CHAPTER II

IN SEARCH OF APRIL RAIN TREE:

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Beatrice Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree* is a revelation of a Canadian Metis woman's torrent of painful experiences. Separated very young and cruelly treated in different foster homes, the sisters, April and Cheryl, choose very different lives amidst physical and psychological tortures. April, the older and fairer-skinned sister, assimilates into white society, while Cheryl adopts a militant political identity at a very young age and grows up to work for Native Canadians at a Friendship Centre. Cheryl, who turns to alcohol, commits suicide while April arrives at a politically strong self-determination to nurse Cheryl's son, Henry Liberty Lee, as a model for the future Native generation. The story opens with April's embalmed memories:

MEMORIES. SOME memories are elusive, fleeting, like a butterfly that touches down and is free until it is caught. Others are haunting. You'd rather forget them but they won't be forgotten. And some are always there. No matter where you are, they are there, too. I always felt most of my memories were better avoided now I think it's best to go forward. Last month, April 18th, I celebrated my twenty fourth birthday. That's still young but I feel so old. (9)

April's reminiscences fictionalise the forceful and tragic separation of her parents, Henry Raintree of mixed-blood Indian and Alice Raintree of part
Irish and part Ojibway. Their Norway House becomes the microcosm of Canadian Metis life. Memories of parents and miseries of present life envelope the tragically separated minds of April and Cheryl. Shifting from one foster home to another, the Metis sisters share their feelings through letters and other discourses. Social workers like Mrs. Grey and foster mothers such as Mrs. Semple and Mrs. De Rosier create problems for these Metis sisters. Amidst all the cruel deeds, April now realises the tragedy of being a Metis: "Being a half-breed meant being poor and dirty. It meant being weak and having to drink. It meant being ugly and stupid. It meant living off white people" (49). Unlike April, Cheryl's pride lies in being a Metis. She rebels against the falsehood charged against on the Native Indians in her history class. She loudly exclaims:

They are wrong. Because it was written by white men who had a lot to cover up. And I'm not going to learn a bunch of lies." Cheryl had said, more scared than ever before ... "Giving me the trap isn't going to change the fact that your history books are full of lies". (58)

Cheryl's teacher's rapid assertion, "They're not lies; this is history," (57) is redolent of Michel Foucault's, "political economy of truth" of the dominant whites. Cheryl, an ardent follower of the Native rebel hero, Louis Riel, bears a striking resemblance to Joan of Arc who faces punishment for being
right and telling the truth. Cheryl's multiple forms of identity meet in a crisis while a White remarks on Cheryl's identity:

Oh I've read about Indians. Beautiful people they are. But you're not exactly Indians are you? What is the proper word for people like you?" one asked. "Women,"Cheryl replied instantly. "No, no, I mean nationality? " "Oh, I'm sorry. We're Canadians," Cheryl smiled sweetly. (116)

Cheryl's feminine identity is shifted to Canadian identity, and thereby Cheryl's Metis identity is merged with Canadian plurality.

April too sloughs off her identity as she represents the surrogate White identity in Metis race. April Raintree becomes "Raintry" and marries Bob, a White man in order to shed her Métis identity. April's overhearing of Mother Radcliff and Heather's conversation over her Metis identity and her proposed divorce from Bob force her to reinstate her former identity.

April is alienated from her racial identity. Her process of locating her identity becomes inconsistent while she happens to face the rapists. She is mistaken for Cheryl. As a Native person, April's fantasy of her fake White identity is demolished after this moral ordeal.

The doubling of protagonists through April and Cheryl confounds the question of identity. The two ideologically oppositional Metis sisters are illu-
trations of antipathetic extremes of their Native heritage. April represents the fictive, authorial, and narrative voice. She is the schizophrenic self of Cheryl, with a surrogate white identity. Cheryl, the younger sister, represents the Native people who insists that she represents the Metis Indian community:

Cheryl by acceding to neither designation, locating herself in a floated myth, disrupts the binarism that naturalizes such identity crisis. Not occupying a shadow space in Canada the Metis activist female hero, Cheryl, dismantles the fabricated system of assimilation. While April, the narrator-protagonist's attempts in her life bring out the identity crisis. April- Cheryl's struggle with identity can be read as a quest for the true self. April's story is both sloughing off false persona (only at the end does April realise her mistake of trying to become a white person) and a final embracing of an authentic self. Her identity undergoes a transparency. April at the end determines to embrace her real heritage. Margaret Clarke, by contrast, emphasizing a feminist reading of the novel, suggests that for Culleton the experiences of female identity and Metis identity are inseparable. (Hoy 160)

Culleton's authorial identity is double since the novel has a revised edition. This textual variation poses a double life for Culleton, as an immature and mature author. The "author" of the revised edition is less the subject
of life experiences similar to those in the novel than is the "author" of the original edition. As a successful professional in the revised edition, Culleton problematizes again the notion of a singular, unified intrinsic identity. The undermining of unitary and essentialist discourses of identity in the novel countermands notions of the author's originary identity and the authenticating imprint of her experience. As Julia Emberley says:

The ending marks a reclaiming of "identity" over difference... a new synthesis of the split narratives of subjectivity constituted in Cheryl and April... a new order of unification and reconciliation in which the 'Indianness' of Cheryl is absorbed into the whiteness of April.

(162)

The novel is a multifarious admixture of identities. Combining fictive, authorial, transparent, immanent, Native and White identities, the text describes various crises of the self and of racial identity. Reality constitutes both self and racial identity. Culleton's experimental confrontations are split through April and Cheryl. The novel creates permeable and melded selves. The narrative voice through April becomes fluid and inclusive. Cheryl's voice is interpolative, transformative, and radical. The novel also has a narrative ambivalence which is split into two figures, Cheryl and April.
April's ability to embody a truly mixed-blood identity takes place through historical discovery and political commitment. The importance of history is evident from the outset of the novel, which opens with the word "memories". The process of remembering is explicitly connected to survival. It is essential that this process of remembering does not reduce her personal pain but creates a sense of historical consciousness.

The novel explores the racial stereotyping of Metis identity in the Canadian cultural diaspora. April is forced to discriminate even at the young age between "brown-skinned" and "fair-skinned" children at a playfield in her school. At school, both April and Cheryl underwent a cultural discrimination. The "fair-skinned" school kids bully them and called the Metis sisters names. This name-calling is a literal form of what Marxist critic Louis Althusser terms interpellation, during which individuals "recognize (or misrecognize) themselves in discourse and adopt subject positions accordingly and through which existing distributions of power are distributed" (170-177). Culleton hails the native subject, "always already" a subject of the dominant discourse (162-63) on behalf of the counter-discourse. Culleton, in the process of evolving a new narratological strategy, creates a counter-discourse to share the experience of having been interpellated by the dominant discourses, which treat the native subjects as "second-class citizens".
Culleton writes the novel about the construction of the Native as the Other. The Othered Metis are" not selfed". (Goldie) April does not have "self", and Cheryl has become symbolic of April's split-off "Indianness". As Margery Fee describes:

When April goes to Cheryl's apartment to pick up some clothes to take to the hospital, she is dropped into a car and raped. Afterwards, April "began wondering for the hundredth time why they had kept calling me squaw" [that which April has always defined as other]. (172)

The violent rape of April by the dominant Whites is analogous, in Spivak's words, to "the epistemic violence that constituted/effaced a subject that was obliged to cathect (occupy in response to a desire) the space of the imperialist's self-consolidating Other" (209). April, who is a symbol for the whole Canadian colonized people and the Metis, feels frustrated by her failure to communicate with her sister; she finds an empty bottle in Cheryl's room and smashes it, screaming "I hate you for what you've done to my people! Our people!" (114). Her use of the last two words "Our people" is most significant in the sense that it opens up a new identity and a renewal of community for herself which has been othered by the dominant community. At the end of the novel, April repeats the words "Our people" and sacrifices her life to breed
a new Native generation in the form of Henry Liberty Lee. She now finds that the Metis other takes the form of a renewed self to assert the true identity of the Metis people through the bringing up of Henry Liberty Lee.

The notion of Native family undergoes a tremendous transformation. Ancestry and family become the predicament of history to the Natives. April renounces familial bonds and tells her school friends that her parents were killed in a plane crash. She delinks connections to community and even to Cheryl. Cheryl tries to find her familial roots but fails. Metis identity is inherent in Cheryl. April's ultimate self-determination takes place through reconstituting a family. While reading the journals of Cheryl, April comes to understand how the racism and impoverishment of her darker-skinned sister grows into larger political affiliation with "(her) people" (228). Culleton revises the conventional notions of the family and its relation to the nation and blends her personal history, which has been termed in the recent context as a biomythographical attempt.

As Judith Russell says, Culleton set out to tell a story—her own story—in the plainest available language and nothing else is needed (192). In describing her personal story, there arises a conflict and clash between many identities which are overpowered by counter and hostile mainstream pressures. The conflict is happily resolved when the pseudo (White) identity is jettisoned to pave the way for the assertion of the Native identity.
"The true “self-hood” (Russell 33) gains the upper hand on the surrogate and emerges victorious after an intense struggle which seeks to nip off from its own original moorings” (Hoy 160). The crowning success of April’s character lies in the efforts she puts into achieving “a new orientation towards her ontological bearing, which results in a process of reunification in which the Indianness of Cheryl is absorbed into her Whiteness” (Hoy 168). As Lionel Trilling says:

Authenticity is implicitly a polemical concept fulfilling its nature by dealing aggressively with received and habitual opinion, aesthetic opinion in the first instance, social and political opinion in the next (94).

The intertwining concepts of authenticity and identity are based on personal experience, which is more autobiographical than fictional. The authentic first hand experience of the author becomes a rich source of material for Native writers such as Culleton. Therefore, the novel serves to provide Metis readers with a recognizable reality. Describing the book as “autobiographical fiction, Ray Torgud, refers to Gertrude Stein’s maxim: "write the truest sentence that you know" and, notes that the “unflinching of the text is aligned with its presumed honesty”. Rob Ferguson speaks in one breath of “an unapologetic honesty and a simplicity in writing style”(42). Culleton frankly presents her own personal story as the story of her Metis people. The novel is
a powerful presentation of the cruelty of the Native life. To describe this situation, Culleton mixes family, ancestry, history, with fictional mode, and autobiographical discourse with the genre of realism. In this context, the cultural memory of the Metis people in autobiography, where the writers rehistoricize the personal as well as the cultural identity. Talking about ethnic memory, Amritjit Singh says:

Ethnic memory... of Native Americans, African and other neglected groups (like Canadian Natives) represents a real challenge to hegemonic constructions of nation, culture and history. As part of the ongoing argument between history and memory, marginalized groups often attempt to maintain at the centre of national memory what the dominant group would often like to forget. The process results in a collective memory always in a flux: not one memory but multiple memories constantly battling for attempting in cultural space (56).

Culleton's opening of the novel with "memories" is the best example of memory based autobiography. Culleton's cultural memory challenges the dominant historiography that very often fails to represent the wholeness of Canadian Natives. The creative urge of Culleton finds a place only when her submerged consciousness blends with cultural connotations. According to a
Foucauldian archaeological reading of submerged history, the recurrent memory of Natives reinforces the “fossilization process” of their history. The novel reflects issues surrounding memory - personal, cultural, and historical. Culleton fuses the genre of autobiography and indigeneity/aboriginality by re-writing her memories. As R. A. Schermerhorn has observed, “ethnic memory always has a common ancestry and historical past” (12).

Memory plays a vital role in Culleton’s life in describing her personal story, family story, and nostalgia. The search for “roots” is often accultural as one of the wings of memory in Arab American literature is relevant in this context:

Memory functions on both a cultural and a personal level to establish narratives of origin and belonging, myths of peoplehood like memories of childhood situate the subject and make agency possible (Majaj qtd in Singh 266).

The genre of native autobiography emphasizes ancestry, memory, aboriginal history, and family stories. Whereas the traditional autobiography documents the "autos" of individual identity, Native autobiography emphasizes the oral mode and the collective development of particular group. Culleton in *In Search of April Raintree* depicts her autobiographical experience and reminiscences in a fictional mode as internal cultural as well as ethnic dialogues. This personal narrative mode becomes a microcosm of
Aboriginal life in Canada. The novel shows how accepting one's Native heritage opens up a new cultural space in the mainstream map. In this process, Culleton de-otherizes the myth of “historylessness” of the indigenous cultural history. The doubly alienated Native people in Canada choose the genre of autobiography as the convenient mode of writing to create a new cultural map in Canada. As Mudrooroo says:

Aboriginal culture became as distorted as others seen through British eyes such as the Irish, African, Indian and Chinese... There is a preponderance of biography in Aboriginal written literature and many people I talk to are concerned about this form of literature. (qtd in Ashcroft 230)

Culleton employs first-person, narrative, (and the use of "I" in Native autobiographical narrative is more significant in the Native context) Zwicker says that Culleton radically revises the conventional notions of the family and its relation to nation and argues for the importance of personal history in the construction of the national (15). Culleton's fusion of the genre of autobiography and aboriginality results in the assertion of personal as well as cultural identity. Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra describe...:

Very many Aboriginal texts written and unwritten, recorded or not deal directly with the fundamental issues facing Aboriginal people,
torn as they are between alienation and a sense of belonging. The strategy they use is an adaptation of traditional Aboriginal ways constructing maps that are designed to represent broad stretches of space and time to give meaning and perspective, direction and hope on the wildering journey of the life of themselves and their people. (93)

In this map-making process, Culleton writes revisionary autobiography by fusing Aboriginality and Native cartography. In her struggle to authenticate the cultural memory, and the mainstream concept of Native historiography, Culleton, through Cheryl, opposes the notion of a history of Metis people which is written by the White writers:

This is all a bunch of lies! "If this is history, how come so many Indian tribes were wiped out? How come they haven't got their land anymore? How come their food supplies were wiped out? Lies! Lies! Lies! Your history books don't say how the White people destroyed the Indian way of life. (57)

Culleton, instead, glorifies the history of the Metis and their rebel leader, Louis Riel. Cheryl says "I knew all about Riel. He was a rebel who had been hanged for treason... I had learned about his folly in history" (44).

In this autobiography, one may find that individual or authorial memory and cultural or collective memory are fused into what Bakhtin would call
"double-voiced discourse", which represents "a concentrated dialogue of two voices, two world views, two languages "(324-325). For Bakhtin, language has its own embedded memory:

Language has been completely taken over, shot through with intentions and accents. All words have the "taste" of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work, a particular person, a generation, an age group, day and hour. Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially changed life; all words and forms are populated by intentions. (293)

Therefore, in ethnic or Native autobiographies the form is as hybridized as the people. Autobiography is traditionally a Western genre linked to the bourgeois European emphasis on individuality; however, the personalised history lives on in both form and substance in the ethnic autobiography. Culleton draws on Metis heritage in which the individual identity is distorted. For Wong, the term, autobiography in Native American personal narratives means a "communo-bio-oratory" as it mixes oral, dramatic, and artistic forms (42).

A term such as Wong's "communo - bio - graphy" might indeed be more reflective of the autobiography of Culleton since it places great importance on the memories and experiences of an individual who stands for a
whole Metis community. For Metis, the cultural hybrid, the self, is plural and multiple, a mixing of collective and individual memories where nothing is thrust out and, nothing abandoned. Culleton combines the native concept of history and personal story by locating her own story within the collective story of her family and the Metis community, what Mudrooroo said about the Australian Aboriginal writers is relevant here:

The Aboriginal writer is a Janus-type figure with one face turned to the past and the other to the future while existing in a postmodern, multicultural Australia in which he or she must fight for cultural space. (qtd in Griffiths 24)

Culleton justifies her cultural marginality and memory through her autobiographical discourses. Revising the memories is necessary because the only history is memory (Couer 107 in Singh). Talking about the struggle between mainstream culture and minority culture Abdul Jan Mohammed and David Lloyd point out:

One aspect of the struggle between hegemonic culture and minorities is the recovery and mediation of cultural practices that contribute to be subject to "institutionalized forgetting" which as a form of control of one's memory and history is one of the gravest forms of damage done to minority culture. (qtd in Singh 177)
Culleton disrupts the hegemonic notion of history and stands against the fossilization of Native cultural memory under the hegemonic cultural subalternisation in the mainstream map of Canadian society. While undermining the established or institutionalized history which is against the Native history, Culleton tries to unearth the historical facts about the Native Indian tribes and asserts a vital historical heritage for the entire land of Native Canada. Cheryl blames the school textbooks and their "lies" which distort the historical facts about Native life. These accusations decenter the basic structure of what mainstream concept of native history. Foucault sheds light on counter-memory in history:

The evocation of a counter memory involves a radical disruption of the usual readings of history, that is readings backward in time to retrace a uniform evolutionary process, instead a counter memory places its attention on the "heterogenous systems" which masked by the self inhibit the formation of any form of identity. (156)

Canadian history lacks Foucault's "uniform evolutionary process"; and Culleton now rewrites the history in the novel to assert her people's oral traditions, ritual aspects, and the rich folklores. She wants her personal story to be a blueprint of revolt in rewriting the Native history. Culleton's fusion of
the personal as well as the cultural memories of the “doubly disposed­
sessed;” (Spivak) and culturally “Othered” or the “Not-Selfed” community
(Goldie) in the “compartmentalized world” (Fanon) is a revolution in the his-
tory of Canadian Native life. Her autobiographical documentation is a cultur­
ally-charged rewriting of the traditional genre of autobiography. This type of
fusion of memories, Aboriginality, autobiographicality, and history is a new
mode of writing in the Canadian context. Since this fusion is a feminine at­
tempt, Emberley, in her book *The Thresholds Difference (XVI)*, terms this
genre as “a feminism of decolonisation” and “a decolonisation of feminism”.
According to Emberley, the issues are different.

For example, the nexus of text on the female body predominates post -
structural feminist writings. However, the Native women and especially the
Canadian Metis are not concerned with this literary - sexual analogy. Their
writing undergoes a process of cultural split, a textual aberrancy or a counter
discursive pattern due to cultural schizophrenia which might be due to their
racial halfbreed background. This is evident in the novel when Cheryl says, “I
wish we were whole Indians”(45). Here Cheryl seems to be lacking unified,
coherent subjectivity, which is the aim of European autobiography. This schizo­
phrenia indirectly revealed of Culleton also through Cheryl has in the novel’s
second version published in 1984. April internalizes schism between two
totalities of difference that do not intersect. She produces a dislocation in
the representation of a unified, coherent subjectivity. The narrative splits the protagonist into two figures: Cheryl and April. "There is a dialogism in the narrative strategies, and a polyvocal space breaks open in the figure of April" (Hoy 160). Writing about the double-directed voicedness of the dialogic imagination in the use of parody, Bakhtin argues as follows:

The second voice, one having made its home in the other's discourse, clashes violently with its primordial host and forces him to serve directly opposing aims. Discourse becomes an arena of battle between two voices. (323)

The novel concludes by reconstituting a totality in the figure of "a people". Henry Liberty Lee becomes the new hope of the Metis community. It is tragic that it took Cheryl's death to accept April's identity. But Cheryl once said, "All life dies to give new life" (Culleton, ISAR228). There is a third position, a new synthesis of identity, in Lee, a synthesis of Indianness, Whiteness, and Metis background. As Emberley says: "The ending marks a re-claiming of "identity" over difference ... a new synthesis of the split narratives of subjectivity constituted in Cheryl and April ... a new order of unification and reconciliation" (162).

Realism becomes a genre in Native counter-discourse. Realistic portrayal of life-experience is the life-writing mode in Native autobiography. The narrative discourse possesses a Foucauldian power / knowledge nexus;
the transparencies produce the realities they convey (227). In the narrative mode, Culleton goes beyond Fanon's Manichean aesthetics since Metis life is more subaltern than other marginalized life.

Culleton's text is an intricate choreography of (mis)representations. As Helen Hoy notes:

In Mrs. Semple's presumption that the De Rosier mother and daughter "have no reason to lie about who did what" (66), we have the familiar "objectivity" of the hegemonic position and dubious "interestedness" of counter discourse (163).

Culleton rethinks the 'dubious' interestedness of the hegemonic position and uses subversive strategies such as first-person narrative as a primary tactic against the dominant discourse. This form of narration has traditionally worked to "suppress the role of language in the construction of the subject, and its own role in the interpellation of the subject, and to present the individual as a free, unified, autonomous subjectivity" (Belsey 192). Within the literary discourse of Canada, the use of a Native "I" is a subversive tactic. Both Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash* and Culleton's *In Search of April Raintree* show how the dominant discourse functions in a native hybrid mode of writing.
Culleton’s counter-discursive strategy disregards common sense chronology to create her own history in order to make cultural syncreticity. By deromanticizing the master narratives, Culleton enriches the aboriginal oral traditions, and in this sense the text, in Althusser's terms, "interpellates" or "hails" the Native subject, "always - already" a subject of the dominant discourse. The structuralist concept of "always - already" is being distorted by the native writers in order to bring out the continuous process of native culture from time immemorial.

An attempt can be made to bifurcate Culleton's text as an authorial craft through April and as a discursive craft through Cheryl. Cheryl chokes with emotional energy and finds an outlet in fragments of missives and in a heteroglossia of discursive media such as dialogues and speeches. Culleton through Cheryl presents a variety of discourses. As Hoy lists:

The stumbling of letters of a pre-schooler; subsequent letters academic speeches and essay, on Metis history, Oratory, written for a university newspaper ...dialogue most centrally; and posthumously, diary entries. In addition, the novel either represents or addresses a range of other discourses. (160)

Culleton's experiment on the Native counter-discourse against the dominant discourses is more effective since Culleton intermixes the features of fiction, and autobiography in her new mode of Native discursive "autobiography."