CHAPTER V

HONOUR THE SUN
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*Honour the Sun* is the first novel by Ruby Slipperjack which was published in 1987. Set in a small Ontario native community, the story records the diary entries of a ten year old girl growing up in an extended family in the 1960s. The first half of the novel is the celebration of childhood. But there is an undercurrent of pain, frustration and violence that come to the surface later in the story. Owl functions as the narrator-observer whose diary provides the bulk of the story, while simultaneously putting the events of her own life into proper perspective. She is present throughout the period of transition that her family goes through and therefore she is the most constant witness of change.

Owl, the Ojibway girl loses her father at a very early age. Life has been a struggle for the family after the accidental death of the father. But the mother takes up the entire responsibility and helps the children grow despite all odds. The novel works around the relationship the daughter shares with her mother and the theme of how the rupture in the bonding leads to the loss of identity of Owl, the protagonist.

Slipperjack portrays women struggling against the power politics of the patriarchy. Her novel is an expression of an enlightened consciousness, as it explores the hidden consciousness of the self. This chapter presents how the novel voices humanistic concerns, dealing not just with the colonial experience of a native Canadian, but more precisely, that of a woman.

The child’s apparently innocent narration of the events of her life nevertheless has been considered by Hartmut Lutz to be a “highly political book that carries a very strong statement about violence against women and children.” Lutz observes that the narrative has some very pertinent criticism that the Native Canadian society is struggling to face up to. Racism and sexism found in the colonial process have served to dramatically undermine the place and value of women in aboriginal cultures leaving them vulnerable both within and outside the communities. The writings of Native women, therefore, in Canada, are attempts to rewrite the histories from their own perspectives. In the first place, writings enable the writers in the post-colonial societies to reclaim a legitimate voice that was suppressed under colonialism, and secondly, the writings of women challenge European culture constructs and their imperial
dominance, which left a deep impact on the dominated survivors.

As a post-colonial writer Ruby Slipperjack has an unusual insight or rather a unique power of penetrating beyond the surface. Her novel is therefore a pictorial representation of her own mind, emotions, personality and the world that surrounds her. In *Honour the Sun*, Ruby maintains a silence over the existence of the white community. But the whole narration has been instrumentalised to reveal the cultural degradation of the natives caused by the white colonisers. Therefore her text demands to be read in the context of resistance to the structures of internal colonialism in Canada.

A close look at the text reveals the various experiences of Owl’s life that emphasise on what it means to be an Indian, and especially a woman. The novel focuses on why a native Canadian Woman can not become unproblematically a Canadian, just as the way a white Canadian woman can. Aboriginal women fare worse than their male counterparts because their position is neither understood by their own men, nor by the white feminist. Kamla Gopalan says “*like other women of colour, Aboriginal women feel that feminism must be contextualised; one cannot assume a commonality among the interests and objectives of all women.*” A purely gender-specific view of oppression would not explain the Native woman’s struggle. The era of colonisation had constantly juxtaposed images of brown and white women. Thus, depending on their colour, women are subjected to different stereotypes of the feminine. Audre Lorde¹ has pointed out that the triply marginalised women can not function within patriarchal society. The experience of triply marginalised women of colour are very different from those of white women because these women are positioned quite differently vis-a-vis the dominant social order.

Gloria Anzaldua suggests that for the woman writer of colour it is essential to bring lived experience into one’s writing. She believes that writing is empowerment and therefore she advocates writing about all that one knows and feels, including bodily experiences. She says, “*Even though we go hungry we are not impoverished of experiences.*” Slipperjack’s narrative also seems to be advocating writing the body, not for its own sake but to bring the realities of life into writing and to see the protagonist establishing connection with her own self. The female body in *'Honour the Sun'* has been a site to play out other struggles. Slipperjack uses the female body as a metaphor to bring out instances of the triple bind they are in, - of sex, race and class.
The novel seeks to foreground the role of the coloured body with its ramifications for identity formation. The narrative deals with the protagonist’s negative self-image rooted in perceptions about being a woman in the Native society. The situation is even worse due to the absence of a father-figure at home. Owl’s first exposure to sexuality is linked with negative images of her community. As a child, she experiences spending dreadful nights under beds in fear of being abused by drunken men of her locality. The small girl expresses her sad plight, she says – “we’re hiding ...... We can’t play at the front of the island because the drunken might see us.” This negative image which she forms of her own people are reinforced later in the novel when her mother expresses her fear on Owl’s getting her first monthly periods. Barbara tells her – “Moms mad because you were the last of her baby girls. You’re growing up too fast.”

Owl’s vulnerability deepens as her mother tells her that it is improper to become a “woman” at her age. She adds by saying “your body is already ready to receive a baby.” With this damning analysis, the mother almost seals the fate of her daughter. The negative image of the Native woman syndrome is explicit in her statement, which is stored in her subconscious. That the Native woman is looked upon as a symbol of mere sensuality is further confirmed when Jed tells about Owl to her mother – “How are you going to keep all the men off her when she looks like that, eh? In a couple of years, you’ll have all the young guys at your door.”

Slipperjack points to the inadequacy of the Native woman’s state of being in the novel. The protagonist’s identification with her tribal heritage although a positive one, is built on fragile foundation of confusion and a sense of insecurity. She finds herself in the quiet bush, besides her father’s grave whenever she feels sorry for herself. This act of Owl symbolises her strong desire to have familial protection in life. It also signifies her urge to return to the past, because the present fails to generate a positive message.

Owl grows up in a society where very few Indian children attend school while the number of drop-outs is on the rise among the older kids due to the fear of being sent to Residential schools. The situation is depressing. But the mother’s presence in their lives continues to be a source of happiness. The mother has the rare quality of remaining firm even on the face of great difficulty. She protects her children, especially the daughters, from the lustful drunk native men, who kick their door at night to force it open. One can hear
them yelling and screaming from far. Owl’s anger seems to settle like a “ton of cold cement.” She feels helpless due to the absence of male adult members in their cabin. *We are so vulnerable, this cabin full of children. No father or brother protects us; no police to come to our aid. We’re at the mercy of all the evil out here.* However the mornings following the terrible nights look to be very calm and quiet. The drunk males who caused them so much sufferings at night, are now sleeping peacefully. It angers Owl even more as she is frustrated for not being able to destroy the vices of her community. She realises “Nature is friendly and true while our own kind tears us, leaves us bleeding inside.”

Paula Gunn Allen in *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* talks from the perspective of a culture in which women are held in high esteem. She holds the European explorers and Colonisers responsible for erasing the central role that women played in most Native Societies. Tribal feminism, according to her, speaks volumes of the Indian worldview that stresses on unison and wholeness. But in reality, despite their rich cultural heritage, the Indians are universally thought to be incapable of looking after themselves. A deliberate attempt was made to destroy the matrilineal customs of the Aboriginal societies and to promote the norms of the dominant European patrilineal culture. It was done to organise the Aboriginal peoples into European male and female roles. Historically many Aboriginal nations were matrilineal where the child’s ancestry was traced through the mother. The family’s property was also passed down through the female line. Traditional Aboriginal women’s responsibilities included providing for themselves, their family and their community at large. Women were considered to be the creators of life and were involved in all things that dealt with creativity. Their roles were perceived as vital to the survival of the community.

When the Europeans arrived in Canada, they enforced their power over the Aboriginals and their lands. The European laws had the most detrimental impact on women. Their positions were considered subordinate and they were no longer viewed as equals to men.

The integration of the Indian Act, 1875 was instrumental in breaking of the Aboriginal culture. This Act effectively made women second class citizens. The Act stated that only males could be considered as Indians in their own right.

During this time missionaries also arrived. They brought with them Christian values and beliefs. Further, these missionaries showed disregard to
the traditional matrilineal descent pattern and assimilated the Aboriginals into practising patrilineal patterns.\textsuperscript{13}

Aboriginal women’s strategic importance to the daily reproduction of their families and communities comes as a natural phenomenon. The report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples document the amount of power \textit{these women enjoyed in the areas of family life and marriage, politics and decision making, and the ceremonial life of the people.}\textsuperscript{14} Nevertheless this positioning has been exacerbated by the process of colonisation as the combined effects of racism and sexism served to degrade and marginalise Aboriginal women within their communities, even as they continued to exercise considerable power over particular facets of family and community life. It is precisely this legacy which Aboriginal women continue to live with to this day. Not only are they often expected to be able to raise their children with little or no help from their spouse, but in many cases they are also forced to endure physical and sexual victimisation at the hands of the partner.

Owl makes a specific reference to one such incident in her diary. Her friend Ben’s mother is routinely beaten up by her husband even in public. Owl remembers how by the store’s storage shed Ben’s father crashes “\textit{his fist into the woman’s face, sending her flying to the ground, blood splatters on the front of her dress.”}\textsuperscript{15} The dehumanising treatment leaves a permanent scar on the woman’s body and mind. Ben’s mother becomes “\textit{drunk and filthy}”\textsuperscript{16} and can not come out of it. Her dress has mud all over and her face is covered with messy hair which she occasionally brushes back with her “\textit{blood crushed hands.”}\textsuperscript{17}

All these incidents indicate a disappointing future for her community which makes Owl want to fly away. She wishes to see change coming over so that life in community becomes worth living. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Canada, 1996a) highlights the extent of the problem and the need for strong measure to counteract it.

A closer look at the history of the Native Indians reveals that poverty is their common fate and that the conditions of the reserves hardly give them the right to self-determination. The women, especially, fall prey to the alluring male infidelity. They give their men everything and in return receive only pain that takes away their precious lives.

Inspite of her being shattered by the collective degradation of the
community, Owl is always happy to come home to her mother. The mother is strong and energetic and works hard to assure a better living for her children. But she fails to save her son Wess from falling a prey to tuberculosis. He is sent away to a sanatorium. Owl sees many of her near and dear ones going away to different places and never coming back. She is in grade sixth now and finds the benches empty around her. "I feel at times like I'm sitting on a death row." The thought of leaving home and going to a boarding school makes her disturbed. Some of her siblings have started living in separate places which makes Owl feel very lonely and alienated in the reserve.

Moreover, the humiliation at night continues as before. Owl recollects how their mother stands firm as a rock to protect her daughters on such occasions. She writes,

"the man from across the tracks kicked our door open again. We were already lined up in the dark behind the stove, when the door crashed open, splinters flying, and the man strode in. We slipped out behind him. I heard something behind me when Mom hurried us out the door. We ran across to Aunty's and she opened her door before we even reached it."

These incidents account for the notion of chastity of a woman prevalent in the society. Being a single mother leads to a natural lack of safety of home for the woman. Society makes unreasonable demands on the woman and offers little in return. The notion of chastity of a woman involves her service to the husband, to the family and to the children. Exception to the rule is always met with doubt and suspicion and hence the woman in question is looked upon as a mere object of sex. Adrienne Rich (1986) holds how a rigid code of "appropriate" behaviour circumscribe. Even Rousseau champions the notion that a woman should be of good reputation in the society. There is, therefore, not only a moral difference between the sexes, but also a motive for duty and propriety, which prescribes to women in particular, the most scrupulous attention to their conduct.

Slipperjack captures the stresses of a postcolonial native woman’s dual identities in the novel. Owl’s mother seeks a female identity within the context of her tribal traditions and a globalised structure of economy. She is doubly colonised. Moreover, in the hierarchy of structural oppression she finds herself further down the scale that finally destroys her totally. Owl, as a small girl does not know how to explain it. All she knows is that her mother is not the same
strong person as she was before. The lady had all along maintained a calm resignation to her fate and toiled hard silently for the family. Generations of subordination and humiliation have rendered her insensitive to the horror of the present. Gradually she turns into a different person. She has stopped telling night-time stories to her children. The journey of her life has proved to be a story of loss of identity, power and human rights in her own community along with the perpetuation of abuse and humiliation.

To utter shock and disappointment, Owl watches her mother becoming an absolute drunker. On occasions Owl returns home only to find it empty. The small girl looks for her mother everywhere until she locates her at a place that is stinking with many people boozing and screaming. The room is small and dark. As the daughter gets her out of the room she becomes furious. She pushes Owl away and grumbles "Never mind! It's none of your business what I do." Owl struggles hard to fight back the tears rolling down her cheeks. Then the mother starts giggling. She says "Owl, will you remember your mother when one day you will be so drunk, your kids will have to carry you home?"

Tears start flowing from Owl's eyes as she feels extremely disappointed at the sudden turn of events. There is hardly any food at home, nor there is wood. When Owl's mother drinks a lot she remains sick for the next few days. Owl is totally frustrated with people around her and their way of living life. She helplessly watches her society crumbling down as she finds "all my friends' parents fighting, their fathers beating up their mothers. I don't want anyone beating up my mother. I don't want anyone touching my mother. I guess that's why I have to drag her home whenever she gets drunk." The community can not instil hope in her mind anymore. "The sky has gone blurry." Owl lets her tears flow freely from her eyes as she is lying flat on her back in the middle of the lake. She has no one to share her grief with. She finds herself at her father's grave more often these days where she stands silently. Upset over the sudden turn of events at home, Owl wonders what it could be like if her father were alive. Little does she know that her mother has gradually fallen victim to the role defined for her by society. The role definition is both racist and patriarchal. As Margery Fee remarks, "...freedom to choose one's identity is normally reserved for the majority, while members of minorities have identities—negative ones—forced on them with varying degrees of brutality."

Owl's mother's submission to the racist pressure of society distances her
from her own children. The initial impression of Owl regarding her mother is that she was one of the strongest persons in the world who could steer the family through the rough days even in the absence of their father. This idyllic belief is steadily shattered later in the text as the mother gradually becomes alcoholic. Owl describes the world she lives in as “a totally rotten world. What a damn hopeless life.” As Owl stops beside her father’s grave, her gaze settles on other graves, most of these are of young men and women. As Owl looks around at the crosses, she recognises most of them. The thought slowly comes to her mind that “only one or two older people could have died a ‘natural death’. The railway line and alcohol related accidents take so many lives.”

Slipperjack’s text thus presents the notion of the quest for a native identity. This includes elements of illness, alcoholism and domestic violence against women. Within this matrix, Slipperjack uses the mother figure to reveal the concept of identity. A mother is a preserver and transmitter of culture and therefore, the positive and negative representation of motherhood work on the premise that “idealisations and identifications can be deployed in ways that are both destructive and productive, deceptive and protective.” The mother is the repository of cultural wisdom and morality and therefore when everything else in the postcolonial culture is in a state of flux, its woman needs to be projected as stable and safe. C.S. Lakshmi (1999) puts it: ‘The “notion” of an unbroken tradition is constant and attempts are made to write this notion of tradition on the body of the woman to dictate its movement, needs, aspirations, and spheres of existence even while the body is moving along time, space and history.’

The mother-daughter relationship thus becomes symbolic of the traditional – individual one, where it suggests continuity, safety, and a sense of home. Honour the Sun works around this mother-daughter relationship. It is not simply a bonding, but a sense of identity that revolves round the figure of the ‘mother’. Slipperjack narrates in the novel how the rupture in the bonding leads to loss of identity of the protagonist. The author uses the family as a metonym of Native Canadian society in the reserve to demonstrate how the structure of the society is dismantled, disrupting a whole way of life. The narrative portrays how the protagonist’s family, which was a repository of traditional cultural modes, has been replaced by broken family units. Owl begins to suffer from a deep loneliness as the grown-up brothers and sisters leave the reserve and move towards the towns. The eldest brother got married
a long time ago and has been living in the town since then. The young men and women of the village are drawn away from the land towards the city which is causing a rupture in the fundamental structure of communal life. Owl records in her diary how her brother Wess and sister Vera fall prey to tuberculosis and are sent away to the sanatorium. The empty house is very depressing as Owl says, *I feel like crying. I turn around and go back out the door.*

Owl is visibly disturbed by anticipating her alienation from the family as she is about to leave for the residential school. As a child, she fails to comprehend the complex situation in her life. She is afraid of going to the unfamiliar residential school, but at the same time finds the home to be growing equally unfamiliar too. She is overpowered by conflicting emotions as she says—

*I'm scared but I'm also looking forward to leaving home. I hate it all home now. I have nowhere else to go.*

The small reserve becomes a paradigm of ill-fated Native Canadian rural society caught in the tentacles of socio-economic phenomenon extending further and further into the heart of the Indian society. The change that invades the reserve is frightening. The protagonist recollects with regret the chain of events that was to change her peoples' lives utterly. The broken families are portrayed in the novel as the symbol of deterioration of traditional Indian cultural values. The poor parents under acute economic pressure are compelled to discard their own children. The destitute, helpless children indicate the failure of neo-colonial economic structure with its hollow promises of safeguarding the lives of its citizens. Owl gives an account of how her mother takes three kids under her fold whose "*mother has never come.*"

The novel gives a graphic description of a degraded social order where parents fail to play their roles as pathfinders in their children's lives. The society in the reserve has incredible problems with drug and alcohol being the choice for members of broken families. Owl recalls incidents when the young girls are found to be getting addicted to alcohol. She remembers — *Last week, Annie and another girl drank some wine at the girl's house when her parents were drunk.* Slipperjack's condemnation in the novel is thus targeted against the neo-colonial betrayal of the authority in Canada.

The story is further developed around the inability of Owl's mother to cope up with poverty and disease and her failure to bring the family members together as she did earlier. Her gradual deterioration as a human being is a
metaphoric presentation of post-colonial disillusionment. In summer, 1968, Owl returns to the reserve only to find that drastic changes have disturbed the community while she was away. The traditional spiritual bonding has been replaced by materialistic world order that has taken away so many young lives of her community. That her own mother has severed all emotional ties with the family is reflected in the incident wherein Owl gives an account of her father's grave that has some ribbons that are already faded and rotted off the cross. There was a time when Mom used to change those fluttering ribbons every spring. Now they look like she hasn't been here in a couple of years.

Owl struggles to fight back the tears as she watches her world crumbling down. Her family has become a victim of the connection between cultural devaluation and economic exploitation. But Owl is no longer willing to passively accept the position allotted to her within the hierarchy of neo-colonialism as many members in her community accept. She has noticed that the children “don't seem to be affected in the least, even if a drinking party has been at their house. And here I am, feeling like I'm ready to die each time I have to drag, push or pull Mom home from someone's party.”

There is a moving description of Owl's intense desire to come back home. But the thought of not having the mother waiting for her at home fills Owl's eyes with tears as she mutters helplessly “where would I go?” She seems to be forgetting the world around her. Only sitting by the woodpile and listening to the silence makes her feel happy and peaceful. The novel reflects how the protagonist makes an attempt to celebrate the gifts of life in the face of sorrow. But she is never vocal about the various discomforts she has to encounter in life. She drowns her sorrows by sharing a space with silence “Silence, listen to the Silence” - these are the keywords that have been stressed upon in the novel to explain that Owl is in proper tune with her Native world view. Throughout the novel, the author projects the significance of silence in a meaningful way. Because, in the Native world view, silence has more eloquence than the words have. The essence of silence has been acknowledged in a variety of ways in the novel. The novel affirms that to understand a feeling one has to see the feeling because “it is not just words.”

The author, in an interview, adds to the point by saying “In the stories I have to have that feeling between the sentences. If it is not there, then I have lost something.” There are number of instances of non-verbal communication in the novel which is regarded as an
important trait of the Native community.

In the opening dialogue of the novel, Bobby asks the ten year old narrator, Owl, and her friend, his sister Sarah, ‘What are you guys laughing at?’ The reply anticipates not only a recurring mode of response within the Ojibway community depicted, but also the novel’s characteristic narrative stance. Sarah giggles and shakes her head. ‘Nothing’⁴⁸, Nothing is an evasion of direct communication which negates the possibilities of communicating anything.

As an introduction to the novel, the initial scene resonates further because what the girls are laughing over and playing at are the particulars of female sexual maturity. Bobby, who with puberty, is to become a physical and sexual threat, prefers to instruct Owl - ‘What’s the matter? you are supposed to be a mother with your baby there. Here, take some.⁴⁹ Sexual maturation, along with male aggression becomes one of the occasions for discursive reticence in the text, and coincides with an increasing narrative fragmentation as the novel progresses.

Communication in non-verbal fashion is exemplified more explicitly in the portrayal of the completely wordless Christmas of 1962. Owl’s mother Delia uses silence quite deliberately, taking a deep breath, then pretending Owl is not there after Owl has ruined her mother’s stockings. A strange look from her sister, Barbara, and one from Delia constitute the entire outward familial reaction to Owl’s close call with a train. Slipperjack even makes a hint about an actual rape of Owl’s mother⁵⁰, while the novelist maintains a silence over specifically mentioning the men who, when drunk, smash doors, rape women and kill wantonly. There is Delia’s screaming after she fails to escape the cabin as the drunk breaks in her heaving shoulders and her hair tangled in her face when the children finally return. Owl’s own experience, such as her school teacher’s drawing her close between his legs involves both fear and confusion ‘I should tell Mom. Tell Mom what?’⁵¹ Repudiation of the violation here has been framed in terms of the assault on social harmony, communal survival, and the respect women owed as transmitters of life and culture. Feminist advocacy of ‘breaking the silence’ has been refused in the novel, as the protagonist takes the vow of challenging the violence from within the Native ethic. The silences have been registered as the most eloquent & evocative component of the narrative that exposes the damages done to the community. The text asks one to talk about it less and internalise it more.
An adherence to the spiritual tradition of the everlastingness of life in the face of the mortality is another important aspect that emerges powerfully in the novel. This theme has been reflected by the symbolic presence of the Medicine Man in the novel. Without saying a word the Medicine Man imparts his message to the suffering girl. Medicine Man and Owl sit in silence for a long time. Owl is no longer feeling distressed. She feels that an overwhelming mystical spiritual feeling has comforted her mind. She realises that the simple wisdom, understanding and compassion are the virtues which can rebuild her community. She says:

"I feel his calming presence flood my soul, a rushing warmth of completeness, of knowledge undefined, then calming peace settles over me. I feel like I have just completed a circle; I glance at him thinking that here the medicine man is one person in total harmony with his world."^3

Owl comes to realise that her identity as a native Canadian is ultimately related to questions about the satisfaction afforded by social life and to the problem of arriving at a mature capacity to tolerate the suffering and death that is the destiny of all. Because in ethnic identity there is a commitment to endure suffering. De-Vos / Romancei Ross hold:

"Each (ethnic) group perhaps thinks that in maintaining itself it has to undergo certain forms of unique suffering not experienced by others. It may be reassuring to others to recognise that consciousness of suffering is not unique to any one group, but is the destiny of our common humanity, whatever our separate cultural origins."^43

The Medicine Man in his role as an initiator of ecstasy and healing, creates a culturally shared inner space in which the healing of body and mind occur. He elevates Owl's mind when he says:

"One thing you know for certain without a doubt is that the sun comes up every morning and sets again in the evening. Does it care about the clouds? The stillness itself lasts forever but the noise can be silenced."^44

The Medicine man has been referred to here from the cultural context of the Native Canadian worldview. These medicine elders are not to be understood as equivalent to the herbalists. The primary function of the Medicine man is to secure the help of the spirit world for the benefit of the entire community. They are specialised in the field of spiritual healing.

Most Native Canadians typically regard illness as resulting from the entry
of malignancy into the body, or the departure of the soul from the body through violation of the social order. The Medicine man strives through his ritual to remove or cast out the illness from the suffering soul or to induce the soul to return to the ailing body. Sometimes the help sought may be for the sake of healing disease, sometimes it may be for the sake of healing the psyche, and sometimes the goal is to promote harmony between human groups or between human and nature.45

In portraying the Medicine man in the novel, Slipperjack emphasises the man’s potential to be the healer of the community. The portrayal of the Medicine Man is particularly significant in the contemporary Canadian situation where renegotiation of nation and national images are taking place in a post-colonial context. In Indian tradition it is the Medicine Man who nourishes, nurtures and heals in the same way that the earth does. He derives his sacredness from a spiritual connection with the earth.

Though the meeting with the Medicine Man does not dramatically change Owl’s attitude towards her community, it certainly makes her re-examine the worthiness of native values. The faith in native Indian spiritual way helps her to fearlessly shed off the note of despair. She addresses poverty as the root cause for alcoholism, violence and premature death of the people of her community. A survivor must survive an enemy, irrespective of his or her location. Slipperjack’s protagonist confronts the problem of alcoholism at home. She knows that she is a part of the whole as she says - “I love this community, I know every hill and hollow, stump and tree.”46 It is to claim the deeply inculcated tribal values that she embarks upon her life’s journey. She is pained to see how alcohol ruins her mother and many Native families. But she refused to lose herself to alcohol. Her strong determination to survive is a positive message for the people of her community when she says – “I will never get drunk! My kids will never have to carry me home.”47 She has regained her long-lost hope and peacefulness of mind as she realises that the sun is always up there even when one can not see it. There is a note of hope on the other side of every despair. She embraces her community with all its vice and virtue, as has been said by Daniel David Moses, "To conquer your demons you have to face them.”48 Owl is a complete human being now who does not nurture any grievance against her tormenting childhood days. She remembers her mother’s words, "Honour the Sun, child just as it comes over the horizon.”49
Ruby's protagonist symbolises the growing consciousness of the young Native generation. The narrative exposes the vices of the neo-colonial structure of the society. The evils of the society has come under satire not for a sense of moral righteousness, but for protecting the children, the voices of the future. Ruby argues that innocence of the child's mind needs to be protected in order to regenerate the Native Canadian social order. She says –

"The child is so honest, so open. The child has memory of creation, because the child has not yet lost that connection. That is one thing that we all have in common, and I think that is one way that we can all communicate. That is one thing that we can all understand. We all have that one thread that connects us to all creation."^20

It is the connectivity with the landscape and spirituality of the Native worldview that helps the child protagonist to overcome despair she has suffered in life and turn her into a new person, in complete conjunction with her cultural traditions and values.

Notes and References


7. Ibid, p. 188.

8. Ibid, p. 177.


10. Ibid, p. 36.


17. Ibid, p. 66.


22. Ibid, p. 175.

23. Ibid, p. 175.


31. Ibid, p. 11.

32. Ibid, p. 146.


34. Ibid, p. 181.


40. Ibid, p. 80.

41. Ibid, p. 126.

42. Ibid, p. 120.


45. Malloch, Lesley: “Indian Medicine, Indian Health: Study Between Red and White Medicine”, *Canadian Women’s Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2 and 3 (Summer / Fall), 1989, Pp. 105-112.


47. Ibid, p. 172.


Lutz, Hartmut: Contemporary Challenges: Conversations with Canadian Native Authors, Saskatoon, Fifth House, 1991, p. 209.