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SPIRITUAL AWAKENING: A BINDING FACTOR FOR SURVIVAL IN LOUISE ERDRICH'S *THE BINGO PALACE*

Mrs. A.J. Aruna

Assistant Professor,

Research Center of English, Fatima College, Madurai

Abstract

*Native Americans are misrepresented in the conventional histories. The history of America records much on the progression of the newly discovered continent. The focus upon Native Americans and their concerns are restricted by the historians in their approach. Native American writers handle literature to demonstrate their life. Hence their works are not fictional but they are real stories of their past. Louise Erdrich is a prominent Native American writer. She fabricates the Native American tradition in her works. Her novels relate a long story of her people from the late nineteenth century to contemporary times. She integrates her experience into well crafted stories through which the readers explore human experience. The paper focuses on the spiritual awakening of Lipsha in Louise Erdrich's *The Bingo Palace* (1994). The crux of the novel is the transformation of Lipsha from a mean worker to a shaman. His story is juxtaposed to the story of the Lyman who schemes to build a bingo palace on sacred Pillager land. Erdrich uses Lipsha as a communicator and indicates the evil effects of bingo in the reservation. She also stresses the significance of the survival in the chaotic world. His spiritual awakening drastically binds him to connect his communal responsibility as a Pillager.*

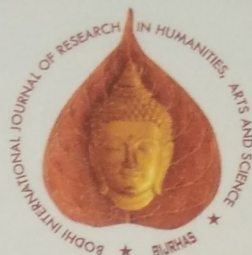
Native Americans are misrepresented in the conventional histories. The history of America records much on the progression of the newly discovered continent. The focus upon Native Americans and their concerns are restricted by the historians in their approach. Native American writers handle literature to demonstrate their life. Hence their works are not fictional but they are real stories of their past. They define themselves in their works. Joy Porter in his essay "Historical and Cultural contexts to Native American Literature" states that the great transformative power of Indian literature derives in part from its ability to invoke a past with direct implications for the present. In spite of a brutal colonial past, the Native Americans survive in many Indian urban and reservation as community and individual. Their communal responsibility is to retain their cultural values and pass on the legacy to the next generation.

Louise Erdrich is a prominent Native American writer. She fabricates the Native American tradition in her works. She is an enrolled member of the 'Turtle mountain band of Chippewa'. She captures the story of her own community in all her endeavors. Her portrayal of the tribes has overwhelming odds which endures the twenty first century readers. Her novels relate a long story of her people from the late nineteenth century to contemporary times. She integrates her experience into well crafted stories through which the readers explore human experience.

The paper focuses on the spiritual awakening of Lipsha in Louise Erdrich's *The Bingo Palace* (1994). It is the story of his transformation from a comic fool to heir to the powerful Pillager medicine. The Pillagers are dynamic and they possess mystic qualities. His story is juxtaposed to the story of the Lyman who schemes to build a bingo palace on sacred Pillager land. The novel sets in the reservation and the action of the novel takes



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Academic Excellence in research is continued promoting in research support for young Scholars. Humanities, Arts and Science of research is motivating all aspects of encounters across disciplines and research fields in an multidisciplinary views, by assembling research groups and consequently projects, supporting publications with this inclination and organizing programmes. Internationalization of research work is the unit seeks to develop its scholarly profile in research through quality of publications. And visibility of research is creating sustainable platforms for research and publication, such as series of Books; motivating dissemination of research results for people and society

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vision provokes a better feeling towards his mother. As an illicit child, he is deserted by his parents. His mother disowns him since she is disowned by her parents.

Erdrich propagates a strong message to her own people through Lipsha's spiritual awakening. She orients her present generation to realize their significance for survival through Lipsha. His survival is significant because he is the one who keeps the Pillager legacy alive. But he is unaware of it. He considers himself lucky and he uses his charm in casino and to heal others. He tries to generate money out of his mystic power. He fails to realize that his 'easy money, easy flow' will not withstand. The vision of the skunk for the second is a noteworthy scene in the novel. The skunk teases and irritates him. Lipsha is disappointed and he requests the skunk to tell something unknown to him. He gets the vision of the new casino in the Pillager land. Erdrich vividly describes what will happen if they demolish the primitive land. The skunk warns Lipsha that "Luck don't stick when you sell it". (220). Lipsha's inner conscience agrees with its words. His conceived responsible thoughts follow:

You have to stay alive to keep your tradition alive and working

... Our reservation is not real estate, luck fades when sold.

Attraction has no staying power, no weight, no heart. (221)

Erdrich portrays the miserable condition of Lipsha in the chapter "I'm a mad dog biting myself for sympathy". The title is very explanatory and it shows the plight of the Chippewa in the modern world. The chapter gains significant in two ways. Firstly, Lipsha links his spiritual awakening with his purpose in earthly life. Secondly, he realizes that how he is responsible for instructing the present and the future generation about survival. Lipsha helps his father, Gerry to escape. He steals a car from a Chippewa and takes his father. During the middle of their journey they hear the cry of a baby. Their

journey is obstructed soon afterwards by June. She appears as a spirit and takes Gerry. He goes with her willingly since as a trickster 'his own want is too deep to resist'. Lipsha waits for a moment with lots of hope. But his parents leave him since his father is a communal hero whose responsibility is to protect the community. Lipsha is left alone but the baby in his hands indicates the purpose of survival. He is held up in the snow storm. It implies his life which is in the middle of nothing. His thoughts run to predict that how the non-natives publish in the news paper and advice about how to stay alive when the snow storm hits. The educated non-natives' advice springs from their scientific and technical knowledge whereas Lipsha's knowledge about snow storm and how to undergo it, is the experience he felt when he was a boy. To put it in Lipsha's words:

My father and my mother ... have already taught me about the cold so I don't have to be afraid of it. (258)

In the connotative sense, his parents taught him how to survive in the stormy world. He finds emptiness around him. Then he realizes that "There's just emptiness ...until you harm yourself, until you are a mad dog biting yourself for sympathy." (259) He decides not to long for sympathy or not to long for aids which won't come in the form of a person or love or any financial aid. But he feels the presence of his parents within him. Erdrich paradoxically describes their presence as 'dark and shining'. In his bewilderment, he realizes his role in the community whereas the baby is incapable to relate its role in the community and to safe guard from cold. So Lipsha's task is to prevent from not being "a waste or a reservation load" like him.

Erdrich implies to her target readers that if the natives do not prosper and prove themselves, they are branded as a useless load in the reservation. Lipsha's life becomes meaningful with the strange baby and his unknown paths are open. His story in the novel closes with the following words: Snow

closes over our tracks, and then keeps moving like the tide There is no trace where we were...We are the trackless beat, invisible light, the thought without a word to speak. Poured water, struck match. Before the nothing, we are the moment. (259)

Louise Erdrich's *The Bingo Palace* sketches how Lipsha acquires his fading talents through spiritual awakening. She uses Lipsha as a communicator and indicates the evil effects of bingo in the reservation. She also stresses the significance of the survival in the chaotic world. His spiritual awakening drastically binds him to connect his communal responsibility as a Pillager.

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Lipsha's indefinite life gets importance when he wins Bingo van and his passion for Shawnee aggravates him to win her heart. Though Lipsha inherits the healing power, he is incapable of using in the beginning. He has a chance to cure Russell Kashpaw, a war hero in the reservation. He is introduced to Lipsha by Lulu. He recovers from multiple strokes and wounds. Lipsha tries his hands on him by rubbing and pressing to produce the proper touch. But he hurts him worse. He is very much eager about the money which is going to receive. But he fails to realize that once he charges money for his magic medicinal charm it will be of no use.

Lipsha has richness in his dreams and thoughts which urge him to come up in life. His dilemma is to establish as a medicine boy or to bloom in the bingo. But he is troubled with distracting force. Money and mad love are the distracting forces which hinder to acquire shamanistic power. In the beginning, Lipsha's prime intention is to impress Shawnee. He wants to grasp spirit power to win love. He stupidly attaches spirit power with passionate love. He fails to recognize the paramount significance of the spiritual power which leads to identify the purpose behind the survival. The driving force behind him is to earn money and to assert him in the reservation.

Erdrich's depiction of Lipsha shows that how the younger generation is deviated by lots of distracting force. In order to win the hands of Shawnee, he visits Fleur's house which is in the far end of Matchimanito Lake, a mysterious place. She cures Lipsha's love sickness. Since he belongs to Pillager background, he is bold enough to ask love medicine from fleur. But she doesn't reply, instead she receives Lipsha with tea and soup. She mixed sleeping powder in the tea and some herbs in the bean soup. It is very strong and it numbs Lipsha's legs, arms and face. Fleur's treatment of Lipsha creates a great impact in his life.

Connie A. Jacobs in his article "A history of the Turtle Mountain band of Chippewa Indians" discusses the salient features of the Chippewa Indians. They are called Turtle Mountain band of Chippewa because they live in the Turtle mountain of North Dakota. He puts forth the spiritual experience of the male Chippewa. One of the most significant experiences in their life is fasting for a dream or vision at the time of puberty in order to evoke a spirit that would appear as an animal. The spirit acts as a guardian and helps a person during his difficult days to understand his life's significance. This spirit is the source of power throughout his life.

Erdrich applies the vision quest in *The Bingo Palace*. Lipsha experiences a vision in the woods behind Xavier's house. He chooses a personal spot to gather power. He is dejected because he is unable to interpret the meaning from nature. Later so many days of hunger and starvation he finds himself slept and suddenly he feels that something is warming up. He feels the presence of skunk at his hips. It is the spirit skunk possibly Fleur. It appears to him and admonishes him not to allow Lyman to acquire the sacred Pillager land to build a Bingo palace in the reservation. Lipsha is panic at the thought and he is inhabited by a thing so powerful which he does not recognize as a smell. It leaves a strong indication to Lipsha that "This ain't real estate" (200). Its words have deep implication in the novel.

The next notable mystic vision in the novel is how Lipsha is saved by the spirit soon after his birth. He wakes up at the mid night during his deep sleep. Something strange happens to him and tries to resist him. His thoughts connect one another and it reaches the time when he was a baby. He expresses that I feel the hand from which I've fallen. I feel the cool shock... I rest on the mud bottom with the stones in the sack. (217)

He hears his mother's voice and feels her touch. He is saved by the spirit of the water world which rocked and cradled him. His