natural: ". . . I spend time sitting by the woodpile, listening to the silence. The ice melts on the lake, the grass turns green, the leaves come out, the flowers bloom. I look over the land and feel peaceful and happy" (185).

Nonhuman nature has been perceived in Slipperjack's texts not as an object of study but as an active, bodied subject. Owl's crying over the town joker hanging five puppies by the neck between the trees, her delight in the listening of the birds are instances of a native child conceiving the animals as living presences. An Indian is close to the earth, not as a 'noble savage' but as a person who believes that the earth is alive in the same sense as he is. Generally, it is seen that human beings personify inanimate objects but do not naturalize or animalise themselves. But Slipperjack suggests that it is possible. Her protagonist, Owl, imagines herself as a

blackbird and describes her feel: "The warm air gently lifts my breast, filling me, through me, and I become one with the night, only to emerge again as Me, to honour the Sun, in the early morning light" (39). Owl in bird's guise and Owl the person changes subject positions as both belong to Nature. Danny, in *Silent Words* too feels the same: "If I was some other kind of animal, what would I smell? I hunched down and pretended I was a wolf. I sniffed the damp warm air as I trotted to the edge of the water" (141). Slipperjack suggests through this kind of animalization the dissolution of personal ego and becomes compassionate towards human and non-human entities. Danny's innocent identification with wolf blesses him with a new life as a pack of wolves saves him from dying in the snow by alerting his friends about his distress in the forest. Later Ol'Jim gives him a pouch of tobacco to thank the wolves as a token of respect and gratitude: "You leave this to thank the wolves who helped you last night. Once they know you know them, they will always be there to help and guide you. They will know you recognise them. They don't forget, it is the humans who do" (226).

Another beautiful portrayal of an empathic relationship between human and wolf is evident in Beatrice Culleton's *In the Shadow of Evil*. Wapan, the "tawny grey wolf" (87), acts as the guardian angel of the protagonist, Christine Webster. This she-wolf saves Christine from every mishap in the novel and even gives up her life in order to save her. In Métis heritage, wolves are considered as a powerful metaphor of strength, loyalty and mysterious spiritual wisdom. They are believed to be protectors that guide and protect the native soul in the time of utter misery, confusion, or need. Lee Maracle, another prominent and dynamic native writer, identifies herself to be descendants of 'wolf clan'. Once in the novel, when Christine is bewildered due to a mysterious and sudden disappearance of her husband, Peter, and her son, Todd. Police reports state they die in a road accident. She feels completely dejected and torn apart. She attempts to commit suicide by shooting herself with a rifle. But she fails to shoot herself and breaks down in tears, feeling utterly depressed. At this critical juncture, Wapan comes out of the deep

forests of the Shadow Lake and licks away Christine's tears to pacify her. Christine breaks down, hugs the wolf and buries her face in the wolf's neck. This is the most touching overwhelming situation of the novel: "My grief was so consuming that it hadn't occurred to me that what was taking place here was unbelievable. This had to be the wolf Kit called Wapan— a wolf who had more heart than I, a wolf who took care of young ones not her own, a wolf who gave comfort to a half-crazy, grief-stricken woman in the wild" (116). Christine's disturbed soul eases as her eyes get locked into Wapan's. Her wretched soul feels 'empowered' as it absorbs the compassion and wisdom— "Get on with life, for life is sacred" (117) — convey by the noble wild beast. She describes her enlightenment in this way: "The viruses that had wiggled and squirmed inside me were being vanquished and stilled. The emotional and spiritual maggots that had gnawed away at my heart, mind, and soul were somehow being destroyed as if an invisible blood transfusion were infusing antibiotics— infusing life into me. Wapan was sharing her power— a clean, pure healthy power" (117). Beatrice presents a striking difference between the Catholic teachings and the native belief system. In the Catholic religion, the church preaches that "man was created in the image of God and, therefore, we were superior over all other creatures. Animals could not think or feel the emotions we did, and they acted only on instinct, always for their own benefit" (122). But for aboriginals, non-human entities, including plants and animals, do not need people and could exist without us. Humans need forests, rivers, mountains and other physical environments. The spiritual communion between Wapan and Christine attests this point. Wapan establishes the lost link between Christine and Metis mystic wisdom which has been missing due to her growing up in the white, colonial society that disdain everything native. But now Christine is well-equipped in spirit, courage and confidence in herself and Nature outside: ". . . the healing . . . from all negatives in my past life which had allowed those viruses inside me to fester and eat away at my soul. . . I now looked forward to all the tomorrows to come" (123).

If in Beatrice Culleton's *In the Shadow of Evil* a wolf comes to save a human soul, in Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash* (1985) the natural landscape of the protagonist's reserve rescues him from the idea of committing suicide. Tommy Kelasket is sentenced to prison for eighteen months under the charges of keeping in possession of drugs. The extremely negative environment including gang wars, sexual abuse, bloody fights, and brutal, humiliating discrimination between the white prisoners and the native ones, suffocates Tom to such an extent that he sees no hope in living anymore. One night he decides to pursue the path of 'chosen death'. But the mesmerising, vivid vision of his country-mountains and landscape timely saves a promising life from perishing prematurely:

I looked up and faraway I could see the new snow on the tops of the mountain from the barred windows above me. The sun had set in a blaze, making the snow look orange-pink with dark blue tinges. I could almost feel the soft-cushioned brush of new snow against my shoes and feel the sharp wet bite of the fir and pine smells in the crisp air. Tracking deer in that snow would be easy. "Tonight", I thought, "I will go home to them mountains". (47)

These memories take Tom into a trance-like state and his tears rolling down his eyes wash away all agonies and miseries which prompt him to end his life. His heart becomes "light and happy". This example exemplifies the intense connection a native person has with his/her native land and landscape. Native writers have voiced against the violation of Nature and natural resources at the hands of white colonial enterprises. Lee Maracle's *Sundogs* (1990) deals with the true historical Okanagan Peace Run which took place in 1990 to protect the land rights of the Mohawk community. Maracle exposes the white government's enterprises to build a golf course on Mohawk's graveyard as it has no consideration of the natives' reverence for their dead ancestors who are still living presence for them. Their digger machines would hardly bother to dig out the lifeless wise souls in eternal sleep.

Machines are lifeless, strong, and arrogant tools which do not consider anybody's faith, beliefs and sentiments. They are at the command of their masters, white or brown. In colonial and even in post-colonial eras, machines symbolise capitalist power and authority of man over nature. They stand for limitless greed of man to exploit the natural bounty, whether in resources, minerals, or wood. They consider none to fulfil the monetary lust of their masters. Jeannette Armstrong's *Whispering in Shadows* (2000) portrays such mindless destruction and exploitation in nature. Armstrong puts forth her worries towards the preservation of Nature and its resources and she holds man's greed and his callous attitude the major factors behind it. In an interview with Hartmut Lutz, she says, "the sickness of us as human beings has become evident in the destruction of the world, in the destruction of our atmosphere and other life forms, and our rivers, and our lakes! And it's not a natural occurrence, it's not a natural outgrowth, and what I see happening is the disease of man, not a disease of the Earth! It's a disease of our spirit, a disease that's killing us" (31). Her concern is profoundly projected in her novel, *Whispering in Shadows*.

Penny Jackson, the protagonist of the novel, considers the economic policy of globalization to be the major reason for the plight of the natives in Canada, U. S. A. and the likes. She wonders that "North America is wealthy with resources, so why there is so much poverty" (81). Natural resources—forest wood and underground oil—are not man-made resources; then how could the governments order out to cut down forest after forest to dig out oil. Natives like Penny believe that "forest is sacred. That it's wrong to kill its life" (108); their words stand in stark contrast with non-Natives' attitude physical environment which only meant to use it for their comfort and advancement. Before the advent of colonisers, the land solely belonged to the natives but was later cunningly taken over by the whites in the name of land treaties. With the arrival of the whites, a lot of racism has surfaced too. The colonisers want the forest but "nobody really wants [the natives] to be a part of the forest. That people want the trees saved but not with them in it. What they really want is a park managed for tourist

dollars" (110). The natives are helpless as the whites are in power and their 'interests' rule supreme over the 'sacred' care of the forests by the natives. Penny witnesses one such scene of ruthless plundering of forests in the protest camp. One policeman arrives at the camp with some papers in his hands and charges the protesters that they are breaking the law by causing hindrance to the cutting down of the forest by the logger company so they might get arrested. The chief of the native tribe replies: "You are breaking the law of our lands. You are violating the laws of the Creator. I am ordering you to stop your machines" (114). But the Elder's words fall on deaf ears as the man from the logger company hurls abuses at the natives: "Fucking Indians and tree huggers! Go home!" (115). The Native Elder replies calmly: "I am home. This is my home. It always has been and it always will be, regardless of what you do to it. I'm here for the duration. Get used to it" (115). The author regrets the cunning attempts of white capitalist forces that try hard to distance the natives from their land, failing to realise their spiritual connection with Mother Earth. They fail to understand the benefits to stay close to nature. Once Penny visits San Cristobel and is asked by the tour guide not to drink or wash their mouths with the water of that land. She finds it absurd and she recalls her life on the Okanagan reserve: "The water we carried in buckets to use was lake run-off. I grew up drinking the water that geese and ducks swam in, and cows and horses watered at, not to mention the beavers and otters and other stuff" (164). People in the city get affected by various diseases but the natives do not.

Armstrong's work exposes the environmental nuances that flood in due to globalisation and capitalism as big industries are selling fairytale concepts to run their business at the cost of the environment. Once Julie, Penny's friend, counts Penny's shirts in her wardrobe in order to figure out how mass production functions at the cost of environment and human dreams to become rich and fabulous. Penny and Julie call it "the idea of enterprise and exploitation" (81) and hold "fantasy like Cinderella" responsible for it that "the idea of somehow finding treasure and turning into a princess, with jewels, servants and so on" (81).

Companies initiate such marketing tactics (youth's dreams to become rich and live like kings and queens of fairy tales) to boom their consumer market by plundering resources and getting "everything polluted" (81). General public fails to decode such marketing strategies and deceiving economic interests of big industrial houses ensuring that poor should exist to buy the dreams. So, this results in a rigid class system "keeping the rich powerful and the poor powerless" (81).

Armstrong portrays the horrendous picture of modern cities like Los Angeles where endless series of ultramodern skyscrapers fill one's sight to such an extent that one could not see an eye-ful view of clean blue sky. Such view of 'jungle' of concrete-buildings suffocates the spirit of an environmentalist like Penny Jackson who feels choked and wants to run away and scream aloud. She desperately searches the clean blue sky and wants to reach up into the air to "rip away the mantle of death hanging over everything living" (197). For her living in the "city of Angels" is living in real "hell". She is scared that people will not die a natural death as utter degradation in the environment and unhealthy daily life has cut short the lifespan of a human being in modern days. She expresses her worries: "How many children have to grow up and die here without having seen the clear blue of a spring sky? How many have never taken in a lung full of clean air or eaten clean fresh food from the earth? What kind of human sacrificing takes place here every year? How many daily are laid before the altar of the almighty dollar?" (197-198). Armstrong's protagonist is worried that the only hope for protecting "biodiversity" and "natural sustainability" (147) is getting destroyed as the native lands are being grabbed by the whites, dispossessing the indigenous tribes who hold Nature and its inhabitants, living and non-living, in deep reverence and protects them from exploitation and therefore from extinction. And the white settlers have transformed "the untouchable land" into "global real estate" (Harting par. 25). Heike Harting draws a metaphorical relationship between environmental pollution and Penny's cancer. Penny's body is a natural environment upon which ideologies of progress and development inflict violence through pesticide-

inflicted food and polluted air and water: "The weight of the sky. Heavy with . . . smoke, dust and fumes. Heavy, heavy with vaporized chemicals, carbons, poisons. Particles pressing down into her pores, pressing into her breathing" (290). That is the reason Penny calls cancer the shadows of the new world that she carries inside her body.

Penny condemns general people's complacency and sense of contentment with their present state of living that is responsible for diseases like cancer as "we don't recognise the enemy. We buy the stuff that causes it" (246). People hardly bother to know what kind of toxic chemicals are used to process food, making daily-use products like shoes, cars, utensils, etc. Further, the leakage of plutonium during nuclear tests is responsible for the emergence of new diseases and the re-emergence of old ones. Pollution is getting intense and people are becoming careless day by day. Native writers like Armstrong have raised serious concern regarding such environmental hazards in their works. They advise the present generation to come closer to Nature and natural ways of living like their ancestors. Penny sets the example as she prefers to go back to the medicinal ways of the Okanagan culture and rejects the modern chemotherapy.

Natives writers like Jeannette Armstrong, Ruby Slipperjack, Lee Maracle and Beatrice Culleton have raised concerns saving the physical environment and its inmates. They advocate the need to reconnect our souls to Mother Nature and Planet Earth as this would only save our biosphere from destruction and humans and other species from extinction. And our next generations would be able to see greens and blues with their naked eyes, and not in motion and/or print media. Ecofeminists advocate that woman is more close to nature while a man is close to culture. We need to acknowledge that an old-world order characterized by cooperation between humans and nature has been replaced by a reductionist, mechanical worldview of modern science which sanctions exploitation of nature, unchecked commercial and industrial expansion. Therefore all we need to do is to develop a sensitive attitude towards Mother Nature as mankind has a long way to go, to tread the path of

progress; but healthy progress is only possible when we maintain a balance between our inner nature and the outer one, our natural environment.

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