

# CANADIAN INDIGENEITY IN LEE MARACLE'S *I AM WOMAN*

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of the research is to discuss the unheard voices of Canadian Indigenous. Native women are not considered as women in the patriarchy, racist and white society. They lose their identity and humanity through the objection of the colour and voices of the people. There is a cultural bias between Native people and white people. Lee Maracle, Indigenous writer depicts the life of their people in her autobiographical book, *I am Woman*. She focuses the Canadian aboriginal reality. She says about the destination of Native people. However she is the First Nation, she faces the problems through white people. She is one among when all Natives are attacked by white people. She talks about her pain and sufferings. She cannot sit in the same position under the white domination. She conveys the agony and disaster of CanAmerica in her writings. She shows her inner feel and voiceless of women in the nation. She portrays her thirsty towards homeland. She wants to get it back from the robber. Thus, she expresses the situation of the Native and how they are constructed with a politics of decolonization and marginality.

**Key Words:** Unheard voices, Canadian Indigenous, Lee Maracle, I am Woman, Native people.

Lee Maracle's *I am Woman* is about her own personal and social experiences and it is an autobiographical writing. She might have a nice experience from her people. She wrote on the scraps of paper to know the unheard voices and the value of it. She questions how one can squeeze the small one. She wants to bring the equality and importance for the native people. She presents native people's suffering in their homeland and how they are suppressed by other. She uses a common thread of her writing. She talks about racism and its affect in her life. She says about her inner feel, "...for us racism is not an ideology in the abstract, but a very real and practical part of our lives" (IAW 4). She picturizes her pain and shame which are tangible and murderous. However, there is suppression, people mumble uncomfortably.

Maracle wants to become a writer, not for the fame. She does not like to remain invisible and wants to be visible. She should get up from her dark; otherwise she would be destroyed through the colonizer's brutality. She brings the feminist movement against the colonizers. She works to get their

native power in their homeland. She points out “Racism is recent; patriarchy is old” (IAW 20). Racism and patriarchy, the two victims make the women to suffer in society. Maracle also says about sexual domination in the patriarchal world.

She expresses her own personal experiences of life and how she is against white oppression. She comments her position as Native woman within an active struggle of decolonization. Canadian Native women are ignored by white Canadians. They are silenced and not spoken words against them. She struggled for Native equality in Canada and there was an outcome of intellectual supporters of the liberation movements. She analyzes the situation of the Native and how they are constructed with a politics of decolonization and marginality. She dedicates her life for Canadians and humanity. She encourages Indigenous people to fight against racism and sexism. She expresses:

“We, I, we, will take on the struggle for self-determination and in so doing, will lay the foundation, the brick that you can build on in undoing the mess we are all in. But so long as your home needs cleaning, don’t come to mine, broom in hand. Don’t wait for me to jump up, put my back to the plough, whenever racism shows itself. You need to get out there and object, all by yourself” (*Bobbi Lee* 241).

Once Maracle was admitted in a hospital and she was in dying condition. In that situation, she thought about her community and to do something for them. She wants to arrange the settlement to her children. She lives again for her wishes and her longingness. She narrates women’s condition and their fulfillment through her life’s portrayal. She says that women are slaves in the male dominated world. Women used to talk about the liberation of women. She expects the unity among the women. However, patriarchy and racism behind their back, they should think that they are women and powerful. She suggests that women should know their compassion and tenderness. Women show their love to their husband but men control their apprehensiveness. It happens in all the places how they are dominated by men.

Maracle talks about democracy. In a democratic country, no leader commands anybody; people have rights to voice for their needs. In her native land, she does not have own freedom. They lost their individuality and they need equal power in their homeland. She expresses her suffering in the nation of her homeland. However she is the First Nation, she faces the problems through white people. She

describes the native feminism through their women. She shows her inner feel and voiceless of women in the nation.

Native women have grown up in the world as dark-skinned femininity. Native men do not respect and cherish the femininity. The writer portrays how the colour complex is seemed in Native people. A woman has to love herself to live in the patriarchal world. She is humiliated, not only by other men, by her father and brother also. She says about women's situations in society, "We are like a bunch of soft knots in dead trees, chopped down by white men, the refuse left for our own men-folk" (IAW 56).

Maracle depicts the gender bias, not only racism and colonization in Canada. She asks other women to give hands against oppression. Native women are not considered as women in the patriarchy, racist and white society. They lose their identity in their society and Native men never think about them when they are dominated by white people. She mentions their situation of Indigenous Canadian society. She picturizes:

The denial of Native womanhood is the reduction of the whole people to a sub-human level. Animals beget animals. The dictates of patriarchy demand that beneath the Native male comes the Native female. The dictates of racism are that Native men are beneath white women and Native females are not fit to be referred to as women. (IAW 17-18)

She elucidates how Native women are insulted in public places. White women see the Native women as stealing something in supermarket. Native gets a feel of being ashamed. The cashier asks her sometimes about enough money to pay for the groceries. She feels inside as a great insult. This is the way Natives are humiliated by white. The total perception about Natives should be changed. One can see how the Natives face the insult and humiliation in their homeland. She illustrates the pride of native in the face of white. She addresses direct and takes precaution to avoid main stream. She demands the compromise with white people. When white people do not have to give up, that is called injustice. She says to show the pride in white. There are useless and harmful, she asks Native to clean it through revolution and bring peace to them. It is a time to face their pain. They cannot be patient with white folk. They should understand the spirit. She deconstructs:

We have little pride in the face of white men, and no end to arrogance at home. It is time we turned that around. Let us show pride in front of white folk and be humble at home. If

your home is filled with useless and harmful violence, then revolution will bring peace and tranquility. Revolution is not always violent, but it is always the opposite of what has been.

(IAW 129)

She had humiliated in her childhood by her teachers. She was accused and assessed by the colour rather than the character. She describes the colour bias and colonization of her childhood. She portrays herself to strive to overcome the obstacles and represents the cultural gap. There is a cultural bias between Native people and white people. She experiences that the North America's white women are racist. White women consider Native women as minorities. Native women struggle for emancipation in the world. Racism erases the womanhood sometimes. The world fights for survival and it is not only women's issues. Racism arises with men folk and patriarchy.

Native people in Canada start to take their broken thread of their lives. However, they lost their identity through white people; they want to get back in the social set up. The social condition of women is in the domination of men. The women spend their lives as their wish. They come out from social norms which were created by authoritative men. Native people are considered as an alienated people in their homeland. The treatment of the society makes them to be suppressed. Native Canadians rebuild their nation ten times better than they were. The courageous women protest for their needs and rights. The women healers persecute everything for their objections.

There is a solidarity movement for living in Canada. Canadians remain passive because they want effect of change in society. They fight with colonization and structures. They find injustice in their country and it is crime against their own people. Native Canadians protest in various forms of movements. Their intention is to get the justice and rights. There are movements in Canada towards their emancipation. Native participation is there due to oppressed people. They are promoted by the self-interest. Maracle asks questions and answering as being a Native. She quotes:

Canadians have not sat down with themselves and asked, "What do I want to do here? Am I in solidarity with this or that because I actually want to effect change in the world? Am I doing this because I disdain injustice in a country committing crimes against its own people? What relationship does solidarity activism have to me? Why am I doing this?"

(IAW 125)

Maracle supports the native women. She gives her voice to native women. She has depicted the conditions of the native women in their own land. She discusses the personal perspective and womanhood. Native women are struggle by patriarchy, racism and sexism. She says about multiple marginalization and she constructs the individual and collective identity. She clearly emphasizes her expectations, “We are interested in clearly stating what we see and looking for the key to the unknown in the voices and words of others. We are listening—our imaginations fully engaged—to what is said, what is not said, and what is connected to what is not said” (Oratory 58).

In *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, Alison Jaggar states that subordinated women are unrepresented in feminist theory. Maracle claims feminist identity and their involvement of participation in the women’s movement to empower them. Native women struggle against sexism and emancipation. They fight back against their colonization. They seek empowerment in their native. She opposes using of other culture in their homeland. Her work asserts violence, empowerment and racism. She portrays the unheard voices of the Canadian Indigenous through her autobiographical writing.

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