



**Voicing the Anguish: Portrayal of the Cherokee Life in Select Works of
Diane Glancy**

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Abstract:

Literature of the marginalised, irrespective of the historical and social context in which it is produced, like post-colonial, Dalit, gender minority, or aboriginal, has recently become a discourse of significance. It has contributed much, especially during the 21st century, when all world power and hierarchy equations are challenged or reconstituted. Indigenous literature or the literature of the aboriginal communities is one such voice that exposes the politics of domination that happened during and after the era of white European settlement. Many were forced to leave their natural habitat, culture, and traditions to "civilise the indigenous". Native American literature, popularly known as NAL, is an attempt to restore and revive the rich legacy of Native American communities. NAL is not an isolated group but a set of diverse voices, every tribe with their own literary and cultural conventions, working towards the process of reclaiming lost identity. Diane Glancy is a powerful voice in native American literature belonging to the Cherokee community. Cherokees are a group of Autochthonous people of the Southeastern woodlands of America. Glancy speaks about how the Cherokees were forced to acculturate themselves to an alien life with the advent of European settlement. She mainly speaks from her experience living an ambivalent existence between the native and the foreign. This paper attempts to read two of Glancy's poems to analyse how they contributed to strengthening the indigenous identities of Native American people.

Keywords: *Native American Poetry, Nancy Glancy, Colonisation*

The European settlement in North America led to the homogenisation of several culturally and linguistically diverse communities under one umbrella term, "Indians". Wolfgang Hochbruck, in his essay "'Native American literature': developments, contexts and problems", states that:

We ought not to forget that the very term 'Indian' (including the more 265 politically correct 'Native American', which does not cease to be a euphemistic newspeak version of the old time because it is more politically correct) has come to us from the darkest days of colonial rule. The 'Indian' tag was put on more than 600 tribes, all speaking other languages.... (Hochbruck 265-66).

But for the indigenous people of America this homogenisation process was beyond their comprehension since they perceived themselves as different people with great diversity of cultures, language, rituals, traditions and oral literature. This led to conflicts and chaos among indigenous communities fighting against white supremacy. Some embraced the foreign culture and promoted assimilation, while others continued fighting to preserve their native American identity. H. W. Hertzberg, in his book *The Search for an American Indian Identity: Modern Pan-Indian Movements*, identifies this conflicting historical context as the starting point of a collective discourse called Native American Literature. He says that the Native people needed to find some meeting point beyond the diversity of their respective tribes to create a solid and firm indigenous identity "and unity based on shared cultural elements, shared experiences, shared needs, and a shared common fate" (Hertzberg 6) against European oppression.

Gradually Native American literature, which was once rich with orally transmitted stories intended to preserve and spread the essence of their indigenous culture, got transformed into a written body of literature that, leaving behind their indigenous language, started using English as a medium of communication. The very presence of a body of literature called the literature of the marginalised or indigenous literature automatically points to the presence of majority literature which subjugated the other to the margins. In the context of European settlement, this dominant discourse was the one produced by the coloniser. As stated by Foucault, a practice of exclusion happens in the construction of dominant discourse. In his essay "The Order of Discourse", Foucault explains how the concept of "societies of discourse" controls the construction and validity of speech in a particular society (Foucault 51). It is a community entitled to the privilege to produce and propagate discourses in a closed structure. Only certain "societies" or communities are entitled to produce discourses.

The others excluded from the discourse are at the receiving end with the firm belief that they cannot enter the discourse to negotiate or change the present structures.

In this context, the notion of reverse discourse becomes prominent, which is an attempt to rupture the foundations of the dominant discourse to claim space for those excluded or subjugated by the dominant one. Native American literature becomes a reverse discourse in this context produced by the indigenous communities against the white European male discourse delivered about and against them. During the 19th century, many Native American communities found their existence seriously challenged by the influence of the oppressive white society, causing some indigenous peoples to proceed to assimilation and abandon their cultures. Many native American tribes were forced to leave their native land to live on the grounds authorised by the American government to relocate and assimilate them into mainstream society. "As a result, Native American children were recruited to attend government-run boarding schools to separate them from their parents and their culture while inculcating "Christianity and white cultural values upon them and encourage[ing] or forc[ing] them to assimilate into the dominant society" (Perez 177). Various legal reforms like Dawes Allotment Act in 1887 and various historical events like the American Civil war and the Wounded Knee Massacre in South Dakota in 1890 resulted in the assimilation of Native Americans as the only means of survival. They were reflected in published indigenous literature during the late 19th century.

But during the 20th and 21st centuries, Native Americans began to write about the ethnohistory of their tribes and the adaptation problems they encountered in the process of forced acculturation in the white-dominated mainstream society away from their language, rituals, and ancestral land. Gradually, the earlier Native American literature that promoted assimilation was replaced by a new body of literature that questioned the politics of assimilation and proudly embraced the indigenous cultural heritage. As stated by Perez, The rise of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s also contributed to this resurgence of Native cultures since it demanded an end to racial discrimination and the right of minorities to speak for themselves. In addition, during this period, there were different social and political changes in favour of Native cultural traditions, which are widely known as the Red Power Movement and helped increase indigenous ethnic pride and a sense of cultural uniqueness. (183)

Diane Glancy is one such writer who voiced the worries of her tribe in her works. Part Cherokee and part English and German descent, Glancy writes from her lived experience of cultural ambiguity and ambivalence. Her father, Lewis Hall, was of Cherokee descent, and her mother, Edith Wood Hall, belonged to an English-German-American background. The cultural conflict that every Native American experienced outside his home was a day-to-day reality for Glancy while living the life of a mixed-blooded hybrid. Like any other child of Indian origin, she found it difficult to reconcile her Indian lifestyle and what she was taught in school as part of western Christianised modern education. To add to all this, she encountered an identity crisis at home and was forced to witness the cultural conflict between her parents. Her mother detested her father for his Indian identity, and her father found it difficult to let go of his indigenous memories. Glancy's Cherokee great grandfather, Woods Lewis, was born in 1843 in what was then known as Indian Territory. Forced to flee Tennessee, where he joined the Fourth Calvary (Union Army), Lewis settled in Arkansas after the Civil War. The family lived until Lewis Hall, Glancy's father, moved to Kansas City. In her work, Glancy often reflects upon the tensions between her Cherokee and her European heritage.

As a poet, dramatist, essayist, and novelist, Glancy explores the question of native identity and mixed-bloodedness in her writings. Her works are autobiographical in that her characters are always searching for identity and spirituality, finally finding the same in their native culture. After a phase of her problematic encounter with her Cherokee and English heritage, Glancy decided to reclaim her Cherokee descent and found it easy to express it in her works. In her award-winning collection of creative nonfiction, *Claiming Breath* (1992), Diane Glancy writes, "I was born between 2 heritages, and I want to explore that space, that place-between-2-places, that walk-in-2-worlds" (4). The majority of Glancy's work is based upon Native American life as she juxtaposes traditional values and ways of life and modern American cultural context to explore and critique how her characters interact and respond to this mixed milieu which in turn mirrors the actual response of Native Americans forced to strike a balance between the native and the foreign. In her conversation with Peter Mishler, she says how she intends to give voice to the unheard voices of the past in her writing.

This paper is an attempt to analyse how Glancy attempts the historical restoration of the Cherokee heritage in some of her select works. The texts taken for discussion are two poems,

"without Title" and "Turning" The poems are autobiographical, documenting Glancy's journey of self-discovery as a woman of Cherokee and English origin. The poems considered for analysis here are a tribute to her father and, through her father, to all those Cherokees who were forced to leave their native identity. She says that her father's Cherokee heritage "has been the most important influence I've had. It's odd. It's also been the most discouraging and shameful. It has caused more trouble, as I am an undocumented Cherokee, which brings criticism from some people" (Glancy). It is her sense of separation from her origins while living in the land of immigrants that forces her to talk about her Cherokee identity. For her "a sense of separation is felt more intensely because interconnectedness is part of the Cherokee culture. When it is severed, there is a need to reconstruct it. If you knock down a spider web, the spider starts building again" (Glancy). Writing poems was part of her attempt to reconstruct her broken lineage with her origins, and the two poems mentioned above represent her attempts toward this.

"Without Title", published in 1990, is a poem that captures the intense loneliness and helplessness her father experienced after he migrated to the city. After WWII, the U.S. government's Urban Relocation Program promised Native Americans better jobs if they moved to towns and tried to join the mainstream society. This is reminiscent of the forced displacements of the five Native American ethnic groups that occurred between 1830 to 1850 by the American government. Notoriously famous as the trail of tears, which Glancy wrote about in her novel *Pushing the Bear*, this ethnic cleansing plan of the white settlers caused the natives to leave their ancestral homelands. Apart from the ethnic cleansing plan of the U.S. government, the Cherokee removal that occurred between 1836 and 1838 had economic reasons. The conflict between the Cherokees and the settlers developed over ownership of the land rich in gold deposits and fertile soil that could be used for farming cotton. Such forced dislocations were aimed at politically, culturally, and economically subjugating the real owners of the land. Such government projects snatched away the sense of belonging and identity of the natives, including the Cherokees.

After the second world war, again, natives were encouraged to move to the cities, further displacing them from their identity and subjectivity. The subtitle of the poem "For my Father who lived without Ceremony" refers to the sense of this loss. The verse "Without Title" also indicates the lack of identity with which the natives were forced to live. In "Without Title", the speaker's father moved from the land and life he loved to the city, where he tried to adapt since he had a family to look after. The father's shift from the wilderness and hunting to the stockyards was challenging. He experiences a sense of loss but never shows any outward

signs of this loss. Though he is temporally displaced from his culture, his spiritual and mental link with his roots seems to be intact internally. The poet seems to suggest how far one goes physically away from one's home, his sense of belonging that stays forever. There is a brilliant juxtaposition of the native and the foreign, the ancient and the modern, the Cherokee and the American cultures that the poet achieves in the poem. She says

I remember the animal tracks of his car
out the drive in snow and mud,
the aerial on his old car waving
like a bowstring. (Glancy)

The poem begins with the images of his Cherokee heritage, like the shaman, the Buffalo and the arrow and how the father had to live without all of these. Glancy begins the poem by admitting that "It's hard you know" to live without the marks of one's identity. But Glancy's father and many like her father were compelled to this forced acculturation. The lines, "All his life he brought us meat. / No one marked his first kill, / no one sang his buffalo song" (Glancy), refers to the sense of vacuum that every Cherokee felt while living in the city. Hunting was an integral aspect of Native American life. A man's initiation to adulthood was celebrated with his first kill. Buffalo song was part of the ritual observed during this process of initiation. But in the father's case, nobody celebrated his initiation. Instead, his life is shut inside the four walls of an animal stockyard, where he packs the meat of animals already dead. From the vastness and wilderness of the homeland, he is forced to limit himself in the constructed spaces of the city. His marriage to a woman of English culture further intensified this sense of loneliness and separation from his roots. Father's attempts to keep the spirit of his tribe alive by bringing back "his horns and hides" (Glancy) from the packing house were detested by the Christian mother, who said, "get rid of them." The poet remembers her father and the sense of his lost power. She says she remembers the painted red Buffalo on his chest, concluding, "Oh, I couldn't see it /, but it was there, and in the night heard / his buffalo grunts like a snore" (Glancy).

The poem's ending underlines that though the father never revealed his unhappiness in the city and tried to adapt to the changes, he was always a Cherokee. Buffalo hunting was an essential spiritual practice and the most important means of livelihood for the Indians. Reference to Buffalo in the poem serves another major purpose of reminding the world about the atrocities committed by the whites against the natives. Recognising the importance of buffalos in sustaining the native life, the white settlers decided to kill buffalos to pressure the natives to move to the cities. Generals William Sherman and Philip Sheridan believed if the

soldiers could eradicate the Buffalo, the Indians would have no choice but to give up. Soon, it became the norm for Sherman and Sheridan to provide opportunities for the rich and influential to travel West and hunt Buffalo with U.S. Cavalry guns alongside prominent generals like General William F. Cody (Buffalo Bill Cody), who claimed to kill 4,000 Buffalo himself. Hence, this lack of buffalo song symbolically refers to the white man's plan of ethnic cleansing. Glancy opines

Any culture that has undergone assimilation is not happy. Imagine a foreign country imposing itself over your land, not being allowed to speak your language, and suddenly having to follow its customs without understanding the reason behind it. Add to that the killing of sixty million Buffalo, on which your lives depended, and the introduction of diseases to which you had no immunity, which wiped out half your population. (Glancy) In her conversation with A M Jester, Glancy speaks about her relationship with her father and how she deciphered meaning from his silence. She says:

we didn't always communicate in words. Often I picked up on what he didn't say, which was most of what he said. He died in 1972 at the age of sixty-two. So I have to go back. He faced the past with silence. I was just together with him. I was part of him. He didn't need to tell me much. He didn't want to share the parts he kept to himself. (Glancy).

This is what Glancy attempts to do in her writing, to read meaning into the silences of the past to document the subjugation and displacement experienced by the Cherokees. In "without Title", her father's silence is indicative of the desperate helplessness and mastery experienced by the Cherokees who "without a vision (he) had migrated to the city" (Glancy). According to Glancy, this silence had other meanings. She says:

He had a work ethic and was a decent man. He took us to church. He said, without specific words, that we would get along in this post-colonial world of work and industry and do what was necessary. *Just be quiet and do your work.* .(Glancy)

But at the same time, his buffalo grunts reveal how reluctant they were to leave their roots behind and how unhappy their life in the cities.

"Turning", published in *The Shadow's Horse* in 2005, explores the ambiguous cultural identity and the resultant isolation that Glancy experienced as one with bearings in two different cultures. The poem excellently captures the cultural crisis that her family shared with her Cherokee father and white mother. The forced migrations had led Cherokees, as well as other Natives, to live in cultures and settings that were reluctant to accept them. Though the declared purpose of these dislocations was civilisation and inclusion of the Indians in

mainstream society, it never actually materialised. The natives remained to live as exiles.

Glancy explains her problematic ties with her Cherokee and German identities like this:

“I am German/English as well as part of Cherokee. And the "Indian" part is further fragmented by the fact I was not raised with tradition” (Glancy).

This Indian part of her identity was further complicated by her father's silence about the same. She says, "My father did not explain his heritage to me. I asked him what nationality we were in grade school because a teacher had asked me. He told me Cherokee, but it did not come with an instruction manual. We just were" (Glancy).

In "Turning", Glancy uses memory and images from the past to accentuate the theme of cultural identity and ambiguity concerning native Americans, especially Cherokee lineage. The poem portrays the conflicted feelings Glancy's father had about his heritage, which complicates Glancy's notions about her identity too. In her interview with A M Juster, Glancy explains how there were never many conversations between Glancy and her father about their Indian heritage. She says her father "didn't want to share the parts he kept to himself." (Glancy). Instead, she says in the poem, "My father's Cherokee heritage tucked under some sort of shame. The past" (Glancy). For the father, the past was something to be hidden, a source of shame that he kept to himself. This shame, on further analysis of the poem, reveals her father's means to assimilate into the new culture. Glancy also describes their life in the city as "a life of exile under the trees." The cultural difference between her father and mother is evident when Glancy says, "My father came to the stockyards./My mother from a farm." The lack of stability and the migratory nature of her father's life are captured in the phrase "came to the stockyard" because he never belonged there. But her mother, she says, was "from the farm". When Glancy's father got transferred, he "flew from Kansas City to Indianapolis/to look for a house." But they never found a home of their own. Glancy was left on earth, which appeared like "a sandbox in our backyard/where I made roads to a house I never found." This house symbolises the truth of her inability to feel at home neither in her Cherokee nor in her English heritage. This mixed-bloodedness and the subsequent identity conflicts are a regular theme in Native American literature. Towards the end of the poem, Glancy speaks about the sense of collective guilt that Glancy and her father carried in their minds about their past. She says, "Sometimes I thought we were together/because of something terrible we had done."

Both the poems discussed here capture the spirit of Native American literature. The poems can be seen as Glancy's attempt to successfully resist and challenge the subjugated spaces of existence allotted to the indigenous people by the white settlers. By retracing her lineage to a

mixed Cherokee English past and coming to terms with that, Glancy attempts to restructure her fragmented self to an intelligible whole. She says

I often feel like I work ground level on the prairie, flying under radar detection. Having a home in no particular genre but working in and across fiction, poetry, essay, and drama further clouds my sense of placement. I write between cultures. I was born in a city (Kansas City, Missouri) with a name of another state. My own last name is a nationality I am not. My middle name, which I go by, is not included on forms asking for first/last names. Growing up, the Indians mentioned in school were Plains Indians who hunted Buffalo and lived in teepees, yet my family was none of that; instead were from a woodland, sedentary corn-farmer culture. How could both be Indian? How does one work across barriers, erasures, syncretisms, misappropriations? How does one write about faith? These are themes I explore in the different genres.

The father figure in both poems represents the plight of all the Cherokee people who were forced to live in the alien lands without a title.

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