CHAPTER IV

WHISPERING IN SHADOWS
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Whispering in Shadows

Jeannette Armstrong’s second novel *Whispering in Shadows* (2000) is read as a companion novel to *Slash*. The crisis that arises out of globalisation has been powerfully articulated in the novel by Armstrong. Globalisation has played havoc with the aboriginal economy and environment resulting in a large size of world’s population living in abject poverty and displacement. The story of the novel follows the life and time of Penny, an Okanagan artist. Her story is a complex journey through life as an artist, an environmental activist, a single mother and above all a Native Canadian woman. Along this journey she discovers the complex systems that govern the modern society. Her journey ends with a firm realisation that one’s faith in powerful traditional spiritualism returns one to the mother earth and hence leads to the salvation of the soul.

Penny rejects the idea of categorisation of human beings into confined images that leads to a culture of discontent, giving false promise of happiness circulated by advertisement through media. This western culture of money has a dehumanising effect on people, especially the indigenous population. Coomi S. Vevaina refers to it to be “as ferocious a creature as a crocodile” that has an evil design to create an economic hierarchy.

Penny articulates her feelings as a Native of Canada about the implications of globalisation in this way:

   Globalisation
   Something about breathing
   in the dirty
   buzz words
   and missed manners
   a global design
   of conjure and conquer
   situating the hilarity
   as common text
   a mastering and the master class.

The poem in Penny’s diary thus underlines the political undertones of the glitzy concept of globalisation. She defines herself in reference to her
geographical, social and ethnic background and reflects on the traumatic experiences as a Native Canadian and her loss of identity. Penny begins her life in the reserve, lives a life of struggle to keep her kids in clothes and food. She says, “I know how hard it is to get a decent job if you are a woman or worse a NATIVE.”

Native women face many issues stemming from the circumstances and events of the colonial history of Canada and the imposition of a patriarchal system on the formerly egalitarian indigenous societies. Mobility, after the 80s, characterises native women more often than men. Driven by poverty and single parenthood, many native women migrate to urban centres. This syndrome is articulated by Penny when she observes that the entire global system is set up with a diabolical intelligence “to suck everything from the powerless to serve the rich.” The system is simply helping business in the name of helping the poor and the minority. As an activist Penny is aware of the fact that resources are pushed to outside developers to balance internal losses. Money drains out and the economic gap widens. Penny offers an account of her own voyage of self-discovery and struggle against extreme cultural negation. She represents a country where colonisation emerges from within the structure, creating a void in the minds of those who are at the bottom of the hierarchy.

Brute power, coupled with blatant ethnocentrism make the dominant power group see itself as superior to others. When Penny migrates to the city in search of work, the place turns out to be depressing and grim for her. Here her victimisation as a Native woman is more intense than her white counterparts. She notices – Most of them guys just want to drink around and try to snag you for the night. They don’t want to talk or listen or even look at you like a person. Penny’s statement illustrates how she is caught in a perplexing situation in life. As a Native, she feels that no attempt has been made to understand her people “culturally, historically, philosophically and spiritually” and that takes her desire to go home to a more intense level. She says – I am hardly here. I fade moment-by-moment, and I will soon fly into the shadows. The shadows even how whispering for me to come, to rest, to be free.

Penny takes up the job of counting and stumping boxes and crates in a company where she is warned – “The first time you come in hungover, or late, your ass is outa here.” Even before she could say that she does not drink, she is led into the room where she will have to spend the working-hours. There
aren't any windows except for a dim row of dirty skylight panels in the high ceiling." Penny feels sick and dizzy, while by contrast the Okanagan celebrates the summer sky, which is clean blue, swept by the evening breezes carrying no hint of cloud. The movement from the clean, blue sky of the Okanagan to the metropolitan dark, congested work place is used in the novel as an analogy of a movement from one structure of life to another. It also signifies the loss involved in such a movement. The novel also explores how the disruption of values can be imposed on the helpless individual through the portrayal of Penny's failure to raise her voice against the sweeping comment made against the Indians and their drinking habit by the officer. She also becomes a helpless participant in the promotion of a profit-making drive of the company she joins. The situation of a Native woman worker in her work-place is illustrated by the comment made by the manager - "I get a better subsidy for hiring minority and women. I can kill two birds with one stone." This incident illustrates in the novel how Penny, a single mother becomes a victim of socio-economic manipulation. She is forced into making a choice that stands in opposition to the traditional communal ethos. Penny expresses her contempt about the life in a city when she says – Nobody belongs out there, where everything has a price.

Penny's encounter with the racist immigration officer at the Canada - U.S. border is a case in point. The officer insists on knowing if she has at least one quarter quantum of Indian blood in her before allowing her to cross the border. Penny rages inwardly but feels helpless as she cannot challenge the authority. The Natives like her, routinely experience the institutionalised racism in Canada. She expresses her frustration as she says – I can't even think straight any more. I think it's the tension of the city too. Always having to be afraid. Always worried for the safety of the kids. Always feeling the hostility.

Coomi S. Vevaina (2003) makes her observation that contrary to the claim that globalisation encourages the spread of democracy, which in turn results in economic prosperity, it gives birth to a hierarchy. She holds that the earlier colonising countries now have developed into highly industrially advanced states constituting the First world. These powerful countries control the flow of wealth compelling the vast population of indigenous people live in abject poverty, and misery. In Penny's words it is an ongoing struggle between "corporate rights versus human rights."
P. Parameswaran (2000) makes his observation on globalisation as he says, "It (globalisation) is in nature materialistic and consumeristic. Its motivating force is self-interest and its success depends upon the exploitation of man, nations and nature." Penny’s college friend Julie analyses the corporate game plan saying that the increase in automation causes “bigger unemployment. Bigger poverty.” She holds that the developmental drive has its limits too. After it reaches a point “it flattens and competition dissolves. Economic inertia.” Julie observes:

“Even education would suffer. More glorified job training. Bye, bye real university education” and finally, “price drops means less returns, yet wage scales increase. Companies would either cut wages, or cut jobs. Government would subsidize, of-course, to prop up business. Then it would have to cut. Guess where? Basic social services of-course! Or worse, it would steal from us!”

Julie’s observation is endorsed by the authors of “Women and Globalisation” (1994) as they explain, how, instead of making this globe one extended family, globalisation “has been transformed from the holisticity of a circle into a pyramid with its top, middle and bottom billions.”

In recent years the Canadian economy has gone through the fundamental transformation. A. Gani (1998) makes his observation on the increasingly changing global economy and Canada’s place in it.

“Against the background of fierce global competition, economic and political uncertainty, cuts in government spending, decline in the market share, erosion in the revenues, fiscal losses, less than robust growth and increased cost and job losses, the country is struggling to retain a competitive edge in an increasingly integrated and fast changing global economy. It now stands on the threshold of what will be the most difficult and challenging era in its history.”

Penny holds this economic policy of Canada to be responsible for the sorrows of the Aboriginal inhabitants of the country. She helplessly watches how everybody is chasing a dream of creating “big business.” This is the reason why “The resources are getting plundered and everything polluted.” She wonders, “North America is wealthy with resources, so why is there so much poverty.” The resources were not made by the government yet it is only those who are in power make profit out of the resources. It is the duty of the poor,
marginalised people to toil hard for the "limousines and vacations and jewellery and face lifts" of those who are already rich.

When the world looked too frustrating, fate brings David, a young activist to Penny's life. David constantly thinks and talks about the inhuman sufferings of the indigenous peoples. Millions of them are being violated, displaced and forced into total poverty. As activists, Penny and David attend different conferences and gatherings of indigenous people. Each event helps them gather knowledge about the particular current struggle areas. All the stories look to be identical, be it Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, Chile, El Salvador, Columbia or Mexico. Everywhere, millions of brown peoples are despised, abused, and reduced to slave-like labourers, causing disease and premature death of many.

Voices of resistance are immediately silenced by the state authorities. Sometimes all attempts of resistance are projected as guerrilla fights against the government. Carlos points towards several groups of mud huts in the Mexican village. The thatched roofs are dark and falling apart. One can see the huge holes where the earth has been exposed. Carlos says that fire bombs were dropped on huts suspected of hiding rebels. He says - "Lots of women and children and families killed this way. Many men died here trying to fight off the army to protect their families. The Mexican Army rounded up many of them. They are disappointed." These incidents are often regarded as "Symptoms of political illegitimacy." Howard Adams, in a conversation with Hartmut Lutz talks about the sufferings of the indigenous peoples and expresses his feelings that there is a need for violent resistance.

"As far as I am concerned, as an indigenous person, if we are really going to have to liberate ourselves, probably it is going to have to be with violence! Because they don't seem to understand anything else, other than violence." They say "Look, we will not negotiate until you put down your guns!" "Well of-course, any person who is fighting for his liberation damn well understands better than that! Any person in the world, if he puts down his gun, is totally powerless. He is dead."

Armstrong's protagonist also fails to visualise a natural death for her people. But she is hopeful that their struggle and suffering will ensure a better life for the people of the future generation. She feels - "Well, death is death. From cancer or from guns. We should have the basic right and freedom to live without that kind of threat hovering over us. People have to stand up and fight
Penny translates the collective struggle as an Indian communality cutting across tribal, linguistic and global affinities. She develops a humanistic vision of a world that promises to ensure happiness to the future generation. David echoes her feelings when he says - “The world has to transform itself ..... We just have to live in the best way doing right in what we were each given to do. Even if it does not happen in our lifetime, the generations after us have to have a chance.”

The ruthlessness with which powerful capitalist nations operate, is appalling. In the novel, when Penny and David visit Mexico, they witness the misery spawned by NAFTA in that country. Under the guise of free trade, it shuts the coffee growers out of the market by lowering the prices to such an extent that they can not even pay costs. The Mexicans believe that this has been done with a purpose to force them out of their lands. They are destined to live their lives “in total poverty, scattered and landless.”

David Ahenkew (1996) argues that the First Nations’ right to govern their lands and resources comes naturally from their aboriginal title. Ahenkew says, “Their people’s right to live on their own land and to have use and occupancy of it, equally flows from their aboriginal title.”

The American companies along the U.S.-Mexican border pay “cheap wages to the desperate, mostly women and children, in the worst possible conditions ..... Things that would not be allowed in the U.S.” To add to the damage, Indian children are routinely kidnapped for sale and the grown people are forced by poverty to sell body parts like blood, kidneys, skin and corneas. Bio-piracy is the latest addition to the list of crimes of the First and Second world countries. Many native people are known to have died from “Whiteman’s diseases.” Penny expresses her reservation about globalisation and its policies. She tells David - “It is the monster whose masters sit in shining towers in cities far removed from the suffering. They can’t afford to feel the searing pain of those being crushed,” and all these are being done in the name of development of human civilisation.

As far as right over land and its resources of Canadian aborigine is concerned, an aboriginal right must be proved to have existed and to have been exercised before any claims can be made with regard to the right. The aboriginal right of the First Nations is the right to self-government. Section 91 (24) of the Constitution Act, 1982 refers to Indians and lands reserved for the Indians. This clause is understood to mean two broad groups of jurisdictions.
Each First Nation governing its own people and their affairs, and governing their land and its use. Traditionally, among the First Nations, these two concepts are combined. They believe that the creator gave each people the right to govern its own affairs, as well as land on which to live and with which to sustain their lives.

Before the European settlement of North America, it was unknown among the First Nations for one nation to deprive another nation by force of its rights to self-determination and sufficient lands and resources to maintain the lives of its peoples. A vast number of people were displaced. Since the demise of colonialism the Aboriginals of Canada have been struggling to change the situation. The Federal government has taken the position that self-government and aboriginal title are not existing, but must be identified and defined. This has placed the First Nations in the situation of having to discuss these concepts not only from their own viewpoint but from the European perspective also. Ahenkew refers to the case of the Copper-mine Indians. The Federal Government considers the claim of the Indians to use copper for making utensils because an intensive study has proved that the copper-mine Indians have been making copper utensils since the ancient times. However, the copper-mine Indians are not entitled to enjoy right over petroleum under their lands on the ground that they did not make use of it historically. Ahenkew says:

"By this faulty logic, the Arabs of Saudi Arabia should be denied the right to exploit oil resources, and the United Kingdom and Norway should be precluded from drilling for North oil."

Vandana Shiva (1991) observes how the civilisation mission of historical imperialism legitimised the plunder and exploitation of non-western and non-white territories. This activity had an immense impact on the development in Europe, especially Britain. According to her, the destruction of the Indian textile industry and Indian agriculture, the slave trade from Africa and the genocide of the indigenous North American people were the preconditions for the economic growth of the centres of modern industry in Britain.

The process of historical imperialism continues today in the guise of globalisation and trans-national information system. Aijaz Ahmed (2000) has claimed that by the 1960s and even the mid 1970s the process of decolonisation and a considerable expansion of socialist bases in many of the poorer countries were still going on, but without any doubt, the winner in the
struggle between imperialism and socialism has been imperialism. This has meant the historically unprecedented growth, unification and technological power of capitalism itself, with its fully globalised circuits of production and circulation.

The Human Development Report, 1999 observed that ‘gaps in income between the poorest and the rich people and countries have continued to widen.’ It is further observed that economic disparity in terms of per-capita income has sharply increased in sub-Saharan Africa and other less developed countries. Economic inequality and economic disparities between and within nations have contributed to a rise in social strife and ethnic conflict at an unprecedented scale. HDR, 1999, observed that uneven globalisation is not only bringing integration but also fragmentation – dividing communities, nations and regions into those that are included and those that are excluded.39

Penny’s frustration rises because as an activist she is more exposed to the hard realities of the lives of the natives. The exclusionary economic policy of the government turns these helpless people into homeless beggars. The whole system seems to be making mockery of the lives of the indigenous people. Penny expresses her anger:

“There are laws! My ass. It was pure lawlessness, and still is, that allows aggression and theft of our lands. This is my country and why am I the alien? Who is the real alien here?”40

Jeannette Armstrong has articulated the fact that the basic cause of sufferings of the indigenous people is poverty. Globalisation and its mindless drive to development have intensified poverty. Her protagonist Penny has a strong reservation against the role played by the Multi-National Companies. She observes how the helpless indigenous people are being denied the basic human rights while the MNC’s play games with their lives in the name of development. When Penny is detected of cancer, she blames it on the modern, urban lifestyle, that has lost touch with nature and natural way of living. Her own body bears the mark of the consequences of human maladies. She believes, “Somebody gets sacrificed for what the human has done. This time it happened to be me.”41 She refers to the inhuman developmental drive of globalisation to the metaphoric story of the flesh-eating monster. Penny argues that here illness is not a lonely “personal battle of life and death.”42 Cancer is a threat for all and hence the enemy should be recognised. According to her, the lack of fresh air
and water, the ever-rising number of different industries and the effects of nuclear testing have a pernicious effects on human bodies, leading to various ailments. "We put the things out there which were not meant for our bodies to have to deal with. Our own bodies are part of the natural world. It's part of what we have conjured on the earth."43

Penny's ailment is a metaphoric expression of the genocidal destruction of Native culture. Her body is a site of Native truth and authenticity that fails to put up a resistance against the western materialistic evils. Penny blames the modern lifestyle and its complex ways for her situation. She refers to the devastating power of the mechanised world as a "flash-eating monster"44 which is responsible for the breaking of equilibrium of life. The evil monsters can be banished only if man keeps a balance between the life of nature and the life of mechanical advancement. Penny believes - The balance is the natural order in this world.45 She desires the presence of the long-lost Coyote46 to reappear and save the lives of her people from ultimate destruction. As a traditional Native, Penny expresses her strong belief in Coyote's power to replace vice with virtue, disorder with harmony. She realises that their present oppressed state is a result of the disappearance of the Trickster from their communities.

Leonore Keeshig - Tobias who has founded the committee to Re-Establish the Trickster says: "Some storytellers say this character, this Trickster, disappeared with the arrival of the white man. We believe the Trickster is still here, having assumed different names."47 Armstrong too believes that the Trickster is present among the First Nations people. Her protagonist, therefore, is confident of the Coyote's power of tackling the new monsters created by mechanisation. Coyote's presence and the deep connection that the First Nations feel with the spiritual truths given to them by their ancestors make them believe that, despite everything, they need to remain connected and act not to allow themselves to be swamped by despair. As old Susapen tells Penny in the novel, "Take care to wrap the light around you. To let it keep you warm. To greet it and give thanks to each new day."48

Armstrong stresses upon the fact that both material and spiritual values endow a society with unique ethos. Therefore, if and when a way of life is altered by socio-economic factors, culture undergoes a fundamental change, creating restlessness and confusion in the society. Penny's friend David feels that the millions of right-thinking indigenous people should get together to
constitute a mystical force to heal the earth by resisting insane destruction. The thought of life, devoid of nature and ethics fills Penny's mind with a deep, dark sadness. As she lies listening to the frog singing and insects whirring nearby. She whispers in her language into the shadows .... Beautiful land, keep us safe for the night. Give them your strength in tomorrow's struggle. Move in the hearts of all those who come here as I have been moved."

The justification of Penny's argument is applicable not only in the Canadian context, it finds relevance in the whole world.

Amartya Sen's (2002) analysis of globalisation that puts primary emphasis on human ethos is found to be relevant in this context. According to him, a necessary condition of human development is the expansion of human freedom. Greater human freedom in this sense can be considered as a growth in the capability of a person. The emphasis, however, is not only on the overall level of freedom but also on the participation aspect of freedom. Everybody in a society should equitably enjoy the benefits of greater freedom in the form of greater opportunities. Consequently, the elimination of economic poverty is the primary objective of the development programme of any country where it is pervasive. The denial of freedom and capabilities to some people is socially unjust and morally unethical.

Whispering in Shadows addresses the unethical aspect of globalisation and reveals that the indigenous people as a group have not benefited from economic globalisation. They rather bear the brunt of the destruction of indigenous economies, increased out-migration and other negative effects of corporate globalisation. Exploitation in the name of progress is not new for indigenous peoples. Many have pointed out how globalisation is merely the latest euphemism for continued colonialism. Because development in the western sense equates development with economic growth, with expansion of the market economy, modernity with consumerism and non-market economies with backwardness. In the process of contemporary growth and development, the gains accrue to one section of a society or nation while the economic and ecological costs are borne by the rest. Penny's friend Julie echoes her feeling, as she says "there is a rigid class system, as a result, keeping the rich powerful and the poor powerless."

Armstrong's novel explores and illustrates the possibility of an ethical encounter in which the object of ethical action is neither an object of
benevolence nor of paternalism. It flows naturally. The protagonist Penny is so much deeply involved in activism that even if she wants to get it off her brain for some time, it comes back immediately to her mind. In the seminars and workshops she is found to be constantly talking about "projecting local indigenous economies."  

Penny’s friend David makes a significant remark: Life is precious. We know the spirits are there in all the things that live. Those ceremonies, where they come to our medicine people, are real. Not hocus-pocus. You know that. It's what strengthens me when I'm down."

Mahasweta Devi and Gayatri Spivak point to this idea of learning from the indigenous peoples, especially from their more balanced use of natural resources and their respect for all living things without romanticising or museumising them. This modern world must pay heed to the system of knowledge and habits of relating to the environment that the indigenous people have developed over years.

Armstrong depicts in the novel how brute power coupled with blatant ethno-centrism make the dominant power group see itself as superior to others and hence capable of disregarding the cultures of others. The oppressed find their culture "disregarded, infantilised and falsified."  

Moreover, the economic integration leads to institutional or cultural homogenisation which makes an attempt to introduce the American consumer culture. This has given rise to a symbolic situation of hierarchy, leading ultimately to the display of the American way of life. America’s cultural totems continue to penetrate even in the smallest of cities and towns today. In Canada, globalisation, which can be safely read as Americanisation, evokes contradictory responses, depending on which side of the divide one is on. The novel presents this culture-clash as Penny’s daughter Shanna is portrayed to have fallen a victim of the American way of living.

Penny discovers that even before she could realise, her daughter has been alienated from her, and hence from the native culture. She is into drugs and in Penny’s words “Her only interest seems to be in how outrageous she can dress to copy what they call punk.” Like any other traditional native individual, Penny also sees the American influence on her culture as a force which divests them of their own distinguishing features of peace and harmony. In a letter to Josalie, Penny writes, "I have to admit, life is shallow in this culture. It's really
that there isn't anything with meaning, I guess, just things." She finds her own culture to be entirely different from the culture of America, which is materialistic. Armstrong examines how the relationship of the individual to the family, and of the urbanised family to the larger social structure is seriously impaired by socio-economic circumstances. Penny is portrayed to have difficulty to reconcile her vision of social integrity with the materialistic expectations of her own daughter Shanna. The trans-territorial culture of the city is far from being traditions. Therefore the participants are mainly the products of a westernised strata of society that fails to offer them things that give purpose. Penny makes an attempt to analyse the reason for the collapse of the sense of values of the present day generation city dwellers. She feels, May be it was something to do with being surrounded by something powerful, rather than being absorbed in fighting what surrounds you daily.

The artificial brilliance of the glamour produces a false sense of happiness in the minds of individuals where money becomes the determinant of all values. Penny recognises that what is tragic under neo-colonial circumstances is that the potential power of the glamour that could have been harnessed to move a people in a progressive direction has only been exploited to serve the selfish ends of a particular class. She knows that - this ghost-light, hiding star shimmering, is not to be trusted because the dominant power here uses the most powerful tool of manipulating one of the basest of human emotions, that of greed, to promote their own status.

There is an elaborate description of the symbolic drum-song that becomes instrumental in reviving faith in the indigenous culture in the minds of Penny’s children. Penny and Shanna begin the steps inside the circle of people. The smiling faces of her people greet Penny & her children. Her eyes are filled with tears as she says:

“I forgot how this feels. It’s like we’re being embraced by something so strong yet so gentle. Oh, my people. You are my medicine. Heal this small family of it wounds. Help us to become whole again as part of you ….. I give myself back to this land, our home.”

This dichotomy of living in two cultures has been portrayed again through Lena’s character who had left home with Garry to pursue her dreams in the town and ended up in the narcotic centre. Lena loses everything including her own son Toby to welfare. But just before everything comes to an end, Lena
feels a strong urge to come back home and begin life afresh. When Lena comes home, she finds herself in proper tune with the land and the people of her community. She sits with Penny, tears streaking her make-up, her arms marked with the long trails she has travelled before finding her way back home. Lena kneels down by the tallest of the rocks, and celebrates the bright sun of the new dawn. She wants to lift away lots of mixed up feelings that are still troubling her mind. Tears are silently dropping from her tightly closed eyes as she offers her prayer to the Creator, who guards the mountain. We have not been here for many years and ask that you recognise us, poor humans. We bring our children and grandchildren to you. To be filled with your spirit .... We are people of this land, and pray it will always be so. Armstrong’s novel thus explains the projection of the Native self and the special sense of tribal identity through the use of the ‘home’ motif that stands in sharp contrast to the mechanical “culture of discontent” of the west.

The Cree novelist Tomson Highway, however, is hopeful that the Indians in Canada are overcoming gradually the alluring call of Americanisation. He says in an interview with Hartmut Lutz:

“We are at a point in our history where the ‘American Dreams’ is not so beautiful any more. And we question it we see that it is not going to work very much longer, and so we are looking for a turn of awareness. We are looking at the world, relating to the world.”

It is the Native’s strong bonding with nature that ultimately comes to rescue the environment from the devastating effects of globalisation. Armstrong gives a vivid description of one such incident where an old native person is seen to be making all attempts to stop the felling of a tree. The loggers claim that they have the legal right to log the area and hence the protestors have no legal status. The old man, who lives in the reserve, comes forward and says:

“This is our hereditary territory. The Supreme Court of B.C. is still in session on this matter and you know it. You do not have the permission of my people to move your machines into this area. You are breaking the law of our lands. You are violating the laws of the Creator. I am ordering you to stop your machines.”

The Natives protestors are attacked by the loggers. But when the police comes, it is the natives who are arrested, and not the loggers, who initiated the
conflict. This incident proves that the strength of the White culture depends on application of brutal force while the native culture is more about non-violence. David tells Penny:

“It seems to me that the most basic of all instincts instructs us to yarn for peace and health. Cooperation provides a better chance. Everything in nature counts on this and learns it or perishes. I don't believe that aggression and violence is a natural human instinct. I believe that peace is survival. It is evidence of evolution.”

True to their native upbringing, both Penny and David believe that “We come only to honour life,” that everything on the planet is interconnected and that “things in nature flow around each other establishing a coexistence rather than dominance.” This accounts for the mystical bond Penny feels with the great Cedar tree at a protest rally. The tree seems to be a relative, holding and soothing her. A short while before she dies, she feels the same kinship with a dead bear at a campsite. Like Penny, most Natives feel a strong spiritual connection with the land given to them for their sustenance by the Great Spirit. They understand “real sustainability and practice it even on the small reserves left of their homelands.”

The Natives realise that their survival depends on their ability to put into practice the wisdom of their ancestors. They also feel the need to opt out of their victim condition by thinking up ways of improving their economic status. One of the most viable ways is by developing a mutual support system based on “trust and assistance” such as the one proposed by the Mexican Coffee growers in the novel. Penny remembers the blessings of the priest who spoke quietly in Mayan to her. “There is always light if we keep the flame in focus.” Penny experiences a feeling of profound kinship with the people who are suffering in different parts of the world. She is deeply grieved over the Iraqi problem and reacts similarly on witnessing the miseries of the destitutes in Los Angeles. Her capacity to identify with those other than the indigenous population proves her firm grounding in the Native worldview that embraces the universe holistically.

David puts it thus – “Together, we are millions strong, world-wide. A mystical force, if we maintain the focus.”

Armstrong’s protagonist does not think it necessary to yield up her identity as a Native and embrace a vague global identity. She believes in
integrating politics with spirituality, because the concept of globalisation needs to be drastically reworked and humanised with a positive consciousness.

In the poem on globalisation Penny talks about imagining Coyote making a promise to take care of the evils in the world. Towards the end of the book Coyote therefore seems to say to Penny “I'll take care of them bastards ...... Piss on them.” The presence of the trickster figure of Coyote represents a necessary reassertion of Native identity, a theme, that is developed throughout the novel.

Notes and References

1 In this discussion, the term “west” and “western” have been used to denote a relatively unified theory and set of practices, grounded in a history of ideas which has found its fullest expression in the western European eighteenth-century intellectual movement. This movement was grounded in the conviction of the progress of human knowledge, rationality, wealth, civilisation and control over nature. The movement derived its strength primarily from the evident progress of production, trade, and the economic and scientific rationality believed to be associated inevitably with both. Enlightenment values promote technology, rationality and utilitarian philosophy in opposition to the metaphysics and traditional religion / spirituality. “West” and “western” then, in this paper refer to a set of historical themes and the principles which have become gradually entrenched throughout the course of the last two millennia of western civilisation, and which have become fully institutionalised in contemporary thought systems and knowledges.

2. Ibid, p. 58.
10. Ibid, p. 23.
27. Ibid, p. 61.
32. Ibid, p. 234.
33. Ibid, p. 163.
37. Ibid, p. 189.
41. Ibid, p. 259.
42. Ibid, p. 246.
44. Ibid, p. 247.
46. Coyote is a trickster character common to many Native American cultures, based on coyote, the animal. This character is usually male and is imagined to have some coyote-like physical features such as fur, pointed ears, yellow eyes, tail and claws.
Gerald Vizenor, one of the best known Native American exponents of the postmodern Trickster, in his essay “Trickster Discourse, Comic Holotropes and Language Games” in *Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literatures* ed. Gerald Vizenor (1993) refers to the tribal trickster as “a liberator and healer in a narrative, a comic sign, communal signification and a discourse with imagination ......”


49. Ibid, p. 111.


52. Ibid, p. 223.

53. Ibid, Pp. 239-240.


57. Ibid, p. 131.


60. Ibid, p. 135.


63. Ibid, p. 281.

64. Ibid, p. 274.
65. Lutz, Hartmut: *Contemporary Challenges: Conversations with Canadian Native Authors*, Fifth house publishers, 1990, p. 94.


68. Ibid, p. 18.


71. Ibid, p. 183.

72. Ibid, p. 182.

73. Ibid, p. 188.

74. Ibid, p. 281.