

We are Metis: Healing from Violence in Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*

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Abstract:

The freedom of soul becomes a challenge to the oppressed people, which can raise them even from death. The spirit of Canadian Métis people is unfettered by the limitations of society and racism. Exploring the history of Canada throws light on how the British North American colonies of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Canada joined together to develop the Dominion of Canada in 1867. Métis is a virtual specific cultural community that traces its descent to the settlers in Europe. These people are identified as one of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada among the First Nations and the Inuit peoples. The Métis are called half-breed because of the mixed Indian and European blood in the recent centuries. Maria Campbell shares her happy childhood days in the novel *Halfbreed* where she has spent time with her parents and siblings. She follows her tradition and is joyful with her family members. She faces flaws only after the death of her mother. The full burden of the family falls on her shoulder. Throughout the book, Campbell submits to her grandma Cheechum's advice which replicates staunch towards her heritage. This article is an attempt to study the customs and values of Metis culture and the concept of emerging with a new identity in the development of the society against the consistent discrimination and oppression.

Keywords: Culture, dominant, perspective, emerging, opperession

“My people will sleep for one hundred years, but when they awake, it will be the artists who give them their spirit back” (Wyman 85) is a proverb of Louis Riel. Métis people have started

emerging from the state of residual in the recent years as things started changing. The actual society of the Métis and their real situations in the past are explicated in her book. It is also aimed to represent the “human experience, aspiration, and achievement which the dominant culture neglects to undervalue, oppose, repress, or even cannot recognize” (Williams 124). In *Death Styles among Canada’s Indians*, K. George Jarvis and Menno Boldt discuss that,

Though is premature to put forth a comprehensive plan of social intervention one thing is exact. Unless there is a genuine transformation of social, political and economic institutions and attitudes of white society, toward including Native Indians fully, equally, democratically, and fraternally, we cannot expect a meaningful reduction in this needless waste of valuable life. (22)

It is difficult to differentiate between the two phases of dominant and the oppositional stance in a society. The residual life is always uncomplicated to understand and the community that emerges from the state of residue faces many complications and stumbles back to society. Each stage is considered as a hornet’s nest in their life from childhood to adulthood. The emerging people are the evidence of the culture that once prevailed over the dominant culture. As Williams suggests, “The case of the emergent is radically different. It is true that in the structure of any actual society, and especially in its class structure, there is always a social basis for elements of the cultural process that are alternative or oppositional to the dominant elements” (124).

Métis people face the world with lots of issues and try to come out of it with optimism. Culture protects the people and it teaches them to survive in a better manner. It analyses the way a particular community emerges to diminish the stereotype which prevailed strongly against in the society. Some specific stereotypes include loss of land, sense of homelessness, insecurity, depression, suicidal instinct, and inner conflict between themselves and society. These dilemmas and drawbacks are slowing down because the government of Canada gives them hands to come up

through many organisations. Children of Métis who suffer from those haunted histories are helped to move forward. Every work of Métis writer showcases the devastating and dreadful flashbacks and narratives of their ancestors and their lives both in an explicit and implicit manner.

The people come out of the shell to show that they are equal to everyone and compete with excitement, fear, depression, suppression, and many complications. In an interview, a Métis writer, Beatrice Culleton has said that the suicide of her sister urged her to write fiction. She does not want to show her autobiographical incidents and let others intrude in her life, rather she shares something of what affected their lives and why they have so many problems both then and now. Moreover, she tries to find the source of her parent's alcoholism and how every Métis child is affected in the foster home without the care of their parents. And the impact of such a brought-up style is found to lead them to commit suicide at an early age.

It is time to defy all the misconceptions and fallacies and frame-up new pillars for the succeeding generations. To make their dreams come true, the Métis start working, protesting, and fighting together with a hope for future prosperity to make their dreams come true. This pivots on bullying in the perception of whites that is prevalent predominantly in the foster homes, overcoming the discrepancies in schools, getting married and living up to the standards of right and moral behaviour, and tackling the traumas of their past which affect them psychologically.

As M. Haralambos observes,

Two factors have been primarily responsible for the development of the sociology of women. First, the definition of women's position in society as a social problem. Second, the reassessment of women as people who are just as important as men. In many areas of sociology, a subject and its treatment is influenced more by what happens in society than by developments within the discipline itself. (404)

Campbell designates the term 'halfbreed' throughout the novel by choosing the word Métis,

which is historically a derogatory term. The entire group of indigenous people is now called Métis. The term exemplifies the suffering, bullying, depression, distress, and hardship. Great Grandma Campbell deeply rooted the forefathers' ideas to the younger generations thinking that it would be worthwhile when they need it.

She often told stories of the Rebellion and the Halfbreed people. She said our people never wanted anything except to be left alone to live as we pleased. Cheechum never accepted defeat at Batoche, and she would always say, "Because they killed Riel they think they have killed us too, but someday, my girl, it will be different". (HB 15)

Campbell has been brought up with the same innate thoughts regarding the settlers who own their land. She has heard news about poverty, loss of land, the death of trapping, and the government's attitude towards them from meetings attended along with her family members. Only the strong united voice promised to bring justice and peace. Cheechum often counsels Campbell by saying:

Wait, my girl. It will come. I have waited for ninety years and listened to many men. I have seen men quit and have felt as you do, but we have to keep waiting, and as each man stands unafraid, we have to believe he is the one and encourage him. You'll feel discouraged like this many times in your life but, like me, you will wait. (HB 68)

They have an optimistic view among the community and spread the same towards their next generations. They fight to win their battle to keep their cultural values and ideals alive so that the younger generation will be benefited in the future. Campbell expresses her view that she has learned through her experiences as,

I am not bitter. I have passed that stage. I only want to say: this is what it was like;

this is what it is still like. I know that poverty is not ours alone. Your people have it too, but in those earlier days you at least had dreams, you had a tomorrow. My parents and I never shared any aspirations for the future. I never saw my father talk back to a white man unless he was drunk. I never saw him or any of our men walk with their heads held high before white people. (HB 13-14)

They are heading towards a whole new world of happiness without having their heads hung down and nailing the history of belonging to their nation in the minds of new generations. They limit their self-representation, self-respect, and dignity in front of the public because they are a halfbreed. Sailing through the difficult times in the foster homes at each stage, the children of Métis face only hardship. They wait for a hassle-free life that awaits them after graduation. From encountering many circumstances since childhood, Campbell enunciates multiple factors and phases that she faces and moves towards the understandable view of the real world.

In her novel *Halfbreed*, she mentions that she has married Darrell at a very young age to take care of her brothers and sisters, being the oldest among eight children. Nevertheless, this has devastated her life and she realizes the mistake she has made when she quits her studies at the age of twelve. Shashi Deshpande says, “Don’t struggle, don’t swim against the tide. Go along with it; and if you drown nevertheless, well that’s an easier death after all” (137). Campbell’s brothers and sisters are kept in permanent foster homes as per the court’s verdict, and she is not allowed to know the details about their residence. Darrell informs about the children to the Welfare Department team. She cannot tolerate that her husband cheats her when her siblings are taken away from her, and she cries,

We were all home, and the children were eating lunch when a station wagon pulled up. I looked out the window, and I knew that this was it. It was all over. The kids started to cry and hang on to me, but they have pulled away and were in the wagon

within a few minutes. I could not move. I felt like a block of stone. The wagon drove away with six little faces pressed to the windows, crying for me to help them. I walked around in a daze. Everything went to pieces inside. Dad found me lying on the bed while my baby screamed with hunger. (SAR 107)

She is very conscious about life in foster homes and it hurts her the most. Her siblings would be unhappy due to the awaiting sufferings and struggles are the only thought that troubles her. And when such an unendurable situation arises, she could not protect them, and everything goes out of hand. She plans to keep the family together, but this dream vanishes because of Darrell's abusiveness and transgression. Simone de Beauvoir of the same thus,

Now, woman has always been man's dependent, if not his slave; the two sexes have never shared the world in equality. And even today woman is heavily handicapped, though her situation is beginning to change. Almost nowhere is her legal status the same as man's and frequently it is much to her disadvantage. Even when her rights are legally recognized in the abstract, long-standing custom prevents their full expression in the mores. When man makes of woman the Other, he may, then expect her to manifest deep – seated tendencies toward complicity. Thus woman may fail to lay claim to the status of subject because she lacks definite resources, because she feels the necessary bond that ties her to man regardless of reciprocity, and because she is often very well pleased with her role as the Other. (48)

Hence, the Métis people realize their empowerment. Though they find it hard enough to find themselves, the urge to go behind identity has emerged. The emergency on their emergence has been increased among the society. The concept of sustainability arises when one goes through many experiences. The initial negative questions of dilemma change into a positive context of defining one's responsibilities and futuristic aspirations. This newly-discovered positive identity brings a

sense of social responsibility. Therefore, the social conditions of remembering the past in the future with new beginning have inspired many.

The author has shown the clash between cultural stereotypes and the realities of Métis life in the contemporary Canada. The Métis have promised that the experiences seen in their life gives them unconditional self-love with positive affirmations of their ancestry in the end. They find a new pride saying “MY PEOPLE, OUR PEOPLE”. This concept of emerging with a new identity begins with a dynamic development in the society against the consistent discrimination and oppression. The growth in their perception of who they have always been has changed in discovering their ethnic community. As the perception of Campbell is being shaped and changed, so are the upcoming generations.

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