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Explicating Sherman Alexie Poem *The Business of Fancydancing* and Collocating with Indigenous Literary Studies

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Abstract

*The purpose of the paper is to examine the intrinsic ideas that were used in the poem *The Business of Fancy Dancing* by Sherman Alexie and juxtaposing them with Indigenous literary studies. Sherman Alexie, a Native American writer, has written various works that enlighten the readers upon the hardship and psychological expedition the individuals undergo on various occasions and settings. Through his writings, readers get to understand the etymology of tribes and the socio-economic system that had prevailed. Sherman Alexie's writing emphasizes the historic background, which includes stories or narratives that are passed down from generation after generation; in precise oral tradition, symbolism through objects, Cultural background, which includes customs & tradition, intervention & invasion. Indigenous people are natives who lay a founding stone to many agendas. Prominently in the field of art, literature & culture. In the initial days, there was no language. Through the medium of art, elaborate drawings on stones and walls gave a perception to the later generation. This form evolved into narratives.*

Keywords: Sherman Alexie, Oral Tradition, Symbolism, Spokane Tribe, Fancy Dance

Introduction

Sherman Alexie, a Native American writer from the Spokane or Coeur d'Alene tribe. He did his schooling at Off-reservation School and graduated from Washington State University in the year 1901 with a degree in American Studies. Sherman Alexie is known for his formal experimentation and versatility across genres and was influenced by the poet Adrian C. Louis' work "Reservation of the Mind" Who was of mixed indigenous and white descent.

Alexie gave voice to the voiceless through his narratives and portrayed the hardship of the natives. His writings gave a clear insight and deciphered the concealed ideas hidden through mythology. Oral tradition is predominant in any culture. From petroglyphs, hieroglyphics, etc., the ancestors perceived and narrated stories, which were passed down from generation to generation.

The Spokane or Coeur d'Alene tribe occupied northeastern Washington, which encompassed approximately 3 million acres. They were one of the interior Salish tribes, and their survival was through fishing, hunting, and gathering grounds into Montana and Idaho. The ancestors of Spokane were river people who lived a semi-nomadic life.

The conceptualization of money is depicted through The Native American Barter. Money is a source by which people used to buy goods and services.

In ancient times, the currency or bills were not in vogue. The Barter system was followed; the poet brings out the socio-economic structure that evolved. His writings showcase the constructive aspects as well as the hurdles and sacrifices of Spokane tribe.

The objective of the paper is to elaborate on the poem the Business of Fancy Dancing by Sherman Alexie. The poem stands as a way of expression and plays an important and integral part in depicting the Spokane tribe or Coeur d'Alene tribe. Scope of the paper is to reflect the ideas and dimensions the poem can be viewed in, which gives deep understanding of the Spokane or Coeur d'Alene tribe.

Critical Analysis of the Poem

The Poem the Business of Fancy Dancing by Sherman Alexie was published in 1992. The poem consists of seven stanzas, each stanza has a preeminent meaning through diminutive details. The poet Sherman Alexie is traveling either from Spokane Indian Reservation, Wellpinit, Washington, or Washington State University, Pullman, Washington, to Arlee, Montana, to watch fancy dance finals.

Arlee is a trading centre for residents of Jocko Valley and Flathead Indian Reservation. The main theme, Fancy Dance also known as Indian Dance was originally invented by Gus Mc Donald, a Ponca man from Oklahoma. The fancy dance has grown to become one of the most popular forms of Native American dance which is adorned in brightly coloured feathers and intricate bead works. It is performed by Native American tribes at powwows and as the dancer enters the arena, movement is timed perfectly to the rhythm of a single drum.

The poem can be interpreted equivocally. The myth of Native American alcoholism is significantly depicted. The poet, along with other pals, was exhausted from traveling as he was driving, so they wanted to have a drink. Alcohol was a frequently used drug among the Native Americans, i.e., the rate of alcohol consumption is less among Native Americans compared to Caucasians. The practice of intoxication for fun gradually undermined traditional Native American culture until the late 18th century.

A Major motif is money or currency; it can be a commodity accepted by general consent as a medium of economic exchange. Money can be interpreted as a person too. The poet speaks about the broken promises that were in negotiations with Native

nations; the American officials promised that Indian reservations would always belong to the tribes. The treaty payments and provisions would be delivered in full and on time. Dakota and Ojibwe people were promised everlasting possession of the reservation lands, but all these promises weren't fulfilled, and later angry tribes got into a battle in 1862.

In American Indian numerical there is much in common with that of other traditional societies. Numbers were not simply the expression of quantity but also of archetypes and symbols. It might be the age of a person, or it can be the money, i.e., dollar bill. In the second stanza of the poem, there is an emphasis on a person who is aging or malnourished. The words thin and wrinkled are highlighted; it can be elucidated in terms of a dollar bill as well as a person who is not well.

Another major concept emphasized was powwow, which is derived from Pau Wau, meaning "medicine man" in Narr tick. English settlers began to misunderstand or misinterpret the word by referring to meeting or ceremonial gatherings. In contemporary Powwows, is a time method to renew Native American culture and preserve the rich heritage of American Indians.

The name Vernon had multiple interpretations, which are explicated. Vernon is a place in Florida situated in Holmes Valley. The poet might refer to George Washington, who is also known as Mount Vernon. He was born into a world in which native people were still major players in America, despite having suffered through three centuries of European diseases, dispossession, and warfare. His first meeting with Native Americans had taken place while he was on a survey trip in the year 1748. George Washington, in his journal on March 23, at about 02:00 pm, mentioned, "We were agreeably surprised at the sight of thirty-odd Indians coming from war".

Another person is Vernon Bellecourt, a Native American rights activist and a leader in the American Indian movement. The people were without money; they didn't have any money, or they might have a shortage of money. Vernon is a person who might be helping to pay the dues/ bills of the poet or the pals.

Historically, Natives defined currencies through their food, relationships, nature, and tools to sustain a living. Over time, Natives and Indigenous populations gave way to the use of paper money.

These new social standards pushed them to adopt different ways to sustain their living, often outside their reservation and communities, which may be critical in building wealth.

Before the movement from their lands, Native or indigenous people enjoyed the land bounties for hunting, fishing, gathering, housing, clothing, tools, and other forms of natural currencies that contributed to their thriving lifestyles.

To conclude, the poet was watching Vernon's performance with other pals or friends, and when the girls rushed up towards Vernon, he didn't mind much. He is oriented towards dance. This is when the poet Sherman Alexie compares Vernon with Elvis. Elvis in this poem might be referred to as Elvis Presley, who is 1/3 Native American. His great-great-grandmother named Morning White Dove links Elvis to the Cherokee tribe.

Symbolism in the Poem

Feathers: Feathers are an eminent symbol of the culture and history of Native Americans. Native Americans honour the achievements of their community, family and friends by awarding an eagle feather. It symbolizes trust, honor, strength, wisdom, power, and freedom. They transfer feathers to tribal craftsmen to be fashioned into such objects; no money may be received for the feathers, but the craftsman will get compensated for the work that is done. Oral traditions were in vogue. Aboriginal people were neither wordless nor illiterate in the context of their linguistic and cultural roots.

Colours: There are various colours that are depicted, the colour white represents winter and the north; it can also represent peace and purity or mourning. It also indicates the four sacred mountains in specific; Eastern mountains are represented by white.

Dance: Hoop dance of Native Americans in white mountains Apache is considered to be a never-ending circle of life that has no end or beginning and reminds one that we as nations are all connected. The

hoop symbolizes different seasons, especially four seasons, four cardinal directions, and four sacred colours, namely black, white, red, and yellow.

Fancy Dance or The Oklahoma Feather Dance, originated as a fancy war dance by the Heth skaSociety in Oklahoma. As mentioned previously, the dance was invented by GusMc Donald. He was the first world champion fancy war dancer. Fancy dance style was classified into two types, namely the bask and the contest.

Conclusion

The poet illuminates the readers through the narrative technique used in the poem that highlights the Spokane tribe and the historic emphasis given through symbolisms. In the course of 100 years from the Revolutionary War to the aftermath of the Civil War, a treatise defined the relationship between the Native Americans and the United States for centuries. It was based on the fundamental idea that each tribe was an independent nation, and they had their own right to self-rule and self-determination. When the white settlers began to encroach on the Native American lands, there was a conflict resulting in multiple broken promises.

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