

**MULTICULTURAL IMPLICATIONS IN MARGARET LAURENCE'S
*THE DIVINERS***

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Abstract

Margaret Laurence, one of the foremost Canadian Women writers meticulously strives to reconstruct the lost identities of the cultural groups from Africa and Canada in the last half of the twentieth century. Her Manawaka Cycle specially represents to the Canadian cultural groups of indigenous, colonial and immigrant cultures. These cultural groups constitute the Canadian culture as a whole. It is an attempt of Laurence to portray a realistic picture of Canadian culture by means of her writings. These cultural groups are striving for social recognition, rebelling against the brutality of racial discrimination and experiencing the barbaric disturbances between the ethnic groups are the core issues in this novel. The novel traces the lost historical impressions of – the Metis, Red Indians, Scots-Presbyterian, Asian, Greek, Ukrainian groups of Canada.

Keywords- Multiculturalism, racism, cultural equality, tolerance, etc.

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MULTICULTURAL IMPLICATIONS IN MARGARET LAURENCE'S *THE DIVINERS*

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Margaret Laurence strongly attempted to record the cultural implications in her African and Canadian writings. She has done Canadian writing in the form of Manawaka Cycle, a series of four novels and a short story collection. *The Diviners* is the last novel of the Manawaka series, published in 1974. The novel received a wide applaud from all over world. It is treated as the best composition of Laurence. It was also an attempt of Laurence's self-revelation and an exploration of Canadian past. Laurence defines herself against modernist James Joyce, as he defines himself on *The Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, whereas Laurence portrayed herself as a young woman artist, by means of the protagonist Morag Gunn. She narrates her inner and creative life and her relation with a Metis becomes quintessential for the new Canadian identity and diversity.

The novel is actually a summation of Laurence's concerns such as feministic presentations, a quest of primitive culture, the process of multicultural settlement in Canada and interconnectivity between the different groups of Canadian society. The unity of the cycle has been widely applauded, it has some common connections which demonstrate the link between the five books of the same heading Manawaka. The heading of this series is the fictional prairie town where they all are set, even when the place is only present at the mental level. Even small insignificant objects are handed out from one chapter to the other in different books; different generations of the same families continue to live in the prairie or are presented while becoming part of the city. It is all about the nineteenth century Scottish settlers around the Red river and the indigenous Metis. It is also the story of a woman's quest for an understanding of human community.

The life journey of the protagonist Morag Gunn, for over the five decades, is never regarded as a solitary quest. It is pluralistic vision of the writer addresses the universal issues of race, class, gender, ethnicity, culture and environment. Laurence is concerned with the injustices, prejudice, discrimination and oppression suffered by those who are

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marginalized by the dominant agents of the society. Gabrielle Roy opines, “It is a search for water, truth, identity, words, but beyond all that, for whoever or whatever compels us to endless search.”

The novel has an autobiographical stance as the protagonist is also a creative writer. It approximately explores the socio-cultural scenario. The story of the novel on one hand portrays the picture of Morag’s development from her childhood to her being forty eight years old woman of action where she divorced her patriarchal husband and she is caught up in her daughter Pique’s tormenting and restless behavior on the other. She lives in a rural Ontario beside a river that appears to flow on both ways because of an influential wind. The river serves as an emblem of time and memory.

The novel has a twisting of past and present which stands as the counterpoints to one another. Morag recalls her unpleasing and uncomfortable childhood in Manawaka, where she was raised by a garbage collector and his wife after the death of her parents. She also remembers her adulthood and the sheltered life in Toronto as the wife of English professor, her rebellion and flight to Vancouver and Britain, where she developed as a writer, her return to Canada, her roots and her lasting love for Jules Tonnerre.

The first section of the novel “River of Now and Then” depicts Morag’s grief on the departure of her daughter to the west. She has left a note on typewriter machine. The sudden disappearance of her teenage daughter triggers off her memory of the snapshots she had taken of her past. Though the snapshots are in a mess but clear enough to serve as effective monuments of a bygone past. It also reminds the death of her parents. Only after the death of her parents Morag’s journey was started in an outer world.

“Memory bank Movies” is the second part of this novel which presents the childhood days of Morag in Manawaka. She was born as a white but now she is an adopted child, living with Prin and Christie Logan (fostering parents of Morag) garbage collector of the town. Morag does not like the profession of her fostering father. She considers that the profession of a scavenger is humiliating. Though she deeply loves to Prin and Christie Logan, she suffers from shame and discrimination on having scavenger as her fostering parent. She feels that she is from another planet. Morag meets her classmate, a Metis youth,

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Jules Tonnerre with whom she has a relationship. At the end of school days, Jules makes an enquiry about her future plan. Morag tells him that she will be going away, away from the hold of this family that she wanted to set herself free from the present contemptuous experience. She wants to make her own identity. She happily answers: "Going to Winnipeg this fall. To college and I'm never coming back" (TD. P.181). She takes an admission in Winnipeg university. But, there too, she finds herself homeless, only eager to move away.

Part three that is named as "Memory bank Movies" portrays the university life of Morag. In Winnipeg University, she encounters with her English Professor, Brooke Skeleton, son of an English school master in India. Morag had a lot potential of literary creation. When she used to share her literary interest with that English professor either in the class or outside, it resulted into an admiration and later on love. Eventually the love affair turned into the marriage proposal. They get married and settled down in Toronto. Later on Morag realizes that she is reduced up to a house maid. She does not have even a single chance to get away from her busy house schedule. She is being monitored by her husband. She was trapped on both ways physical and intellectual.

During her stay in Toronto she became friendly with Ella Gurson. The friendship between these two has a special background. Both of them are outcasts, one in the terms of class that is Morag (an adopted child of a scavenger family) and the other is in terms of ethnicity, Ella (a Jew of Polish origin). The point that connects the two together is their interest in literature. The writings that they have submitted to college newspaper are from their respective background. Ella's poem speaks about her people's tragic episodes during the Second World War and Morag's story was about a farmer's survival during the draught. Morag, the protagonist endeavors to establish herself as a writer and her daughter, Pique's search for her ancestral roots compose the core of the novel.

Margaret Laurence strives to reconstruct the lost identities of the cultural groups. These cultural groups constitute the Canadian culture as a whole. It is an attempt of Laurence to portray a realistic picture of Canadian culture by means of her writings. These cultural groups are striving for social recognition, rebelling against the brutality of racial discrimination and experiencing the barbaric disturbances between the ethnic groups are

the core issues in this novel. The novel traces the lost historical impressions of the indigenous group – the Metis, in the folktales and songs, and their struggle with the Sutherlanders for survival. This novel reveals Laurence's strong desire to exhibit the historical imprints of the indigenous Metis.

In *The Diviners* Morag's life with her parents, Louise and Colin Gunn, is recreated in the novel through six snapshots. Louise and Colin, both of them were white European descendants. The technique of using the snapshots makes it very easy to recall the whole past of Gunn family. The photographs of her parents and her own childhood make Morag to recall her past. These snapshots show her life within the confining limits of society and the traumatic incident of her parent's death. It shatters her idyllic world and her faith in God. It deeply makes an impact on her life. She becomes homeless and unwillingly accepts her being an adopted child in Logan family. It triggers off her journey of searching her own self, locating herself either in her parent's ethnicity of white European that is Scots-Presbyterian or fostering parent's being scavenger.

Morag's quest of her identity is neatly revealed at the end of the novel when she realizes the importance of her fostering father, Christie. He constantly used to narrate the stories of Metis people. His tales play very important role in the search of Morag's identity. To retrospect the hardships encountered by the Metis, Christie Logan narrates the tales like Christie's First Tale of Piper Gunn – the escape of the people from the Bitch – Duchess; Christie's tale of the Battle of Bourlonwood, Christie's tale of Piper Gunn and the Rebels, Skinner's tale of Lazarus' tale of Rider Tonnerre, Skinner's Tale of Rider Tonnerre and the Prophet, Skinner's tale of Old Jules and the war out West and the Skinner's tale of Dieppe depict the conflict between the Scots and the Metis.

Christie tells the tales of settlement of the Scots and the Metis in Canada. In his first story, he narrates the hardships faced by the Metis in Canada:

Among all of them people there on the rocks, see, was a piper, and he was from the Clan Gunn, and it was many of the Gunns who lost their hearths and homes and lived wild on the stormy rocks there. And Piper Gunn, he was a

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great tall man, a man with the voice of drums and the heart of a child and all the gall of a thousand and the strength of conviction. (TD.p.59)

Piper Gunn and his wife Morag with others landed on the Hudson Bay in their ship from Sutherland and both of them were living there. There was a quarrel between the half breed and Indians and they began to slay each other. Piper Gunn's people started to migrate from there too and landed on the Red river. When the half breed wanted take this part of Red river, a battle broke out between the Metis and the half breed in which the chief of Metis, Riel was hanged and Metis lost their land again. A Metis rider, the Prince of Braves, fought against the English and the Scots who had come take away Metis land. And when the government men from Down East had come to occupy the Metis land, the Old Rider Tonnerre sent a prophet who was also a Metis. The prophet captured the fort along with the people. Jules had joined the prophet in the battle for Metis. Though they were accompanied by the Indians, the Cress and the Stonies, they lost the war and Jules was hanged finally. It was narrated through the tales that there was a rivalry between the Scots and the Metis in finding a place in Canada. After a long struggle they both managed to find their own space, though the Metis were finally humiliated with defeat by the Scots. The settlement of both the Scots and the Metis has been portrayed in a marvelous narrative structure of this novel.

The Metis had great respect for their ancestry. The rivalry between the Scots and Metis makes the Metis to feel hatred towards Canada. While Morag, a Scot, sings the song in praise of Canada in school, Skinner Tonnerre, a Metis classmate keeps quite though he had sweet voice. The marginalization of them in the socio – cultural framework of Canada had made the Metis resort to such behaviour while this was position in Canada, the Metis are given prominent place in this novel. The protagonist finds fulfillment in her association with the Metis and Pique's search for her ancestry leads to know the historical elegance of the Metis through the folk songs.

Morag's acceptance of Christie as her father is a crucial moment in the novel and the character growth of Morag herself. Christie Logan is such a character who has multiple identities. Although he is perceived as a clown, a fool, a failure but to Morag he is a hero. He

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is portrayed as the man of honesty, wisdom and full of compassion. According to Leo A. Johnson's analysis of "The Development of Class in Canada in the Twentieth Century" (1972), 'Christie can be considered a labourer, a sub-class of the blue collar workers, as he definitely is not a mechanical worker, considering he initially manipulates a wagon and its horse Ginger, much to Morag's despair'.

The most economically marginal character representative of this stratification is Christie Logan. He was once in army with Colin Gunn, the real father of Morag, but unfortunately when Colin and his wife died of infantile paralysis (poliomyelitis), Christie and Prin Logan offered to adopt Morag. While introducing them in the novel, Laurence writes, "they're not what you call a well-off couple", but they are really poor, kind and caring couple who got no children of their own. They get ready to accept the responsibility of a six years old girl, Morag. After the war and his not having finished high school could not provide him an elevated position for Christie. Though he could get any job in the army but it would have been proved as his decay. Therefore he decided to choose the job of Scavenger out of his fancied idea of serving to the town.

The racial conflict is unavoidable in the scenario of multiracial, multiethnic and multicultural country like Canada. Being a Canadian writer Margaret Laurence talks about the repercussions of these conflicts. In this novel, Laurence completes the circle of cultural transgression when she portrays the white protagonist Morag Gunn bears the child of a Metis, Jules Tonnerre. Laurence is fully aware of the fact that how the whites are sharply antagonistic towards the Metis and other minor indigenous groups of Canada. In fact, the reaction of Metis is similar to that of the whites. Jules does not forget to bring into the notice of Morag that his hatred as acute as the white's for him. When Morag tells him of his sister's death by fire in one of the Tonnerre shacks, he shouts:

"By Jesus, I hate you ... I hate all of you, every goddamned one ..." (TD.p.275)

The racial discrimination practiced by the whites while dealing with the non-whites is brought out in Laurence's portrayal of Jules Tonnerre's anger at being refused a burial place for his father at the burial ground:

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“Yes, well. I guess I know why they really wouldn’t have him. His half-breed bones spoiling their cemetery.”

The Metis, once Lords of the prairies. Now refused burial space in their own land. Morag cannot say anything. She has no right. (TD.p.268)

The whites are always portrayed as trying to maintain a distance from the Metis. It is illustrated in relation with the character portrayal of Brooke Skeleton. He gets scared on finding that his wife is entertaining a Metis with his prized scotch:

Brooke says, “I suppose he tracked you down and is here in the somewhat unlovely role of free loader.”

“Brooke! I met him by accident on the street.

I asked him back.”

“Well, tonight won’t be possible, I’m afraid, Charles and Donna Pettigrew are coming over this evening.

Had you forgotten?”

“Yes. But so what?”

“It may not matter to you, but it matters to me. ...

... Anyway, I thought it was supposed to be illegal to give liquor to Indians.”

There are some other minor characters in this novel that play an important role. These characters are the two younger sisters of Jules, Piquette and Valentine Tonnerre. Like other Metis characters these two Metis girls are quite secondary in the story but they are cast in the last three books of Manawaka cycle. Piquette appears in *A Bird in The House* as a girl in relation with Vanessa MacLeod and in *The Diviners* as Morag’s classmate. Valentine Tonnerre is depicted as an adult, when she meets Stacey MacAindra in *The Fire Dwellers*. These characters speak about themselves but they don’t speak to each other which become another sign of their marginality. They live in far from the respectable white

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society, in a very poor condition. In the eyes of Morag these Metis sisters belong to the only family in Manawaka that was less respectable than her own family of a scavenger. Piquette and Jules Tonnerre are the classmates of Morag. Morag looks down upon them and speaks about Piquette:

She's not the worst dressed. Eva is worse... Also, one of the Tonnerre girls, half-breed from the valley, is worse dressed; she's away a lot because of TB in one leg but when she is at school she looks the worst because her dresses are long-gawky and dirty, and she has a limpwalk.(TD.p.54)

Piquette is suffered from bone tuberculosis which is resulted in her limping walk. She could not attend the school on regular basis. Her absence from school does not provide an ample scope to Morag to remember her. But the incident of her death in fire makes Morag too scared.

A Greek couple named as Miklos was running a café in Manawaka. The culture that they have accepted is slightly different than that of the Europeans. They have exchanged their roles of gender. It slightly surprises, "...Parthenon Café, Miklos is sponging his windows dawdling, spinning the job out to last the morning while his wife waits stoically on the customer inside". The Greek man cleaning the window pans and his wife seems in charge of the place. Though they are rooted in European culture but in Canada they are become Canadians they exactly know what roles that they have to play when they have left their country and come to live in other place as the workers.

Like the idea of races, class-consciousness is another aspect of white psychology which recurs in several places in Laurence's fiction. However, in *The Diviners* the difference between the classes is reduced and there is a blending of them. Laurence has shifted her point of view from intolerance to tolerance; from hatred to love and contradictions to understandings. *The Diviners* is the novel of cultural mosaic it includes representatives of various classes and cultures. It has the characters like Colin Gunn, Morag Gunn, Brooke Skeleton are from British descendants, Jules, Piquette, Valentine Tonnerre are from Red Indians (Metis), Ella Gerson from Jews, Miklos from Greeks, Julie Kazlick from Ukrainians, upper class, Christie and Prin are from lower middle class, etc.

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