

CHAPTER - I

**INTRODUCTION TO
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1.1 THE CANADIAN NOVEL : A BRIEF SURVEY

The Canadian novel includes four phases of its development. The first phase of the Canadian novel, which runs parallel with that of the British novel during the Victorian age, paves a path for the later mature Canadian novel written in modern age. Literary historians and critics believe that Frances Brookes' *The History of Emily Montague* (1769) is the first Canadian novel, which was published in London. Though the novel gives little encouragement, it leads the way towards English Canadian fiction. This novel deals with the North American life, giving it an identity of its own.

St. Ursulas Convent or The Nun of Canada (1824) by Julia Catherine Beckwith Hart is the first novel published in Canada and written by a native born writer. Some good works were brought forth by the trend of publishing outside Canada. Anisur Rahman has rightly pointed out : "the fashion of publishing outside Canada caught the imagination of the novelists but it created a reading public in Canada as well." (1996 : 57)

Many outside influences on Canadian novelists are to be noted during this phase, the most important being Sir Walter Scott. Apart from this, many of the Canadian novelists were also influenced by the land. It is essential to examine the emergence and development of the novel in Canada.

The second phase of the Canadian novel throws light on new challenges and new hopes experienced by Canada at the beginning of the twentieth century. After 1900 it was noticed that there was more freedom in attitude and in the range of expression. The writers of this phase dwelt more carefully on their own locations and tried to develop their own view of the beliefs of a community. The past and the present of Canada caught the writer's attention and they reflected it in a revised perspective. Alice Jones, Gilbert Parker, W. A. Fraser are those who concentrated on the land and the smell of the soil. It appears that indirectly they were defending their self and trying to give an identity to the Canadian novel during this period. The generally found pattern is that the hero falls in love, he moves with confidence and finds a resolution at the end. Anisur Rahman rightly points out in this context :

The novels before the twentieth century and the novels in the first decades of this century show the great difference in apprehension of material and

way of execution. While the earlier novel was more story-oriented, the new novel was, apart from being story-oriented, technically more innovative. (1996 : 58)

The fiction written by Canadian writers before 1880 presents scenes of Canadian life in only a few isolated spots in an unknown country. After 1890 the number of Canadian fiction increased rapidly. The Canadian writers started writing short stories. They handled different forms like “the local colour story, the action or adventure story, the historical romance, the animal story, the mystery, the detective fiction or crime story, novels of ideas and the sensational and sentimental society story.” (Gorden Roper 1970 : 298)

In this phase, the whole known area of Canada has been sketched. The Minas Basin, North shore and land on both sides of the Bay of Fundy are explored in greater details. Some novels depicted college life in Toronto and some depicted city life in Ottawa. Major writers of this period are : Margaret Saundess, Alice Jones, Marian Keth and Stephen Leacock.

These writers wrote for an audience for whom fiction essentially was story.

The thirties and the forties saw the emergence of another aspect of the Canadian novel in which the region was well explored. They began the process of diverting the readers' attention towards the actual conditions of Canadian life. The Historical romances were written during this period which dealt with almost every phase of human history produced in Canada. The regional novels also became popular as they portrayed the life of a small area of Canada with optimistic attitude. They dealt with the psychological aspects and a variety of social issues. During 1940-60 the Canadian writers rendered authenticity to the Canadian fiction.

One of the characteristics of the recent Canadian fiction is the emergence of another group of novelists. They are Margaret Lawrence, Margaret Atwood, Jeannette Armstrong, Maria Campbell and others. This period has been the most prolific and the most rewarding one. This period may be identified with the flowering of experimental fiction, feminist fiction, childhood fiction, regional fiction and popular fiction.

A large number of novelists, some known while others not so well known, appeared on the scene. Margaret Atwood, Jeannette Armstrong, Margaret Lawrence are the most important novelists of this period.

Margaret Atwood is mainly known as a great novelist and champion of the cause of Canadian Literature. Her *Survival* is a powerful manifesto of Canadian writing in general. Atwood focuses on existential experiences in Canada. Land and mind, wilderness and civilization, alienation and identity are the opposing elements in Canadian life. Whereas, Armstrong is best known for giving an honest representation of the harsh realities of Indian life. She also presents an optimistic outlook towards people. Her first novel *Slash* throws light upon the tradition and customs of the native Canadian people. What is significant about her is her novel serious thinks about the identity and experiences of the native aboriginal people.

In order to understand Jeannette Armstrong as a novelist, and to come to terms with her major concerns, that is, protest, it is essential to note the theory of protest and place her as a novelist against the background of the protest.

Many other novelists who contribute their works in recent times may be mentioned for all their worth but the works of Jeannette Armstrong, Leonard Cohen, Margaret Atwood and others contribute a lot of the making of fictional identity of Canada. They represent a variety of identity patterns such as survival, isolation, search for identity etc.

1.2 JEANNETTE ARMSTRONG : AN INTRODUCTION

Jeannette C. Armstrong, an Okanagan Indian was born in 1948 and grew up on the Penticton Indian Reserve in British Columbia. She received formal education at a one room school on the reserve as well as traditional education from Okanagan Elders and her family, so she is proud of her Okanagan heritage. In 1978, she received her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from the University of Victoria. The same year she received a Diploma of Fine Arts from Okanagan College.

Her education was a precursor to many remarkable career achievements and establishes the basis for her multifarious work.

At fifteen, Armstrong first discovered that she had a talent for and an interest in creative writing when her poem about John F. Kennedy was published in a local newspaper 'Voices'. She is influenced by Aboriginal authors such as Pauline Johnson and Chief Dan George.

Armstrong's literary production increased shortly after her 1978 graduation. She published two children's books in the early 1980s, *Enwhisteetkwa (or Walk in Water)* in 1982 and *Neekna and Chemai* the following year one of which won the children's Book Centre "Our Choice Award".

In order to understand Jeannette Armstrong as a novelist, it is significant to know a brief resume of her works.

1) *Slash* : Her first novel *Slash*, which was published in 1985, tells about a young Okanagan man. Thomas Kelasket, who is in search of his self-identity. It develops the theme of protest against the injustice in the society and also depicts the picture of his search for an identity in his own native land.

2) *Whispering in Shadows* : This novel was published in the year 2000. It is a journey of discovery towards the intimate voices that guide the world and our souls. The entanglement of poetry and traditional prose allows the novel to work and deliver its message.

Armstrong's technique is to help readers understand the social and political statements she makes in her book.

3) *Neekna and Chemai* : This fiction deals with the seasonal life pattern of the Okanagan Indian people, a tribe in the interior of British Columbia.

4) *Enwhisteetkwa/ Walk in Water* : It is published in 1982 and deals with the life pattern as well as traditions of the Okanagan Indian people.

Jeannette Armstrong, though not a prolific writer, has written four novels, poetry and non-fictional works. The following is the list of her novels and other writings.

Fiction :

- *Enwhisteetkwa/ Walk in Water* (1982)
- *Slash* (1985)
- *Neekna and Chemai* (1994)
- *Whispering in Shadows* (2000)

Poetry :

- *Native Poetry in Canada : A Contemporary Anthology* (2001), Edited with Lilly Grauer.
- *Breath Tracks* (1991)
- *Dancing With Cranes* (2004)

Non-Fiction :

- *Land Speaking in Speaking for the Generations : Native Writers on Writing. Sun Tracks : An American Indian Literary Series 35. Ed. Simon J. Ortiz. Tucson, AZ : U of Arizona P, 1998.*
- *Looking at the words of our People : First Nations Analysis of Literature* (1993).

- *We Get Our Living like Milk from the Land*, Critical Works. Researched and Compiled by the Okanagan Rights Committee and the Okanagan Indian Education Resource Society. Penticton : Theytus, 1993 (with Lee Meracle).
- *The Native Creative process : A Collaborative Discourse*. Penticton : Theytus, 1991 (with Douglas Cardinal).

In 1978, Jeannette began working as a writer and researcher at the Enowkin Centre, a cultural and educational centre operated exclusively by the Okanagan nation. In 1989, she became the Director of the Enowkin School of International Writing where she teaches writing classes which is affiliated to the University of Victoria. While teaching she says, "If any one person's rights within a democracy are not cared for, then everyone's rights are at risk, and asks if indigenous rights are not protected, how women's rights are protected, how are any other minority groups rights respected?" (Lutz ,1991 : 31-32)

She is a consultant to the Centre for Ecoliterary in Berkeley, California, Center for Creative Change, Esalen Institute, Omega Institute and the World Institute for Humanities at Salado. As a campaigner for Aboriginal rights, Armstrong serves as an international observer to the continental coordinating commission of Indigenous peoples and

organizations. She was also named as one of seven Indigenous Judges to the first nations court of Justice called by the chiefs of Ontario and to the council of listeners in the International Testimonials on violations of Indigenous Sovereignty for the United Nations.

Jeannette is honored with many awards like Mungo Martin Award (1974), Helen Pitt Memorial Award (1978), Honorary Doctorate in Letters, St. Thomas University (2000), Buffett Award for Aboriginal Leaders Eco Trust Award (2003), Honorary Fellow Award (2008).

Jeannette was appointed Executive Director of the Press and Creative Writing Programme of the Enowkin Centre in 1986, located in the Penticton reserve. Her participation in workshops, lectures and reading in Canada, the U. S. and parts of Europe helped her in locating the connections between the people. She has addressed conferences and assemblies at Universities in Japan, Moscow, Switzerland, Germany, New Zealand as well as the USA and Canada. She received an Honorary Doctorate at Laws in 2006 from University of British Columbia Okanagan. Jeannette is also currently sewing on the Canadian Commission for UNESCO and recently served as a representative to the Third World Water Forum in Kyoto, Japan.

In the study of Native literature, Penny Petrone includes Jeannette Armstrong amongst a young generation of university trained Aboriginal authors who contributed creative works to Canadian literature during the 1980s. Petrone also describes her work as direct, unequivocal, and assertive, even aggressive.

In an interview with Janice Williamson, Jeannette says that, "she is proud to be an Indian. It gives an inspiration to the native people to be proud about their own culture and traditions." (1992 : 111-29)

It can be noticed in her first novel *Slash*, through the character of Tommy Kelasket, she has tried to create such awareness among the people.

According to Barbara Godard,

Armstrong is less concerned with writing authentically 'like a Native', ... but in taking up a third position both within and without to create a new cultural community. She is not preoccupied with 'Truth' but with good story telling ... that foregrounds the complexity of the Native women's political engagement on several fronts. (1990 : 185)

Thus, it is observed that Jeannette Armstrong is a significant contemporary Canadian novelist writing in a post-colonial perspective. Her major concern is with the protest in relation to the established order. As it is prominently represented in *Slash*, it becomes imperative to study the theoretical aspects of protest.

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