

CHAPTER - IV

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My attempt in the study was to point out protest being reflected in Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash*. I have tried to first place her in the tradition of Canadian modern writers. In the first chapter I have taken a brief survey of the Canadian novel. This review reveals the development of Canadian fiction. Jeannette Armstrong is concerned with the education and rights of her native people on the Reserve of British Columbia.

In Chapter II, I have discussed the theory of protest. It clarifies the concept of protest in which the people of a particular society get aware of the injustice being done to them. I have further discussed different aspects of protest.

In Chapter III I have presented my analysis of the theme of protest in Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash*. The study reveals various experiences faced by the protagonist Tommy Kelasket through which he gets his real identity out of the confusion either to assimilate or get away from the sight of the black ones.

Jeannette Armstrong is a committed writer who deals with the important issues as education and indigenous rights of the Native people in her books. Armstrong is also concerned

with the preservation of Indian land. As an indigenous civil rights activist, Armstrong fights for the rights of the Native people to keep land that legally belongs to them. 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 : 13-32)

The study of her first and the most popular novel *Slash* confirms the view that Armstrong concentrates on important social as well as political issues. She deals mainly with the damaging effects of colonialism on Canada. The novel depicts utter exploitation of the natives by the white rulers. The white rulers in this novel are possessed with the feeling of superiority. Through her writing, Armstrong gives an honest representation of the harsh realities of Indian life in British Columbia. Even though the novel consists of many pessimistic events, she also presents an optimistic outlook to people. It has been made clear through her sayings, she says, 'today we human beings face the biggest of obstacles, and so the greatest of challenges to our creativity and responsibility. Let us begin with courage and without limitation, we will come up with surprising solutions. (Williamson, 1992: 111-129)

Armstrong is very confident about what she writes. According to her, to understand one another on an amicable note is to bridge our differences. Further Armstrong says that it is essential for the Okanagans' to tell their own history. She strongly states, "The only correct version has got to be from our people ! Nobody else can give the correct version but our people. And we're going to stick to that!" (111-129)

Jeannette Armstrong in her novel *Slash* has shown her protagonists suffering from the sense of loneliness. Tommy Kelasket is broken down in his own confusion between either to assimilate or get out of sight. As *Slash* gives the whole history of the life of Slash, from his childhood to his matured state so it can also be considered as Bildungsroman. This protagonist who can be regarded as Armstrong's mouthpiece as he shares her views and concerns is a misfits in the existing systems. Such characters are not happy with the prevailing conditions. Hence they try to protest. She shows that social injustice results into psychological complexities. Her protagonists suffer from the loss of identity.

Human beings and their sufferings stand at the centre of Armstrong's novels. Her protagonists suffer as they are victims of one or the other flaw in the existing social systems. With an extraordinary awareness and keenness she looks around to

record human sufferings. Being an activist Jeannette always stands against social injustice. She vehemently criticizes social inequality and moral degradation. She is a political activist who records attentively the social problems in her society.

Jeannette Armstrong feels a deep concern for the exploited masses and expresses in her novels a longing for freedom from the clutches of imperialism from the white people. They bring out the reaction against the established code, introducing the models of social reconstruction. Exposing the prevalent social, political, economic and religious exploitation with a firm commitment, they await a society with equal rights, privileges and opportunities for all alike. Thus they try to protest. *Slash* undertakes two journeys in his life in search of his identity, that is, first being a physical journey through Canada and the United States and second one is an inner journey which was influenced by the experience and inspirations which he encounters. Thus, the publication of the novel *Slash* represented an important milestone in the literature of Canada, as it was one of the first modern novels published by an Indigenous Canadian author. While writing about indigenous people she maintains that Indigenous rights must be protected, for we are the protectors of the earth. (14)

For the upliftment of this indigenous people Armstrong helped to establish the Enowkin centre that includes the study of Okanagan culture and history, language and traditional arts, as well as fine arts and education. Armstrong is engaged with this centre in the protection of lands on the Penticton Indian Reserve. Here in this centre she encourages people to participate in ecological restoration work and enjoy readings, performances that foster connection to his land. While encouraging people regarding the protection of the land she says, "it is important to preserve the precious gifts of life and become true caretakers of these lands." (Lutz, 1991: 13-32) Lally Grauer has rightly described her as a treasure of the Okanagan.

Jeannette Armstrong got this heritage from her family who regarded it as their responsibility to preserve and pass on the traditional culture – their language, their ways of relating to the community. To spread out her views she decided to write in English, though she knows the Okanagan language well, to be able to communicate with the Native people from other tribes all over Canada. While referring to the importance of the language she says, "All my elders say that it is land that holds all knowledge of life and death and is a constant teacher. It is said in Okanagan that the land constantly speaks. Not to learn

its language is to die.” (Jeannette Armstrong : 2008) Her special concern has been with empowering her people through a restoration of their traditional culture. This concern is even noticed in *Slash*. Through the wanderings of her hero, she traces the outlines of an emerging will for liberation and self determination, beginning with a challenge to self doubt. Her hero at the end of the book does not rest easily with activities which appear to meet the need of the day. But they will stick to the permanent achievements that they need.

Because of an active participation of Jeannette Armstrong, the Native people are discovering the voice which is necessary to make themselves known and how to use it to have their demands heard and respected. This voice is manifested in a nationalist spirit. Armstrong always writes to inspire the abilities of the native people and to put a framework around thinking that is good and healthy for their people. She truly writes about the Native literature. According to Lee Miracle,

Slash is rich in traditional oral history and our ‘Modern’ dilemma The woman who wrote this work wanted us to experience the life of Slash and the culture of the people that birthed him. (1994 : 5)

Whereas Betsy Warland found it to be one of the most courageous feminist novels. (1990 : 67-73) Because the incidents explained in the text become familiar with the audience as they keep themselves on that place. Slash as a character creates a conflict in the mind between wisdom and words, thoughtful acts and reckless conflicts.

Through the protest carried out by her protagonist Tommy Kelasket Jeannette tries to protect native values and practices and try to sustain them. Armstrong's insights as an educator, activist are respected by the native people. She has expressed herself both in Okanagan language as well as in English. Through this her writing has helped reveal truths about herself and her people. This also helps non indigenous children learn about Okanagan culture. According to her, only an individual should not get his/ her rights but everyone should learn to protect their rights. In order to create an optimistic attitude in the minds of the people she says :

Today we human beings face the biggest of obstacles, and so the greatest of challenges to our creativity and responsibility. Let us begin with courage and without limitation, and we will come up with surprising solutions. (1992)

There is absolutely no doubt that Jeannette Armstrong is familiar with sufferings and injustice to the Indians so that she possesses genuine sympathy for the underprivileged. She has painted all the characters so wonderfully that all the characters in the novel are able to hold our attention and involve our emotions from beginning to end. Even the minor characters are not an exception to this.

Her art of novel writing shows that she favours simplicity and naturalness in style as if the reader keeps himself at the place of Tommy Kelasket and understands the whole situation, which the native people have to tolerate in their life.

Thus *Slash* can be treated an important Canadian novel that represents a fine blend of commitment and creativity.

