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## CHAPTER VI

## A COMPARISON OF THE ‘NATIVE’ WEST AND THE ‘DALIT’ EAST

A lot of frustration as well as a profound love for their people inspired Maria Campbell and Beatrice Culleton to write about Métis people in their moving books, **Halfbreed**, Maria Campbell's autobiography and **In Search of April Raintree**, Beatrice Culleton's autobiographical fiction. Both deal with the pain and sorrows of the Métis people and their life. They both show how the Métis are never recognized as human beings; how the Métis face social inequalities such as discrimination and prejudice through negative stereotypical images; how the historic economic deprivation of the Métis continues into the present; how the government intervention through social welfare systems has a destructive effect on individual Métis families and on entire Métis communities; and, above all, how welfare is really more of a hindrance than a help to Métis' determination.

Campbell and Culleton believe that the Métis' feeling of racial inferiority is a crucial reason for the problems they encounter everyday – everywhere. Inferiority complex is so deeply instilled in their psyche that they feel themselves to be second-class citizens. This psychological condition of low self-esteem and guilt feeling worsened the socio-economic situation of the Métis. Both writers realize that an awareness of who they are is greatly needed to revive their fortunes and to help them to survive as a distinct people in Canadian society.

Maria Campbell, born in 1940 in Northern Saskatchewan produced her book ***Halfbreed*** in 1973, the story of her life upto the time she became a writer. In Doris Hill's article, "You have to Own Yourself" Campbell states that she never, ever dreamed of becoming a writer. It was growing frustration and anger with her powerlessness that spurred her to write about herself. Culleton born in St. Boniface, Manitoba in St. Boniface, Manitoba in 1949, has had many of the same bitter experiences as her characters in her semi-autobiography, including placement in foster homes, her younger sister's suicide in 1964, her older sister Katherine's suicide in 1980, and the loss of contact with her father. Her anger and bewilderment motivated the writing of her book, resulting in a powerful insight into the urban life of the Métis and compelling reasons behind the many suicides of the young Métis people.

Both Métis women strongly inform their readers that the attitudes of white people towards the Métis have negative, profound and disastrous consequences. These effects are so enormous that they are beyond white people's understanding. The root cause of the Métis' plight is identified with mis-education, stereotypes, racist and discriminatory practices, divide and conquer tactics of the ruling class and Canada's child welfare systems.

Maria Campbell faces discrimination as a child when she goes to a mixed school where both the whites and Halfbreeds are registered together.

The whites sat down on one side of the room – while the Half - breeds sat on the other indicating the unequal treatment among them. The Half– Breeds had a lot of fights with white kids and they always played by themselves. Lunch times were rough, because until then the children had not realized the difference among themselves. The Half – Breeds took bannock spread with lard, filled with wild meat. If there was not meat, they had cold potatoes, salt and pepper or whole roasted gopher with sage dressing. But the whites had white / brown bread, boiled eggs, apples, cakes, cookies and jars of milk. The white children would tease and yell at them about their gophers. Maria used to feel terribly hurt and above, all ashamed. She felt bad being a half – breed and shouted ugly things to her mother and father calling them “all of you no good Half – breeds. (50)

Unlike Maria Campbell, Culleton deals extensively with education and its effects on the personal development of the Métis / Native child. In the classroom, the Métis or Native children are daily subjected to feelings of alienation and discriminatory practices through textbooks, teachers and their peers. These children easily get discouraged and uncomfortable because the school textbooks convey a negative, stereotyped image of Native people as hostile or cruel savages. The Europeans and their descendants are portrayed as civilized and the Indians, as savages.

Being identified a Métis child is indeed humiliating in such an environment!

The character of Cheryl represents Culleton's voice against biased descriptions of Native people's history when she protests against the idea that "..... the Indians scalped, tortured and missionaries" (Culleton 56). On the other hand, Cheryl sees that incidents involving Europeans killing groups of Indians are just called fights or battles. Many textbooks almost never mention "how the white people destroyed the Indian way of life" (Culleton 57).

Coupled with the problems created by textbooks, the teachers' lack of knowledge of Native people also poses a threat to the personal development of Métis or Native children. Teachers were always white who seldom had a good understanding of Native matters. Cheryl's teacher and her school principal turn a deaf ear to her assertion that "... Your textbooks are full of lies" (Culleton 57). It is Culleton's belief that "History should be an unbiased representation of the facts. And if they show one side, they ought to show the other side equally" (Culleton 84).

Maria's family circumstances, the death of her mother and their movement from place to place, fearing that the relief people would take away the children and her love for her seven siblings, all create obstacles to her education after Grade Eight. The relief people announce that the children would be put in three separate homes forcing Maria to find someone who could afford "to keep us all" (Campbell 52). At the age of

fifteen, she gets married to a white man Daniel hoping to keep the family together. Cheechum's words, "nothing good ever comes from a mixed marriage" becomes true not only to Maria but also to Culleton who marries Bob the businessman in order to get social recognition or status as upper class wife.

While Maria was disturbed by the foster home system, Culleton gets the positive side of foster home. In Culleton's work both April and Cheryl get the benefit of education though under foster home system. Both are able to meet each other. At one stage, April shudders to think that they would have ended up if they had remained with their alcoholic parents! When she goes in search of her parents Henry or Alice Raintree she is shocked, horrified at the kind of existence, the slums the Métis were living in: "If I hadn't been brought up in foster homes, I would most likely have been brought up in those slums" (Culleton 136) she says, giving credit to the government's intention. She decides to put an end to her search and pursue her dream of material success and being free like the whites.

Maria, April and Cheryl despise their people because they are losers, alcoholics and gutter – creatures. "The white bureaucracy had helped create the image of parasitic Natives" (196), and just as Cheechum said, they are made to hate their people.

If the death of Maria's mother causes havoc with her life taking away pleasant childhood memories, the death of Baby Anna separates the children April and Cheryl from their parents Henry and Alice Raintree.

The parents losing custody of their children end up in alcoholism; the mother commits suicide not being able to bear the agony of the loss of all her children or rather unable to bear the government's labeling of them as incompetent parents.

Both Maria and Culleton view subjugation by the whites as the foremost reason for the socio-economic and moral problems of the contemporary Métis people. The anger of both the writer is directed not only at the whites and the indifferent, inhuman administrative system, but also is against the demoralized Métis people: "They are losers!" Because Maria has seen the positive and unique side of Métis culture, she is not averse to their traditions and practices. But Culleton's contemporaries, the Métis, have lost their land and moved to towns to unknown occupations. Alienation and lack of social recognition have driven them to low self esteem, alcoholism and other substance abuses. Cheryl, owing to her awareness of their history, analyses their plight thus: "But there is a reason why they are the way they are. Everything they once had had been taken from them"! (Culleton 215-216).

The Métis are further angered by the negative stereotyping by the whites, the society and the government. Many of the natives are portrayed as drunken, suicidal or lazy beings. Destructive behaviour such as suicide and alcoholism of the characters in both their works help us to identify the root cause for the plight of the Métis.

In **Halfbreed**, Maria Campbell and Smoky, her first boy – friend are both driven to suicide because of social alienation and severe struggle for survival. Smoky shoots his two white women and shoots himself to death out of frustration. Maria is driven to a desperate life in Vancouver when her husband deserts her. She is driven to alcoholism, drug use and attempts suicide twice. Though addicted to alcohol and drugs, the spirit of Cheechum and the voice of an ‘ancient’ Métis give her the strength to straighten herself. She overcomes her difficulties and discovers not only herself but the whole dignity of her race. In Culleton’s work, April goes to the friendship center with Cheryl where she meets some elderly native people: “without speaking a word an elderly native woman imparted her message and April has an overwhelming feeling of a mystical spiritual occurrence. She wishes, “if she had a grandmother, probably she would not have been so mixed up” (159).

In Culleton’s work, Cheryl, upset about her mother’s suicide, feels like following suit when her dreams of her people are shattered. She is abused, exploited by her boyfriend (Mark) and the shock of meeting her demoralized father drives her to drinks and desperation. Her childhood dream ideal of living as one family cannot be realised. The reality behind the Métis’ life, their struggle for existence and her helplessness to do anything goad her to suicide – just as her mother did! The only difference is that the mother died in desperation while Cheryl dies with hope, hope

that April would step in for the Métis and for her son; that April would continue her dream and make it a reality.

Both the writers feel that the solution to the Métis' problem lies not only in changing the Canadian's understanding of the Métis but in creating an awareness and respect among the Métis about their own tradition and uniqueness: a awareness of their culture and familiarity with it and an acceptance of their pride and self – identity. The lack of cultural awareness poses a threat to the Raintree sisters. Campbell's Native experience in her childhood is her redeeming factor, later leading to her strong attachment to her people and their cause.

Unlike the two Métis sisters in **In Search of April Raintree**, Campbell never lost her original Métis culture. From the beginning, Campbell's is a loud cry through April Raintree over facts: she realizes she who she is, takes pride in her being a Métis and loves her people. Her concern lies not with herself, but with her people. She considers Métis' efforts at self-determination to be the key solution to the plight of contemporary Métis.

Campbell refers metaphorically to a “blanket” (159) that the white government provides to the Métis after they have taken away everything from them: “When the government gives you something, they take all that you have in return – your pride, your dignity, all the things that make you living soul. When they were sure they have everything, they give you a blanket to cover your shame”! (159). Not only government, all social institutions, churches, schools are all a part of it and all people wear their

blankets in their own way. By facing reality, by rising up, people can throw away their blankets. They can survive with each other fighting their common enemies, than fighting with each other. That “Change will come, we won’t give up there was growing evidence of that today” (182) is the positive note with which Campbell ends her work.

Both writers assert that a future will come when Métis will enjoy being Métis and take pride in themselves and their cultural heritage, as they did centuries ago. April concludes,

But for Henry Lee and me, there would be a tomorrow.

And it would be better. I would strive for it. For my sister

and her son. For my parents. For my people. (207)

Maria’s dream of material success – deemed as white man’s idea of life by Cheechum, “tooth brushes tell of tomorrow etc”- take her life away from Nature, her people. But when she realizes that she should discover for herself the need for leadership and change, that she has to find other people like her and unite them to find an alternative, she takes an active part in social movements and finds a meaning for her life.

April’s dream is also that of economic success and freedom to take her life into her hand. Such material success ultimately does not satisfy her after her success with her divorce package. Her denial of Métis identity in the initial phases becomes pride of Métis consciousness, with an awareness created by Cheryl and her interactions later with the Métis’

groups. Their knowledge as to who they are now what they are makes them wise to build a better future for their people. At present, Culleton is working as manager of Pemmican Press, a Métis publishing house in Winnipeg. Like Campbell, she has devoted herself to publishing Native books for Native adults and children, in an attempt to foster pride and confidence in their cultural heritage.

Both the women dare to step into cross – cultural relationship and their experience in the closest of all relationships – hypocrisy, deceit in marital bonding – that jolt them into awareness and take them on a journey of emotional independence. They are full of love for their fellow human beings – irrespective of race; they voice against all unjust practices in society. They know, it is not economic independence and empowerment that alone makes life meaningful. These women take their live in their hands, take decisions, accept responsibilities and face their consequence, ultimately emerging humane, stronger and wiser for all their experiences.

In Maria's time, the government was not aware of the Métis' uniqueness. They were just treated as other Indians or half – Indians. When the government provided welfare measures to Indians, the Métis could not benefit from it, because there was no provision for the Métis in law. They had to struggle a lot, rebel a lot over years to get their identity and difference recognized by the government. Their Native life as one

with Nature got disturbed by the government's activities of urbanization, taking away their reserves for its projects and laying rail routes across the country. The access through train brought Germans and Swedes into their native land. The urban migrants had money to buy the Métis' lands but the Métis with their traditional beliefs of "not owning" anything were deprived of their shelter and became "Road Allowance People". They lead an alien life in an alien place, feeling disoriented with the government, living out of a meager allowance for their survival, that too with lots of conditions which humiliate them and deprive them of their dignity as human beings.

In Beatrice's time, the society had progressed greatly. The government had improved the defects of welfare measures and the foster home system. It recognized the Métis' need to keep in touch with other members of the family. It is people like Mrs. Semple, who due to their hectic schedule "heavy case – load", get fooled by Mrs De Rosier and treat April as a typical Métis child, not listening to whatever she wishes to convey. But Mr Wendell rescues April from Mrs De Rosier proving that the system is not at fault; only the people handling it are to be blamed for their lack of maturity in dealing with such sensitive issues.

When April is put in a foster home of the whites Cheryl is nurtured in a foster home of a Métis couple which gives her a secure psychological orientation. She is aware of her roots, her people's history and the

reasons for their failure. It is her wish that they both (April & Cheryl) should “make it” in their lives and must help other kids like them to come up in life. Cheryl indeed actively involves herself in the friendship centre, goes out of her way to help the Métis around her and makes them feel comfortable with her. Indeed Nancy makes April realize her mistake – that she had not been sensitive to Cheryl’s requirement. When Cheryl wants to belong to her sister and family, April pursues her ideas of white man’s lifestyle as a symbol of success in life. The Métis’ tradition of accepting people / family with all their foibles (mistakes / weaknesses) is inherent in Cheryl and missing in April.

Cheryl transfers her ideals and awareness to April finally making April acknowledge her origin. April is willing to pursue Cheryl’s commitment of living for “Métis” like them; and the novel ends in her acceptance of Métis identity – consciousness of her race. When Culleton’s character April calls “Métis” our people, Maria ends her novel with having found her “brothers and sisters” everywhere – meaning she has crossed even the racial differences to be a human, to be sensitive to all fellow human beings’ requirement and to have the dignity that a human soul has.

It is not every Métis that felt humiliated or abused. When the entire generation accepts their humiliation, feels helpless as to what to do about it, it is sensitive children like Maria and Culleton who observe, question and assert themselves with others for equal opportunities and equal

treatment. It is such individuals who persevere their quest that create ripples gradually and transform the entire consciousness of their society.

Compared to Culleton, Campbell is a progressive, probably because of being a direct witness and victim of the transient period in Canadian history where she had witnessed the glory of the Métis race and the destruction of their psyche and downfall. It is her direct experience upto her suicidal attempts that give her maturity not only to empathize with the Métis but also with the people of other races who have been segregated, isolated and marginalised. Because awareness comes of transferred knowledge and experience, Maria's voice is the seed and the root from which sprout the voice of Culleton. They are yet to transcend the racial consciousness!

In Indian context, while Bama's voice is that of a Dalit Paraya from the cheri street with anger and resentment. Sivakami's voice is far refined – a ‘humane’ voice calling out for the recognition of the downtrodden people. Sivakami writes to reveal the agony of the downtrodden people while Bama writes to “expose” the hypocrisy of the social institutions like schools, colleges, society, family etc against the Dalits. Both the women writers agree that being a “Dalit woman” is double marginalisation because Dalits are marginalised by the entire society. The Dalit women are further abused / exploited by their Dalit male family members who would not give them freedom of expression or thought or even an equal opportunity for a dignified life, adding to the heaviness of their burden.

Bama, like Beatrice Cullen, exposes the lapses in school system where even children are taught the alienation of Dalit caste, and the upper class children are advised not to interact or exchange anything with Dalit children. They do not mingle freely; they are told to sit at a distance, due to the practice of untouchability. The Dalit children are put to tasks and are made to do all the manual tasks like cleaning, fetching water, gardening, etc, even at the teacher's houses (Bama 16). Maria Campbell recalls how when she went to a mixed school for whites and half – breeds, the Métis children were made to sit down on one side and the whites sat on the other side maintaining a distance. The Métis were also to be inoculated. The education that should give them the wisdom of treating all alike only gives them the feeling of superiority / inferiority and the superstition of untouchability.

Even in **Author's Notes** Sivakami recalls how as a School Pupil leader, she wore a faded 'Dhavani' on the day of school inspection. Her headmistress arranges with another girl Shenbaga who has many clothes to give her a 'dhavani'. Shenbaga agrees but her father stops Sivakami at the gate itself and her mother says that they cannot lend her a 'dhavani' because she "belongs to the Paraya Caste" (161). She can only vent her grievance at home saying, "she wants to kill herself" because she cannot even borrow a piece of cloth because of her caste (162). The school that should teach her to respect herself for what she has (as inner self) brings in a low self – esteem for what she does not have. Aggrieved, Sivagami's

father rebukes the nun rightly, “A faded dhavani will not stop anyone from studying. Teach her to study. If this girl had jumped into a well, who would have answered for that death! What can you understand of a poor farmer’s plight?” (162).

Both Bama and Sivakami understand that education can make them come up in life and gain social status for themselves and do well in their studies. When Bama gets an awareness, for the first time, that her community is treated as untouchable, the idea infuriates her into saying “we too are human beings” (13). Her brother gives her the insight that society respects educated people and advises her to “work hard and learn” (15). “Thereafter, she always stands first in class and many become friends with her though she is a ‘Paraichi’” (15).

When all the upperclass children are allowed to go home for festivals, functions etc, Dalit children are not permitted to go home even on customary holidays like Saturdays and Sundays, saying “what celebration can be there in your caste?”(19). When Bama wanted to attend the First Communion of her younger brother and sister, she stands her ground obstinately and asserts herself to get her way with ‘wild rage’; she insists that “there cannot be different rules for different castes, only the only the same rules for everyone”(19).

In school, the teachers, the headmasters – all elders look at ‘cheri’ children with contempt and suspicion. Whenever any child does any mistake, the blame is put on the cheri children. Getting accused and

punished unjustly adds insult to their injury of social marginalization. Bama as a child felt ashamed and insulted in front of other children. When she stands first among all the Harijan pupils of the District, her name is called in the assembly and everyone claps. But the question – “Is it impossible for a Harijan to study or what?” crosses her mind, provoking her to study and to progress.

When she enters a college some distance away from her village, Bama is happy with the thought that nobody would bother about caste in such a big college among so many different students. But suddenly “Harijan” students are told to stand in class one day, and being one of the two, she feels enraged that she is be singled out in front of the entire class. She realizes, “It struck me that I would not be rid of this caste business easily whatever I studied, wherever I went!” (19), her bemoaning reminding us of Culleton’s voice through Roger’s words – ironically it is the white man who acknowledges - “There will always be some form of discrimination, whether it is someone discriminating against an Indian on main street, or your church telling you have to teach your children its beliefs because theirs is the only right one” (143). The solution against discrimination is not to bother about what others think of one, it is what one thinks of oneself that counts!

Even Sivakami recalls her college life in the words of Gowri:

Nobody really cared to know who Gowri was. She blended among the many intelligent and attractive young women in the college, and

it pleased her". "Gowri felt, that she had crossed over human – made boundaries – her father, her caste and her village – and merged with the ocean of people. In spite of this feeling, whenever she went back home for the holidays, "Caste revealed its murderous teeth like an invincible monster". (95)

At college one day a lecture said that harijan students should stand up; the government had arranged that scheduled caste students should get special tuitions in the evenings and only Bama and one more girl stood up. Other students immediately rustled with a titter of contempt filling Bama with a sudden rage. A desire to study to prove that they could make progress burned in Bama just as it burned in April and Cheryl. When they hear Ms Semple's talk on "Native Girl Syndrome" they decide to do well in studies. "We are going to make it, we have not going to become what they expect of us; we will live together" (64), assures April to Cheryl. Sivakami also came up in life due to her zeal for higher education. She became an IAS officer though much later she gave it up.

Bama gets angry when she starts her career in a boarding school because the nuns there were inhuman and made Dalit children do every menial task. There were caste divisions, divisions between rich and poor. They instilled in the Dalit children the feeling that they have to accept their lowliness in life and that "there was no possibility of change" (89). In church, where Christianity is supposed to teach love for even one's own enemies, there is community-consciousness. The Dalits struggle hard

until their moment of death “to fill even half their bellies” (47). They never taste fruits in their lives. However, with their hard-earned money they buy fruits or biscuits to offer as gifts to Mother Superiors and priests who are already wealthy and taken care of by the church administration. The poor offer rich gifts, and in return if they ask for a holy picture or a calendar; they are only offered the sign of a cross as a blessing or as a symbol of their burden. The church that makes Christ their symbol did not practice His teaching; rather they sell pictures or calendars! – doing what Christ condemned – making places of worship into Markets!

Even in Campbell’s childhood anecdotes of church, the children laugh at the hypocrisy practised by the Roman Catholic priests and churches. The Métis struggle for their survival. The Roman Catholic church in their settlement “took more money than the Hudson’s Bay store”(32), comments Cheechum. No doubt, Cheechum was scornful of this “Catholic God” who so exploited the ignorant and the poor that she hated them with a vengeance (32).

Maria recalls how a priest used to come and hold masses in their homes. The priest, very fat and greedy, “always arrived when it was meal time, and finished eating all the choice food”, leaving only scraps for the children. If the children complained to their mother, she, like a true Christian, would tell them that the priest was picked by God and it was their duty to feed him. No doubt Maria treated the priest as enemy. The nuns never allowed the children to pick strawberries from the Churchyard

which is also a graveyard – symbolically conveying that love is dead there (29).

“The berries in the graveyard belonged to the Church and if the Children took them, it would be stealing from God” (29), says the Father who had “taken things” from the Indian’s Sundance Pole that belonged to the Great Spirit – which amounted to ‘stealing’ in the view of the children; for these priests only principles matter, not the differences in God. They decide to punish him (29-30) and set wire traps on his way. Stumbling on the wire traps, the Father curses the children and admonishes the parents. He does not end it there. He refuses to give Maria’s mother a mass at her funeral because of the torment or rather pranks the children did to him, an unforgiving Christian gesture!

Maria’s mother had never missed Church and had many times given the last of their money to the church rather than to buy food for the family (79). When her funeral service was done by an Anglican Priest from a nearby reserve, the Father “made sure no one tried to ring bells for her”!(79). The child Maria’s poignant memories of this unforgiving Father reveal the truth behind Bernard Shaw’s words that “There was only one Christian and he died on the Cross!”

Bama comments on how they were differentiated in public places. Whenever she goes home for holidays, if an upper caste woman sits next to her in a bus, the woman would immediately ask her which place and what street she is bound to. Knowing Bama is from Cheri the woman

would prefer to go away and stand rather than sit next to her or any other person from Cheri. This sort of repulsion confronts her wherever she goes.

Bama observes how inspite of her grandmother being a true and proper servant was ill-treated like an untouchable. From Sunrise she would start work and would slog even after Sunset but she was not supposed to touch any of the belongings of her Naicker master. She is not allowed to go anywhere near them. Bama recalls, “after she had finished all her filthy chores, Patti placed the vessel that she had brought with her, by the side of the drain. The Naicker lady came out with the left-overs or unwanted food and tipped them in Patti’s vessel from some distance as if Patti were an untouchable” (14). Patti used to call even the tiny children of upper caste as “Ayya” (master), an address of respect to elders, and felt very grateful to the upper caste master as they are the “Maharajans who feed us our rice” (4).

Every institution of society such as police and judiciary is prejudiced against the Dalits, according to Bama and Sivagami. Sivagami reveals how the upper class twists events and politicizes a personal problem because a Dalit woman Thangam lodged a police complaint against an upper caste Udayar. The continuous exploitation of the lower caste woman completely goes out of focus when the upper caste diverts it as caste problem, wage / labour problem and so on. Whenever the police go for an inquiry into an upper caste, they offer

seats, tiffin, money and the case will be distorted at the whims and wishes of the upper caste men. Kathamuthu, though of a lower caste, is willing to take up a fight for Thangam and is diplomatic not to rub the rich on the wrong side. Though Thangam gets justice in her property cases her case against Udayar becomes diluted with monetary compensation. Even the monetary compensation is enjoyed by Kathamuthu. The male from her caste, taking possession of her money first and lands next, ultimately makes her the “third woman” in his household.

Bama describes how the police takes to the side of the Chaaliyar whenever there is caste-clash. Both the sides fight even for their graveyard; their skirmishes develop into full-scale fights: “A huge gang of policemen came out of the Chaaliyar settlement, chased and caught as many lower caste men as possible and beat them black and blue”(30) and arrested until evening. All the men disappeared and Paatti explains that the Chaaliyar folk had invited ‘Reserve Police’ from Sivakasi, slaughtered two sheep a day and feasted them. “Do we have such means? Here, we are struggling just for this watery gruel. So how will the police or government be on our side?” (31) Ironically, for Paatti the police and the government are the same.

Maria, talking of the deprivation of trapping – the original occupation of Métis, narrates how the RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police) used to search houses for Métis men and arrest them for hunting which is illegal according to the law and is the only known means of

survival for the Métis! Maria's father takes the risk of hunting to provide for the family. The wardens and Mounties cleverly trick the child Maria by giving her chocolates to find the meat hidden in cellar, and arrest her father. The family faces the hardest six months after that without meat and with no money. She hates chocolate bars ever since that time nor does she trust warden and Mounties thereafter (61).

Culleton writes about how April lodges a case when she is raped: "rape was a double assault. Rabits abused their victims both physically and mentally" (146). Luckily for April, the police (RCMP) were soft-spoken and kind. Though the trial was humiliating and a psychological torture, in the end she atleast gets justice showing the progress in the society. As the case was proceeding, the painful legal process brings her an awareness as to "why some women chose not to seek justice in the courtrooms"(150).

While all these women writers Bama, Sivakami, Maria Campbell and Beatrice Culleton chose biography as their mode of writing, each differs in their own way of presenting the facts of life. Bama and Beatrice Culleton are vehement in their protests and rebel against the injustices. They still have identities of their community or race as Paraya or as Métis in their work. Beatrice Culleton and Sivakami use fictionalized biography to expose their marginalisation in the society. Maria Campbell and Bama use their life's events to portray the injustices against their race and community, Métis or Paraya, respectively.

All these writers travel to the past or to the places connected with the past in their narration. As first writers in their respective race / community they expose the humiliation suffered by their people, their ignorant acceptance of their subjugation, their economic deprivation at hands of the government and the dominant group, all leading to their loss of self-esteem and alcoholism.

Alcoholism is a common relief sought by the deprived people in their helplessness against an unjust social system. Lack of recognition as fellow humanbeings, not being equipped with decent means of livelihood, illiteracy and unemployment all drive these people to alcoholism and later to suicidal tendencies.

Maria Campbell attempts suicide twice, goes to the verge of substance abuse and is brought back to normalcy by seeing how the once proud Métis have lost their roots in a dehumanizing system (government / society). She pulls herself up, takes to writing to maintain her mental balance so that she will not revert back to old practices.

Beatrice Culleton experiences agony over the suicide of two of her sisters and takes up writing to find the answers for the queries of the world about Métis. April's initial rejection of her native identity ends in her acceptance because of Cheryl's influence, (her letters, notes diary etc).

When she becomes a victim of rape, her accident and the trauma make her aware of people in similar circumstances. Gradually her subconscious identity-roots get reinforced by her exposure to interaction

with the other Métis. She takes over Cheryl's dream as well as her half – breed son, ending in her full acceptance of her Métis Identity.

Bama writes in anger aggressively and critically to expose and question the hypocrisy of the society that exploits the labour of the Dalits and Métis: the untouchability, the educational system and the hypocrisy of the religious institution, the Roman Catholic Church. The Church, instead of practicing Christian values of simplicity, love and brotherhood, segregates people and humiliates them. Though she entered convent to serve the poor, when she is not able to do justice to her ideals, she boldly quits for exposing its duplicity.

Sivakami's **Pazhaiyana Kazhithalum** and **Author's Notes** have a soft and civilized voice that reveals the sufferings and agony of the downtrodden over centuries. Ironically even the male in lower caste exploits a female, thereby signalling how women are doubly marginalised by their own members of the society. Both Sivagami and Bama focus on the exploitation of Dalit women which, to them, is most tragic. Yet they assert proudly that the Dalit women are hard workers with mental strength to get what they want; to a certain extent these women exercise their freedom to opt into a marriage or out of it.

Whether it is race or community, unless one wills to assert one's position, one can never be successful, says Campbell. Culleton also asserts that one should not be ashamed of one's self. It does not matter

what the world thinks of one but it is what one thinks of oneself that ultimately counts in becoming successful.

When Bama and Cullen end their novels with the communal awareness, Sivakami and Campbell transcend their community / race. Their voices are more gentle, humane, self-critical and empathetic. When they realize that their people and communities are deprived of their dignities they reach out to all – they give a call to all to unify. It is a call that reaches the roots from where to grow and yield fruits. It helps the world realize its folly and come back to its senses to give a fair and equal share for all.

Every tradition is unique in its own way. Each author has a message that is relevant. That very life has its own grace which is to be revered is the ultimate message we receive from these works. Transcending the barriers of community / race/ nation gender make all human being to feel and think alike and this venture makes them humane.

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## **CHAPTER VII**