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Research Department of English
The American College
Madurai, Tamil Nadu, India

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IMMENSE AND DIVERSE NATIVE AMERICAN FICTION

A. J. Aruna

Abstract

This paper focuses on the immense and diverse Native American novels. It throws light on the ignored 'diverse body of the written texts.' It brings out the salient features of the Native American novels and traces its growth. It also supplements the predominant themes of the popular writers and a brief summary of their notable works. It attempts to facilitate the scholars to explore and enjoy Native American fiction.

Keywords: communal life, interconnectedness, tribal culture

Introduction

The history of America primarily records on the progression of the newly discovered continent and authentically hallmarks the view points of various revolutionists. The focus on the indigenous people of the landscape and their concerns are misrepresented or sometimes ignored by the historians in their approach until 1970s. Native American writers found it difficult to receive recognition for their writing. Their literature became invisible in the pompous lime light of the Euro-American writers. The natives used literature as a medium to define themselves and to exhibit the real portraits of the people and their culture. The key terms in their literature are included in Encyclopedia. Tremendous production of Native American works inspired the scholars, critics and publishers to explore its works. They compiled many anthologies and published many reference books and hand books. These books in print forum paved the way for its entry into classroom for discussion. At present, Native American Literature is considered as a recognized body of literature which is superfluous in the libraries, classrooms as text books and in the internet for browsing.

Discussion

The oral tradition of the indigenous people ripens into work of art in course of time and they produce tremendous output for more than two hundred years. After many controversies, the literature of the natives occupies a unique place among the world literature and is accredited with its label "Native American Literature." Kenneth M. Roemer, in his introduction to the book *Native American Literature* uses 'immensity' and 'diversity' to define this type of literature. It reflects the diversity of the tribal culture and immensely portrays the communal life of the natives which history fails to record. Though the native writers have been producing their literary manuscripts for so many years, the world turns to look at their writing in 1969. The

year was significant for, the publication of the most renowned and pioneer Native American writer N. Scott Momaday's novel *House Made of Dawn* won the Pulitzer Prize. It became the hallmark for the venture of Native American writings into main-stream literature. Many indigenous writers are inspired by its recognition and this novel is the driving force behind their writing. It marks the outbreak of "Native American Renaissance" in the literary field which prepares the foreground for many publications of the natives. To paraphrase, James Ruppert's words in "Fiction: 1968 to the present", Momaday's novel initiated the interest of the public to read and the natives to contribute.

Salient Features of the Novel

Connie A. Jacobs listed five major characteristic features of the Native American novels in his book *The Novels of Louise Erdrich: Stories of her People*. The first distinctive feature is the oral tradition which forms the base for their fiction. Their fictions constitute the transformed versions of the traditional way of storytelling. The role of the native writers is to record their communal life for instructing the present and future generations. Non-linear narrative structure is the second remarkable feature. Stories and incidents are told and retold by multiple narrators. Interconnectedness is the next striking feature. Their stories attempt to interlock the stories of the past which connects the present and foretells the future. Prevalence of trickster occupies a prominent role and he/she is significant for mythic past and oral tradition in Native American fiction. The last crucial distinction of the Native American fiction is the inevitable necessity it serves to the indigenous and the non-indigenous people. The prime motive of the native writers is to represent their people and to define them.