

‘Stories To Stay, Stories To Subvert’: The Role Of Collective Communal Memory in the Native-Canadian Struggle for Resistance against Colonisation

Urmi Sengupta

Memory Studies, in its recent pre-occupation with the exploration of the relationship between memory and history, often strives to look into the distortion and/or repression of the memory of the marginalised that underlies the construction of the official discourse of history in a colonial context. This phenomenon emerges to be extremely prominent within the power-politics underlying a European settler colony like Canada. The fundamental difference in the historical consciousness of the indigenous people of Canada and their European colonisers has been instrumental in providing a rationale for the five hundred years of colonial battering that the Native Canadians have been subjected to. Having a primarily oral culture, collective memory transmitted across generations through oral storytelling has remained the repository of these communities’ past for a long time. Yet, the hierarchical oral/written binary of the Western worldview tends to dismiss their culture and civilisation, as “primitive” in favour of the so-called “modern” one that the Euro-Canadian settlers boast of. It lays the foundation for the colonial discourse of the “White-Man’s burden” of “civilising” the “savage Indians,” who do not have a chronologically documented (written) history in the Western sense of the term, within their own traditional knowledge system.

When highlighting the need to question one’s faith in the complete neutrality of an official version of the history of a colonised nation by acknowledging that “the meaning of history is dependent upon the structures to which facts are fitted” (Hutton 535), it is such ‘structures’ of perpetuating oppression and control that historian Patrick Hutton harps upon, for it is only because of this overarching structure of colonialism, that the Native-Canadians have long been represented in mainstream academia and culture through the coloniser’s gaze and the Euro-Canadian version of history been posited as the singular monolithic “Truth” within and without the geo-political boundaries of the nation. The need to emphasise, acknowledge, and thereby establish the indigenous historical consciousness as an equally viable way of looking at the past is, therefore, a necessary intervention into the colonial discourse of history. It is only as late as the second half of the twentieth century that this process found impetus in Native-Canadian attempts at voicing a resistance against the (dominant) official discourse of history perpetuated by the “white” Canadians through a conscious and deliberate attempt to blur the edges of the oral/written binary in their own uniquely subversive and effective way.

As two of the pioneers among the Indigenous storytellers who use the colonisers’ language (English) and their medium of expression, i.e., writing, as tools to subvert the colonial intervention, the Okanagan writer, visual artist, academician Jeannette Armstrong (b. 1948) and the Salish-Cree writer, performing artist and activist Lee Maracle (1950-2021) have been instrumental in exploring the role of orality and storytelling in interrogating power structures that have repressed the voices of the marginalised for ages. In their literary careers spanning more than four decades, they have consciously yet organically inscribed the oral within the written in such a way as to highlight the importance of memory, collective remembrance, and the art of listening in forging an alternative “history” for their respective communities. This “history” not only holds the key to their traditional knowledge and culture that dates back to the pre-colonial times but also reeks of racial discrimination, appropriation of aboriginal rights, and a complete denial of the indigenous world view by the complacent colonisers. In the light of Maracle’s *Ravensong* (1993) and Armstrong’s *Whispering in Shadows* (2000), two novels that deal with the coming-of-age stories of Salish and Okanagan youths in constant negotiation with colonial intervention, this paper aims to explore the subversive potential of this collective

cultural memory in resisting the colonial atrocities, the erosion of identity and the political disempowerment that has plagued the Native-Canadian existence for centuries.

A “recently decolonized woman” (Maracle *Bobbi Lee*, 18), as she calls herself, Maracle, a member of the Stó-lo (Salish) First Nation from British Columbia, was one of the earliest to bring about a phenomenal shift in the erstwhile perception of the Native-Canadians from being mere victims of racism to being warriors who registered their active protest against colonial domination through the power of the pen, through her autobiographical works *Bobbi Lee: An Indian Rebel* (1975). In fact, Armstrong, who began her literary career a decade after, lauded her for the very fact that “This book (*Bobbi Lee: An Indian Rebel*) was spoken at a time when writing was not considered to be an ‘useful’ endeavour in the ongoing struggle of our people.” (Armstrong, “Foreword” 15) She followed the autobiography with her first novel *Ravensong*, in which she moved further towards decolonising the mind by exemplifying her belief that “writing” and “oratory” should not be mutually exclusive but should complement each other in a way that the very process of literary creation becomes one of ‘healing’ the wounds inflicted upon the indigenous people by the years of deprivation from the ancestral lands, the loss of the hunting, fishing and gathering rights, a forceful imposition of the colonisers’ language through the Western education system and the ban on certain cultural and ritualistic practices that had informed the lives of an Aboriginal Self in the pre-colonial/early colonial times.

It is this understanding of the significance of oratory that finds expression in the moral, ethical, and psychological dilemmas faced by the seventeen years old protagonist Stacy, who is caught between the desire to hold on to her Salish heritage and at the same time be accepted as a part of the Euro-Canadian mainstream society that she has been exposed to, through her Western education. The act of taking cognition of the oral narratives about the achievements of the communal ancestors recounted in the ceremonial speeches, visions of the past, grief songs, dream quests of the village Elders, creation myths, and the trickster tales is encapsulated within the attempt “to integrate two mediums: oratory and European story.” (Maracle *Sojourner’s Truth*, 11) While the resultant narratives often see the presence of a rising action-climax-falling action sequence, in keeping with the Western story-writing techniques, the events hardly unfold within linear progressive ‘real’ time. Instead, they are often placed within a cyclical value-loaded time that forms an integral part of the Native-Canadian consciousness. Furthermore, concrete conflict resolutions are often replaced by an open-ended suggestiveness that leaves room for pluralistic interpretations – an approach that bears testimony to the legacy of Indigenous oral narrative traditions, which would accord as much freedom of thought and expression to the listeners as to the storyteller. Inscribing the ‘oral’ within the ‘written’, thus, leads to a much-needed Aboriginal-Canadian culture-specific intervention within the Western framework of a novel – one that calls for the acceptance of the truth claim of an oral tradition hitherto dismissed as ‘mythical’, ‘unscientific’ and therefore, an ‘unreliable’ resource for understanding the past of the nation and its Aboriginal population. The Anishinaubae writer Kateri Akiwenzie-Damm’s insistence on doing away with what she calls “the cookie cutter approach” (Dattaray “Images”, 91) calls for the need to look beyond the tendency to use the Euro-Canadian parameters to analyse (and judge) Indigenous literature and the first step towards that would undoubtedly be an attempt at acknowledging the truth claim of a historical consciousness different from one’s own.

Maracle aims “to make new memories for her people as a backward and forward visionary that is as someone who connects the generations” (Fee et al., 206) by invoking this indigenous historical consciousness in some of the most important junctures of storytelling. The major crisis about to befall Stacey’s village finds its only premonition in her little sister Celia’s silent narrative which is infiltrated by visions of the past, deeply embedded within inherited collective memory, which has played an important role in shaping her community, her ancestors and in turn her as an individual. The vision of the arrival of the colonisers in “tall ships” and the mass genocide that took place thereafter is in sharp contrast with the official

history constructed to suit the ends of the colonisers which describes how the Indians were waiting to be “discovered” and “civilised” by Euro-Canadian settlers. Renate Eigenbrod beautifully highlights what this oral/written dichotomy signifies for the colonised Indigenous Self in “The Oral in the Written: A Literature between two Cultures”: “Those who know how to write are in control and use their power to appropriate land that is not theirs. Oral communication on the other hand includes the ability to remember “it” (the injustice) and therefore function as a weapon, as a means of defense.” (Eigenbrod 90). These episodes hardly find a place in the official discourse of how the so-called “brave” and “masculine” European pioneer-settlers “conquered” the harsh landscape, weather, and the “barbaric tribes” to take possession of the land that they had named ‘Canada’ after the Spanish word ‘Acanada’ which meant ‘nothing here’. Thus, ‘remembering’ becomes the first step towards decolonising Canada’s official history. The Hong Kong flu epidemic of 1954 that ravages Celia and Stacey’s community in the summer of 1954 is juxtaposed with her vision of another such epidemic that took place when her grandmother was a child. Both the massacres highlight the complete indifference of the colonisers to this loss of lives. While the village Elder Ella, who is a survivor of the previous epidemic, can remember Salish men dying unattended on the streets of the ‘white town’; the present epidemic, too, finds their community a victim of what may be called ‘a hierarchy of care’: “Under the shabby arguments about hospitals being full and doctors already overworked lay an unspoken assumption: White folks were more deserving of medical care than us.” (Maracle *Ravensong*, 69) This phenomenon serves to highlight the coloniser’s utter disregard for the lives and well-being of people from whom they have stripped their autonomy. It hardly comes as a surprise, therefore, that they fail to grasp the environmental ethics of the Aboriginal population and, consequently, the enormity of the suffering inflicted upon them by the systemic and systematic destruction of their ancestral lands through the Euro-Canadian industrialisation and urbanization projects.

Indigenous communities of Canada are closely associated with their land. It is, in fact, emblematic of their entire cultural topoi. Moreover, there is no dichotomy between man and nature in the indigenous world. The entire universe is one interacting whole. Every aspect of nature, whether animate or inanimate, is part of what the Cherokee writer Thomas King calls “All my Relations” (King ix) – a part of one universal family, connected by mutual love and respect for each other. Therefore, one needs to have the ability to listen to the language of the land and nature. Celia acts as a foil to Stacy who ignores her communal responsibilities for the sake of her dreams of moving to the “white town” and enrolling in the University of British Columbia. Being firmly invested in her community, Celia is able to understand the conversation between Cedar and Raven, which continues to elude Stacey till she is ready to embrace her indigenous identity, in the months following the epidemic. As Maracle points out in *Oratory: Coming to Theory* (1990), it is only the ones who carry within them the legacy of an oral culture that understand the significance of this foundational indigenous ethics because “an orator is simply someone who has come to grips with the human condition, humanity’s relationship to creation, and the need for a human direction that will guarantee the peaceful coexistence of human beings with all things under creation.” (11) Rekindling the power of collective communal memory within written cultural productions thus emerges to be the only way to remember, revive, and perpetuate such ethics that reflect the ‘mentality’ (*mentalites*) (Le Goff 166) of the indigenous population of Canada – ones that highlight the “comingled beliefs, practices...images, myths, values recognised and tolerated by a society.” (Confino 1389) The necessity to identify the importance of such ethics in understanding the historical consciousness of the Native-Canadians for what it is, therefore, establishes the study of communal memory to be nothing but the study of the collective mentality of these communities

These ethics have historically been an integral part of the indigenous collective consciousness. Be it Stacey, who comes to feel as much love for her ‘sister Cedar’ as she does for biological sister Celia or Will of *Will’s Garden* (2010), who nurtures as strong a bond with “Ol’ Gramma moon” (Maracle *Will’s Garden*, 1) as one with his own grandmother on earth - every young-adult protagonist of Maracle’s works seem to embody and reinforce them,

through their thoughts and actions. Their emotions find a poignant inter-community resonance in the coming-of-age stories of Armstrong, particularly *Whispering in Shadows*. Penny Jackson, an aspiring Okanagan painter, is ready to leave her ancestral landscape to fulfil her dream of curving her own niche as a visual artist within the mainstream society and yet cannot help but find the semblances of the traditional songs once sung by her long-dead 'Tupa' (great-grandmother) within the humming of the bluejays who flew from her Reserve to the skies of her new urban habitation. Thus, akin to her literary contemporary, Armstrong too actively and consciously engages in what she hails as a process of 'reclamation' – one that pertains to the revival of oral voices lost to the centuries of cultural genocide, that has been started, aggravated, and perpetuated by the coercive infiltration of European languages, manners, and values into the traditional fabric of indigenous worldview through the interventions of Western educational and religious institutions, since the middle of the nineteenth century. *Whispering in Shadows*, her second novel, penned fifteen years after the publication of *Slash* (1985) and widely regarded as the first Native-Canadian novel ever written by a woman, emerges to be one of the finest examples of such a process of cultural 'reclamation'.

Being hailed as "a rich tapestry of poetry, description, letters and journal entries" that "explore the intricate relationship between land, language and community, in the Okanagan" (Dattaray "Soft Power", 76), the novel encapsulates within it not only the 'oral', but also the 'performative' to in a way so as to highlight the 'collective mentality' of a community, striving to hold to its eroding traditions, in a deeply moving manner. As Penny struggles to make ends meet, by working as an apple picker in the "white" town, the memory of Tupa Susapeen's words keeps her afloat:

"Wake up, the huckleberries are watching the trails, waiting."

The bluejays hopped from branch to branch above the camp,
speaking in a variety of tones, comically sounding like
Susapeen.

They sound happy today, not scolding, not worried.

"We can pick again today. The mountain is good to us. We are
lucky. We will have plenty this winter." (Armstrong *Whispering*,
19-20)

These words hold the key to a traditional ritualistic knowledge of berry picking, the gradual loss of relevance of which highlights that chapter of Aboriginal oral "history" that dwells upon the destruction of the berry-picking trails by the colonial forces of urbanisation and industrialisation. This motif of dissemination of traditional knowledge and oral history from grandmother to grand-daughter through the ritual of berry picking recurs in Armstrong's other works, including her cult poem "Wind Woman" (1978), where the adult protagonist relives the childhood memory of Maggie, the village Elder, imparting her valuable life lessons in through berry-picking sessions. It is perhaps reminiscent of the author's legacy of hailing from a family of powerful female ancestors including her grand-aunt Hum-Ishu Ma (Mourning Dove) (1884-1936), who is credited to be one of the earliest woman novelists in the history of Native-American literature. It is the legacy of her novel *Cogewea* (1937) and her rich repertoire of oral stories that have laid the foundation of the creative pursuits of her prodigal great-niece.

Moreover, the repeated narrativisation of this particular communal memory postulates beautifully the idea of the 'Land Speaking' that resonates with Maracle's views on the dynamics of the relationship between the land and the community. "I am claimed and owned by this land, Okanagan", she says, "Voices that move within as my experience of existence do not awaken as words. Instead, they move within as the colours, patterns, and movements of a beautiful, kind Okanagan landscape." (Armstrong 'Land Speaking', 176) These colours, patterns, movements, and the Okanagan landscape and also collective memory truly come together in Penny's paintings as some of the cornerstones of the native Canadian, particularly Okanagan, creative process. The question of the integrity of an artist comes up too, when Penny is faced with the challenge of holding her own in the face of being stereotyped for following the "Native-American format" (Armstrong *Whispering*, 127) by the Euro-Canadian 'connoisseurs' of art on the one hand, and being pressurised to fulfil the demands of the neo-liberal capitalist Canadian economy that banks on the so-called 'exotic' aboriginal art works to facilitate cultural tourism, on the other. These are the dilemmas that Armstrong herself faced in her career as a painter, prompting her to lay the foundations of the En'owkin Centre in Penticton, British Columbia, in 1980. Defined on its official webpage as a "dynamic institution which puts into practice the principles of self-determination and the validation of cultural aspirations and identity" ("En'owkin Centre"), this centre strives to preserve and protect traditional aboriginal artistic expression by offering courses on visual/performative/media arts and indigenous storytelling. Each of these projects emphasises the ecofeminist indigenous notion of 'Soft power', that encapsulates "the feminine process that has the power to heal the world and the individuals in it." (Armstrong *Looking at the Words*, 8) This collective belief that invests women with the special power and prestige of nurturing and preserving the biodiversity of their ancestral lands finds expression in the works of both writers.

Revisiting the memory of their grandmothers' lived experiences, ignite this nascent "Soft Power" within Stacey and Penny, inducing them to act with responsibility and "responsibility" towards nature and landscape. While the former refers to the ethics of drawing sustenance from nature but never exploiting it to satisfy human whims and fancies, the latter speaks of an ability to listen to, understand and respond to the language of nature. Every element of nature has its own way of communicating not only the pain of being over-exploited, but also a strong warning about the future repercussions of this exploitation on the overall ecological balance of the land and eventual survival of the human-race. As women who hail from a formidable line of female ancestors, who have embodied such ethics and abilities, both the protagonists in question display a sensitivity towards nature, community 'outsiders' are hardly capable of. Therefore, while Penny's 'white' partner Francis, in his eagerness to satisfy the needs of the capitalist economy of the coloniser does not think twice before snapping apples off trees, Penny herself can hear "the snap of apples being broken off their limbs" (Armstrong *Whispering*, 20). It induces her to "gently put them into the bag" (21), swinging the bag to one side in such a way that they would not bump into the ladder while she climbed down. Stacey, too, falls back upon the memories of her communal 'grandmothers', to realise how the rejuvenation of the Salish lands and its flora and fauna is the only way to prevent another catastrophe from befalling her epidemic-ravaged community.

The significant role of the communal memory in instilling such ecological ethics serves to enhance the need felt by the two creative artists to look for lessons of social regeneration within their traditional oral history and inscribe them within the Western narrative model of a novel. One encounters numerous storytelling sessions within the novels. In fact, the entire novel of *Ravensong* is nothing but a story being told to a Salish child by his mother, aunt, and grandmother. A unique feature of Salish storytelling is that when someone asks a question, he/she may be "given" a story, a story that is told by a number of people from different directions, i.e., from their own standpoints. The story of *Ravensong* begins as an answer to a question asked by Stacy's son Jacob, twenty-five years after the epidemic of 1954. He wants to know why his cousin Jimmy had killed himself. From this non-didactic multidimensional story about the havoc wreaked by the epidemic told by Stacy, Momma,

Rena, and Celia from their own perspective, he has to seek his answers. Maracle strongly feels that this is precisely the reason why the “white” men are not able to ‘retell’ stories. They, after all, cannot tell stories “from four different directions at the same time” (Maracle *Ravensong*, 86). Moreover, it is not only by taking cognition of the plurality of voices but also by introducing a performative element within the written that Maracle is able to give voice to the unspeakable misery and suffering that marks the existence of an aboriginal community ravaged by colonisation and numerous epidemics. It is a grief song, a part of the rich treasure of collective memory, which helps the community members to recuperate from the scars of inflicted by the loss of so many lives:

The grief shook the walls, rattled the women and terrified young
Jacob. Momma raced from the room, dug about in her trunk and
retrieved an old hand drum. She reached inside herself for the
strains of their ancient wailing song. Celia, Stacy and Rena
joined in, expunging the old grief from their insides- [...] Relieved
of their grief, the women laughed.” (Maracle *Ravensong*, 198)

Laughter and humour are used as tools of subversion to balance unequal power equations. By laughing, the women are able to turn a so-called grief song lamenting death into one that celebrates life, thereby refuting the attempts of the coloniser to demoralise the communities through their sheer apathy, neglect, and discrimination in the face of the epidemic crisis. As Maracle points out in her interview “From Discomfort to Enlightenment”: “We have our storytelling rules. I never write stories without humour. Humour opens people up to the subject of change, the possibility of change. You have to be open” (Fee et al., 212). This “change” refers to the ones that the indigenous communities should initiate within themselves in order to negotiate with this onslaught of colonial apathy by pledging to bridge the gap between them and the colonisers and establishing an effective communication that would serve to expiate their mutual distrust and disdain for each other. This is one of the most important lessons about oral storytelling that Maracle endows her protagonists with. Many other lessons follow suit.

As both Stacey and Penny realise, being a part of the family storytelling sessions, it is imperative not to bombard their mother and aunts, who are the storytellers, with questions. One would rather adhere to “the Indian thing of waiting for the story to unfold” (Maracle *Will’s Garden*, 8). It is a part of Native-Canadian ethics to not force people to listen to a story if they are not interested in the same – a lesson that becomes an integral part of storytelling sessions encapsulated within Maracle’s novels, shaping their narrative structure accordingly. It is fascinating to note how Armstrong prepares herself to use a European genre (novel) to talk about her community, by invoking the spirit world through the traditional Okanagan ritualistic fasting. The novel begins with the evocation of the traditional Okanagan song of the ‘wailing night bird’ seeking the guidance of the ancestral sister-spirits:

O! Soft responsive voices of the night
I join your minstrelsy [...]
I may not all your meaning understand
But I have touched your soul in shadow-land (Armstrong *Whispering*, 5)

and ends with the tale of the Copper Woman, the nurturer of the Okanagan community, being in solidarity with herself, her mother, grandmother, and generations of female ancestors, respectively – thereby, bringing the narrative to a complete circle, as perceived in a quintessentially Native Canadian storytelling process. The Okanagan belief of life being “a circle that has to happen in people” (Lutz “Jeanette Armstrong”, 20) is exemplified through the journey of Penny, from naïve to mature, from confused to self-reliant, from the uninitiated to the enlightened. Thus, one finds oral history in the form of the basic philosophies of Aboriginal worldview permeating a so-called Western medium of expression in the works of the two stalwarts, both in terms of the form and the subject matter.

The tricksters or animal spirits with gender and form variability that had been an integral part of indigenous spirituality and oral storytelling since the pre-colonial times often enter the world of written cultural production as agents of subversion of colonial power equations. Armstrong’s work sees the Okanagan trickster Coyote (Spirit of the Prairie Wolf) representing the claustrophobic existence of the Aboriginal youth within the urban setup. Far removed from their roots by official (Euro-Canadian) forces of cultural assimilation, mainly the Residential Schools, they belong nowhere, gradually losing their way in the deep abyss of substance abuse, sex-trade, theft, violence, frustration, and eventual suicide:

She (Penny) thinks of that one Coyote in the papers, in some city - how someone had opened the door of an elevator, how it had ridden to the top of an apartment building and ran around crazily and jumped to its death [...] Nobody wanted them there, so nobody made friends with them but once in a while they made the papers when they did something wrong or showed up, trotting along Broadway, cool as can be. (Armstrong *Whispering*, 253)

The Coyote trickster, emblematic of the traditional lifestyle of the Okanagan people, emerges to be a contemporised version of the displaced and urbanised Aboriginal Self – battling the scars of unemployment, discrimination, substance abuse, and molestation within the mainstream society that never accepts them, as their own. Maracle, too, never lets the role of the Salish trickster Raven (Spirit of the common raven or *Corvus Corax*) to remain restricted just within the traditional creation story in which he steals water and fire from Gray Eagle and brings them to earth for the people who had been living without light and water till then. Raven enters her novel as the omnipotent, omniscient entity that holds the entire narrative together. The conversation between Cedar and Raven that recurs as a refrain in *Ravensong* is crucial to the understanding of the discourse of complete non-negotiation that informs the “history” of the Salish people – one that speaks of the precautionary measures adopted by the community in order to bypass assimilation into the mainstream Canadian society.-

They gobbled up the land, stole women, spread sickness everywhere, then they hoarded the precious medicine that could heal the sickness [...] with each sickness the silence of the villagers grew. The silence grew fat, obese. It had taken Raven

almost a century to drive the people from the village; still the
villagers would not communicate with the others. (Maracle
Ravensong, 23)

While Cedar represents all that is traditional, stable and conservative, the trickster Raven emerges as a harbinger of change. He causes the 'flu epidemic just to provoke the community to come out of its self-imposed segregation. As Maracle herself tells Jennifer Kelly in "Coming Out of the House: A Conversation with Lee Maracle." "Our culture is one that looks at life as a process of constant spiritual growth and social transformation. A culture that does not have Raven is stagnant, it is incapable of transformation" (Kelly "Coming out", 76). Stacy, who initially lives in denial of her indigeneity, is able to understand the meaning of Raven's song and its underlying call for social transformation only when she comes to accept her role and her responsibility towards her community.

Language, both that of the coloniser and the colonised, plays a vital role in forging an alternative oral "history" for the Salish and the Okanagan people within the novels. Language is not merely a medium of communication for the indigenous people of Canada; it inscribes within it the culture and the worldview of the community. Loss of the native languages, as a part of the cultural genocide initiated and perpetuated by the Residential School System and the subsequent imposition of the coloniser's language upon the colonised, poses problems that these writers need to negotiate with through their creative endeavours. In the Introduction to their interview with Maracle, "From Discomfort to Enlightenment," Margery Fee and Sneja Gunew discuss how she "reworks language from a non-Western perspective to suit the Salish sensibility" (207) Elders, still firmly invested within the traditional ways of the community, often tend to switch to their native language during ceremonial speeches or while telling stories. Each word of the Salish language is loaded with nuances of Salish traditional knowledge that can never be accurately communicated through the colonisers' language. An ideal example would be Ella's words, as spoken in Nora's funeral speech in *Ravensong*. "For us, the word rain images woman-earth, the tears of birth and endless care-giving. In English, rain is just water collected on dust balls too heavy to remain floating in the atmosphere." (21) The starker, the untranslatability of the culture-specific ideological connotations emerges to be, greater is the necessity to articulate it in an essentially quirky yet definitively subversive manner. Maracle is known to distort English and deliberately deconstruct its grammatical and syntactic structure as a way to deal with this issue, as enunciated in her poem "Performing" (1998):

Remember Ta'ah

I speak brocken

Ink-lish tooh?

Now

I am

Speechless (Maracle *Native Poetry*, 184)

The power politics undermining the language of the colonised is thus overhauled through different narrative strategies of the indigenous writers. The Okanagan language makes no distinction between different genders, thereby highlighting a philosophy of equality that is difficult to express in the coloniser's language. The latter is, after all, a product of the Western worldview – one that is marked by a deep-rooted gender hierarchy within the folds of its social and intellectual assumptions. Penny feels very strongly that the nuances of a way of life embedded within a language where the same word is used for both 'Sky' and 'breath' cannot be communicated through English. Her death due to cancer caused by over-exposure to pesticides, therefore, is almost emblematic of the effect of the destruction of nature and ecology on the deeply sensitive Canadian Indigenous Self. As an attempt to combat this situation, Armstrong has introduced a course on 'Applied Ecology and Conservation' at the En'owkin Centre. A certificate course on 'Aboriginal Language Revitalization' also helps indigenous students to deal with the social, psychological and intellectual effects of the 'language shift' and the 'language loss' and helps them move beyond a state of linguistic non-belongingness by re-establishing their connection with their native languages.

An endeavour to read, fathom and grasp the intricacies of the historical consciousness of the indigenous communities of Canada through the lens of Memory Studies, therefore, invites and facilitates a much-needed interrogation of the problematic politicised oral/written binary of the colonisers' worldview. The act of taking cognition of the 'truth claim' of the oral stories, preserved in the collective memory of the communities and accepting them as the authentic repository of their past that encapsulates their traditional knowledge, ethics, moralities, and practical life lessons brings to light a struggle for autonomy denied to the original inhabitants of the settle-colony for eons. Tracing the contours of the 'collective mentality' of an oral community by delving deep into their communal memory thus emerges to be instrumental in unpacking the subversive potential of contemporary Native-Canadian literature. The oral, performative and semiotic ruptures in the works of indigenous creative artists, who have been forced to adopt a medium of expression and a language of articulation alien to their own, spell reclamation and re-empowerment for a population repressed and deprived of their basic rights, in their own homeland. It would, one hopes, facilitate the rightful journey of their people into social, cultural, political, and linguistic self-determination, in the years to come.

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Urmi Sengupta
Assistant Professor of English
The ICFAI University, Tripura
urmibolchi89@gmail.com
@Urmi Sengupta 2023