

A Tribulation of Indigenous People in George Ryga's "The Ecstasy of Rita Joe"

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Abstract

Canada has a diverse range of cultures, regions, races, and faiths today. It is a country formed on the many aspects and characteristics of its people, as well as the geographical surroundings. In terms of physical appearance, language, culture, and outlook, Canada is indisputably a racially and ethnoculturally varied community. It was once indigenous races who lived there. According to current archaeological findings, the Indigenous People initially came around 40,000 years in North America by traversing a land route that had created between Asia and the state of Alaska during the last Ice Age. The majority of Canada had been colonized by indigenous peoples. Hundreds of tribes had formed, and each has its own culture, traditions, mythology, and personality. The indigenous people cultivated, hunted, and raised crops. European traders, missionaries, troops, and colonists profoundly altered the aboriginal way of life. Canada's civilization began to face numerous challenges as its culture and language became more diversified. In this way, how George Ryga brings forth the numerous tribulations of indigenous people in "The Ecstasy of Rita Joe" is the main focus of this article.

Keywords: Sufferings, indigenous people, voiceless, hopeless

To firmly create the image of a Canadian heritage, Canada had to face numerous wars and hardships. Canadian writing, like all literature, is impacted by the social economic conditions prevailing in the country at the time. Because Canadian writers were significantly impacted by the distinct cultures of the pioneers, such as the French and British, they produced a wide range of works in various genres. The development of Canadian literature begins with the writings of Canada's indigenous peoples. Canada was formerly completely a place of indigenous, but it later became a cultural melting pot, making original inhabitants a marginalized group within their own continent. The First Peoples of Canada demonstrate that barely over 500 years ago, the one and only people living in Canada were the indigenous peoples of Canada.

"Indigenous" refers to the original settlers, or those who arrived originally. The terms "Native" and "Aboriginal" are also used interchangeably and have the same meaning. They are now referred to collectively as the Very first Nations or First Peoples of Canada. However, Canada is now seen as a multicultural country, as it is home to a diverse number of cultural communities. Indigenous Peoples and Northern Development of The Canadian constitution recognises three Aboriginal people groups: Indians (also known as First Nations), Métis, and Inuit. There are three separate peoples here, each with their own history, languages, cultural customs, and spiritual beliefs.

Despite his non-native status, George Ryga has successfully dramatised and portrayed the situation of Canada's indigenous peoples in a genuine tone through his plays. He worked closely with the Cree Indians on his father's land as a boy, therefore his representation is so authentic and true. When he was working with Cree Indians, he was subjected to a great deal of discrimination, and he is a member of Canada's minority group. George Ryga's outsider status made him aware of the issues and disadvantages that the native population faced as disenfranchised subalterns. To this context, Lutz words would fit in aptly, "Ryga's works show that it was and would be possible for non-native Canadians to seek to overcome racial stereotyping, to open their hearts to Aboriginals around them, and to address in their works systemic racism and the traumata of colonization. But in speaking 'for' the Natives, they were also speaking 'instead of'. They could help, however, in raising awareness and help prepare the reading public to open their eyes and hearts to read texts authored by First Nations, Métis and Inuit authors" (Lutz 49)

The Ecstasy of Rita Joe, by George Ryga, was first staged at the Vancouver Playhouse in 1967. He wrote this drama as part of Canada's centennial celebrations. George Ryga was motivated to compose the play after hearing of the death of an indigenous woman in an impoverished Vancouver neighbourhood. It depicts Aboriginal people's hardships in a society dominated by white men, as well as a variety of concerns affecting them, such as identity crisis, alienation, alcoholism, unemployment, racism, and domestic violence. It's evolved into a type of theatre that openly criticises the Whites' cultural dominance. He raises his voice against oppression and discrimination towards aboriginal Canadians, as he does in all of his plays. In this piece, he sheds further light on the suffering and agony that native peoples in Canada through at the hands of European immigrants. Rita Joe, a native Indian girl, was subjected to anguish and suffering at the hands of white men, which he masterminded. She has become a victim of racism and violence perpetrated by white people. He has never shied away from exposing the tragedies and heinous crimes perpetrated against the indigenous peoples.

The central story is around Rita Joe, an indigenous Indian girl who abandons her family on the reservation and travels to the city with her lover, where she is suspected of a series of petty crimes before being murdered in a brutal rape. The drama has characters who represent both native Indians and whites. The Indian community includes Jaimie Paul, Rita Joe's lover, her sister Eileen Joe, her father David Joe, and a few unnamed Indians. From the other hand, there's many figures from the White community such as a priest, a teacher, Mr. Homer, a social worker, a Magistrate, and a few nameless guys.

Rita Joe, the indigenous girl, is brought before a white magistrate for disorderly conduct and prostitution at the start of the play. The magistrate's initial statement, when he discovers Rita Joe in the court, indicates the white people's language dominance. He inquires about her ability to communicate in English with the officer. Rita is accused by the police officer of accepting \$5 from a man. When Rita Joe tries to explain the scheme that led to her detention, the white magistrate is unimpressed.

The colonial authority employed police officers and the court branch to arrest numerous harmless indigenous people. Rita Joe feels weary during the case's hearings and frequently goes into recollection state. She recalls her love connection with Jaimie Paul, a local community member. She explains that her first job was in a tyre store, and Jaimie Paul was likewise hopeful of finding a good position in the city. He also wants to work as a vocalist in a hotel, but he was turned down because of his ethnicity, despite the fact that he is an excellent voice.

Rita Joe gets charged with another offence, criminalizing homelessness, the following morning. Despite her repeated reminders to the judge that she was in prison the night before, he ignores her. Rita Joe then recounts Eileen Joe, her sister. The Judge warns her that she must provide witnesses to support her case. Rita has been physically and mentally harmed by the continual punishments and nightmare encounters. She has no idea how she got herself into this dangerous position. She recalls her sister Eileen Joe, who has relocated to the city in order to pursue her dream of becoming a designer. Despite the fact that she is an excellent designer, white people refuse to place fresh orders with her. As a result, she would perish. Here George Ryga intends to remind the readers how indigenous people have been persecuted against in the workplace.

The accusations against Rita Joe are stated out by the Judge. A police officer has apprehended her on allegations of prostitution. Rita opposes the allegation, claiming that she was wrongfully detained. She claims that two white police officers started to ridicule her on her way home, while a third officer shoved a five dollar bill into her pocket. Then she was abruptly arrested and taken into police custody. Two witnesses then emerged, falsely accusing Rita of being a prostitute. The courtroom crowd laughed at their vulgarity. The judge accused her of prostitution, stealing, and homelessness. Rita gets fed up with the procedures and requests that the magistrate order the investigation to be halted and she be imprisoned.

Rita is then informed that she has been arrested for theft by the Judge. He goes on to say that this is her sixth charge and that she must explain why. Rita expresses her hunger as well as her lack of financial resources. The crowd and government authorities were definitely drawn to notice by these statements because of the native people's poor living conditions. When a police officer informs the magistrate that Rita has positioned herself as a nuisance throughout the school day, Rita Joe recounts another event from her school days to demonstrate how her lifestyle has been structured with false allegations since she was a child.

Due to her inexperience of the legislation, Rita Joe was unable to explain herself against all the other charges, including intoxication, stealing, abuse, and prostitution, when the judge sought replies from her. She went on to say that because the government's policies were formed before she was born, she couldn't grasp them. Rita, according to the Magistrate, is an irreparable transmitter of sexual diseases who has to be separated from society. Rita collapses to the floor when the verdict is read. George Ryga has communicated concern or uncertainty about the future of the indigenous people in the city through the indigenous characters throughout the play. Every indigenous character in the story seems to have a dream, but they are unsure whether they will be able to realise it.

George Ryga skillfully depicted the voices of indigenous people's subordinates in his drama *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*. In every aspect of their lives, the indigenous people were marginalised and oppressed. Stereotyping, oppression, and discrimination at numerous levels meant that their opinions were not adequately reflected for a long time. When they tried to talk about their concerns, no one was willing to listen and help them. George Ryga has successfully utilised the genre's potential to convey the native people's suffering. George Ryga has provided a voice to the indigenous people in most of his plays as the spokesperson, allowing them to express their hardships in the setting of subalternity.

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