

Searching the Roots of Identity: A Postcolonial study of Drew Hayden Taylor.



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July-Aug., 2014

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There are groups in society that experience profound social problems and others that show signs of growing social malaise. In particular, among Aborigines, Identity Politics is an important problem. This paper attempts to read Drew Hayden Taylor's plays *Someday and Only Drunks* and *Children Tell the Truth* in light of searching the real self from a Postcolonial perspective. A postcolonial reading depicts the predicament of identity politics faced by Colonized people. The paper also posits that Multiculturalism is the root cause of Identity Crisis since Multiculturalism results in Marginalization and Marginalization thereby into Identity loss. An individual can no longer relate to his/her real roots and confronts Identity Crisis. Drew Hayden Taylor, the Native Canadian Playwright, attempts to figure out the miserable plight of the Aboriginal people who are still facing the curse of Colonialism and still fighting and yearning for a sense of belongingness. Both the plays depict the wounding journeys and anguish of the Native people and explore the Cultural Clashes faced by the two sisters - Barb and Grace who find it difficult to get on with each other when they meet after a long gap of 23 years. Both of them are not able to relate to each other. The two sisters suffer Cultural Conflicts owing to their different cultural upbringing. Since Grace is entirely assimilated to white culture, she is not able to relate herself to her own place and thus faces Identity Crisis.

This paper is an attempt to explore the above facets of Drew Hayden Taylor's plays *Someday and Only Drunks* and *Children Tell the Truth*.

Identity refers to the sum total of different characteristics (social, cultural and economical) and traits of an individual that defines and distinguishes him/her from the other individuals in the society. In this modern epoch every individual is looking for his/her place in the society.

Fundamentally identity of an individual is shaped in context to society where an individual lives. Cooley (1902) has pointed out in the book *Identity Crisis* that the individual and society are two sides of the same coin. No two individuals belonging to different societies can have similar identity. For instance an individual belonging to white and black society re-

spectively would have different identity owing to different social set-up.

Search for the self and sense of belonging is one of the burning topics of the social malaise affecting the society and it finds full expression in literature. In particular, the term 'Quest for Identity' applies to the Aborigines. Aborigines are the marginalized beings, facing Discrimination and pushed aside from the mainstream society. These communities are the most disadvantaged confronting an array of social dilemmas, constantly fighting for survival in their own land. The Aborigines are deprived of their land, culture and language and are being colonized by the colonizer who occupied complete control over their lives. The prime objective of the colonizer is to strip the Aboriginal of what defines him. The paper is an attempt to explore the questions related to Identity and causes that has led to Identity loss and Quest for the same, in Drew Hayden Taylor's plays *Someday and Only Drunks* and *Children Tell the Truth* from Postcolonial perspective.

White imperialism is the ruling power in Canada. Canada is a multicultural country and its Multicultural Policy is indeed an eye wash. The Natives still are facing Discrimination and Marginalization. The Aborigines in Canada are treated like slaves and are divested of their land and culture. Their lives are being controlled and overpowered by the white society. They are treated as outsiders in their Native land by the white colonial master who made encroachments in their land and has become the ruler. Colonialism and Assimilation are basically preventing these people from developing a clearly defined self. Government of Canada has a very poor record when one talks of the Aborigines. Government of Canada is acting like a Colonizer, to colonize the Aborigines. The Colonizer is adopting various policies that superficially aims at the welfare of the Natives but has assimilating objective at its core and marginalize the Native generation. The Aborigines suffer from questions related to Identity Politics, owing to the constant efforts made by the Canadian Government. The Colonizer intends to promote his own language and culture. Sir John A Macdonald, Canada's first prime minister declared, "The great aim of our legislation has been to do away with the tribal system and assimilate

the Indian people in all respects with the other inhabitants of the Dominion as speedily as they are fit to change." (Milloy 6)

The Native Canadian Playwright Drew Hayden Taylor is part Ojibwa (Ojibwas are among the largest groups in Native America) and part Caucasian (represents the white race). Originally he is from the Curve Lake First Nation in Ontario and therefore has firsthand info of the Aboriginals. He is Canada's most renowned Aboriginal writers and humorists and is well known for his Native concern. He provides the first hand observation and real picture of his people and has written his plays in Colonial language, instead of Ojibwa language, which is indeed his Native language. He attempts to figure out the miserable plight of the Aboriginal people who are still facing the curse of Colonialism and still fighting for what actually belongs to them and in doing so he is laying before the audience the brutality of the Colonial world.

His plays *Someday* (1996), *Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth* (1998) and others exemplify his passion for Native concern. He fully explores the injustice done to the Native people who have been marginalized from the mainstream society. *Someday* is set in 'Sixties Scoop period', which aimed at Cultural Genocide. It involves forceful removal of the Native children from their families in order to place them with the white people where they were brought up according to English norms. The White thinks of himself and his culture as superior and something that the Aboriginal lacks. The White looks down upon the Aboriginal as semi-barbarian and uncivilized being whom he has to make a civilized, refined and polished being.

Someday depicts the wounds of the Native girl who suffered Identity Crisis because she had been removed from her Native land and family when she was only a toddler. *Only Drunks and Children Tell the Truth* is a sequel to *Someday*. It portrays a reunion between two sisters---- Janice and Barb. Both the plays depict the wounding journeys and anguish of the Native people and explore the Cultural Clashes faced by the two sisters - Barb and Grace who find it difficult to get on with each other when they meet after a long gap of 23 years. Both of them could not relate to each other. Actually Grace was taken away from her Native place when she was only a toddler. She was put in a white foster home where she was brought up according to white norms. The two sisters suffer Cultural Conflicts owing to their different cultural upbringing. Since she is entirely assimilated to white culture, she couldn't relate herself to her own place and thus faces Identity Crisis.

The plays depict the psychological conflicts

experienced by the Aboriginal people like Grace while assimilating to new culture. She (Grace) yelled out "It isn't my place, my time. I don't belong here." (Taylor 74). She had to undergo many psychological conflicts in order to return to her mother roots. The following small conversation from the text clearly reflects her alienation and marginalization:

Tonto (Barb's boyfriend's brother) and Barb are toiling to make her realize who she actually is and where she actually belongs.

Barb: "Your Biological Mother".

Janice: "I know her for one hour that was all".

Tonto: "What have you got against Otter Lake? That's where you come from, that's your people".

Janice: "My people live in London".

Tonto: "No, your caretakers live in London, your family live in Otter Lake". (Taylor 23)

This conversation vividly echoes the Colonized mind and Colonial mentality of Grace who is trapped between white and Native culture. The irony is quiet explicit, she is feeling alien to what belongs to her and at ease with what is indeed alien to her and her entire society.

Grace has got another name also, Janice Wirth, given by her foster family. She loves this name and doesn't want to be addressed by her Native name Grace. She rather feels uncomfortable when someone calls her Grace instead of Janice because she is not use to it. She tells Barb that she is not acquainted with this word Grace, until six months ago. "It's like somebody calling you Susan or Victoria all of a sudden" (Taylor 90).

Grace never leaves a chance to point out their cultural differences. She (Grace) says "I was raised Anglican" (Taylor 33). To this Barb replies, "Blood is thicker than water" and "Sisters are blood." (Taylor 38) hinting at their biological relation which is something mutual in them despite the cultural differences. Barb along with her brother in law, Tonto is portrayed as making consistent efforts for their reunion and making her realize her biological self. At the end of the play Tonto quotes the example of a cowbird to explain to her where she actually belongs

"Janice, have you ever heard of a bird called a cowbird? They lay their eggs in other birds' nests then fly off. They raise the baby cowbird as a robin. But when it grows up, the cowbird is still a cowbird. It lays its eggs in another bird's nest just like any other cowbird. Somewhere, deep inside, it knew it was a cowbird. No matter how it was raised or what it was taught." (Taylor 111)

The plight of the Grace and cowbird is quite analogous to each other. Tonto intends her to get on with her real

Identity which is the Aboriginal Identity despite where she was brought up like cowbird.

Conclusion:

The play undertakes to unleash the Colonization that still persists through various indirect means. "Scoop up policy" (1960's) of the Canadian Government mentioned in the play is one such means. Native children are taken away from their Native families and are put in white foster homes/residential schools where they are made to assimilate to Colonial culture and

adopt the Colonial language. They completely wash their minds and dehumanize them by making them totally alien to place they were initially brought. As an outcome they suffer Identity Crisis and find themselves marginalized to their mother roots. Grace is indisputably one such instance and also one of the victims of assimilating policies of the Canadian Government..

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