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"The Clash of Culture in Silko's Text Ceremony, Storyteller, and Garden in the  
Dunes"

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**ABSTRACT**

According to the British historian Perry Anderson, he says that the age we live into is the period we live to celebrate the cross over, the hybrid, and the pot-pourri. Many theorists of Hybridity have expressed themselves of double or mixed cultural identity. Homi Bhabha has describes himself as 'a mongrel culturally, the absolute cultural hybrid.' Edward Said refers himself as 'out of place' wherever he is located. The term hybrid, or hybridity, or hybridization, that so much marks the present day however, comes with a heavy prize of the loss of regional traditions and of local roots. It is present everywhere, especially when there is an encounter between cultures. "Examples of cultural Hybridity are to be found everywhere, not only all over the globe but in most domains of culture – syncretic religions, eclectic philosophies, mixed language and cuisines, and hybrid styles in architecture, literature or music" (Burke 13). This encounters between cultures lead to clash of cultures.

The Native Americans, being the indigenous tribe of America, have to move in two different cultures everyday: one of the tribal heritage and the other of the mainstream American culture to which they are exposed as children in boarding schools, as soldiers in the U.S. army. So, it is obvious for the people of the Native Americans to be influenced by the mainstream American culture. But there are also people who stick to their old tradition for they believe in maintaining and preserving their culture. This chapter highlights on the issues of Clash of views between the assimilative and non assimilative Native Americans; and clash of religion and social beliefs between the Whites and the Native Americans.

This clash of culture between the assimilative and non assimilative Native Americans is seen in their views, ideas, and beliefs. In *Ceremony* Grandmother represents the age old tradition while Rocky and his mother represent the assimilated Indians. If Grandma believes in clan worship Auntie talks of individual redemption. Besides Grandmother and Auntie had different opinions about the calling of traditional medicine man, Ku'oosh, for the treatment of Tayo's sickness. Auntie who is a representation of modern thoughts and is chiefly influenced by dominant white culture is against the calling of Ku'oosh. Moreover, she is a Christian woman who does not believe in such thing. Besides, she is also concerned of what the white doctor might think –

“No Indian medicine . . . the doctor won't like it.” (Silko 34)

“You know what the Army doctor said: No Indian medicine: old Ku'oosh will bring his bag of weeds and dust.”

Like a true Christian woman she is also concern of her family reputation; what the neighbor will think of their families, others might get a chance to gossip – these entirely bothered Auntie. When old Grandma told her about the need to call a medicine man for the treatment of Tayo's illness, she reacts in the following manner -

“. . . You know how they are. You know what people will say if we ask for a medicine man to help him. Someone will say it's not right. They'll say, don't do it. He's not full blood anyway. . . It will start all over again.” (Silko 33)

Tayo's aunt has fiercely protected her family from the gossip in the village. She was stern of her Brother Josiah's affair with his Mexican girlfriend. She says –

“I've spent all my life defending this family, but nobody ever stops to think what the people will say or that Father Kenneth will call me aside after mass to speak with me.” (Silko 88)

She was also stern about keeping the little son for her younger sister with them so that she can go around with other colored man. However, she took him in to conceal the shame of her younger sister. But years later after the death of her son, Rocky, she took him in and took care of him in his illness because he was all she had left. And indeed she needed a new struggle; another opportunity to show to people that she had still another unfortunate burden which will prove her a true Christian woman.

Dr. Uday Navalekar, in *The Ritualistic Universe of Leslie Marmon Silko of Relations in the text of the Native American Women Novelists* has argued that Tayo's aunt holds firm the view that it is the individual suffering and the endurance through it makes a true Christian and whom Jesus will save. However, Tayo does not believe it for he thinks that according to Native American culture it is clan worship and he believes in mass redemption; it is for the first time that Tayo hears of a God who tries to save individuals.

“Christianity separated the people from themselves; it tried to crush the single clan name, encouraging each person to stand alone, because Jesus Christ would

save only individual soul ; Jesus Christ was not like the Mother who loved and cared for them as her children, as her family.” (Silko 70)

On the other hand Old Grandmother is a representation of age old traditional beliefs. She insists on calling Ku'oosh for Tayo's sickness. She is of the view that the treatments of the white doctors haven't helped him. Unlike Auntie she does not care what the people might think, or gossip about them; what concerns her is the well being of Tayo – after all he is the only grandson that she has now.

“He's is my grandson. If I send for old Ku'oosh, he'll come. Let them talk if they want to. Why do you care what they say? Let them talk. By planting time they'll forget.” (Silko 33 -34)

Rocky, like his mother, also is very much influenced by the white culture since his school days. He believes in what the white teacher at school tells him. He deliberately avoided the old time ways because he understands that to be successful in the outside white world he has to avoid the old-time ways. He also feels embarrassing when people at home perform things in traditional way. When Rocky killed a deer, his uncle and father goes to the deer and sprinkled the cornmeal on the nose of the dead deer. They believe that by doing so they “show their love and respect otherwise the deer would be offended and would not come to die for them the following year” (Silko ). But all these rituals find him funny and embarrassing. Rocky is also against the cattle raising decision taken by uncle, Josiah because it was not based on scientific method. Rocky believes in books and scientific knowledge so accepting his uncle decision made him critical. Auntie never scolds him for the way Rocky is. Rather she wants him that way because she understands what white people wants in an Indian and she believes this way is his only chance to be successful in life. Besides Rocky was becoming what she always wanted “Someone who could not only make sense of the outside world but become part of it.” (Silko 76)

After much debates and discussion old Ku'oosh is at last called upon. He spoke to Tayo using the old dialect, a dialect that was impregnated with explanations of their own origin. So, Tayo has to strain to catch the meaning of what the old man said. Here, Tayo unable to understand the language spoken by Old Ku'oosh can also be seen as a result of clash of culture. He feels ashamed of himself because his language is interspersed with English words. Tayo since a child has been around with different people whom his mother has spent a night with. After his mother death, he is taken care by his aunt, grandma, and his uncle, Josiah, which is again different culture. So infusion in language is obvious.

Like Grandmother and Auntie, the result of this clash of culture is also seen in the ritual performed by old Ku'oosh and Betonie. Old Ku'oosh ritual of Scalp ceremony is based on the old system of Laguna. It has helped many Veteran soldiers who are haunted by the bad spirit from the war. This ceremony has worked back then before the arrivals of the Whites. But things changed with their arrivals. Betonie who is also a mixed blood Indian, has a deep

understanding that things must change with time because change lead to growth. And anything that doesn't grow is dead. Change keeps ceremonies strong. A. LaVonne Ruoff writes – "Herself influenced by many different cultures provides insight into why she emphasizes change as a source of strength for tribal traditions" (Silko 69-70). Silko has emphasized Change for their existence, for survival, for change is the need of the hour. But by change she doesn't mean switching over to the whites ways but by adapting '*to use alien traditions for their own purpose*' (Silko 72) and keeping in mind one's root.

The Scalp Ceremony (ceremony meant for the warrior) that old Ku'oosh performed has not worked on Tayo. He has a different understanding or believes about warfare. According to him, a person "couldn't kill another human being in battle without knowing it, without seeing the result, because even a wounded deer that got up and ran again left great clots of lung blood or spilled guts on the ground" (Silko 36). So Old Ku'oosh remains skeptical when Tayo said that he didn't know if he had killed any enemy during the war. But he is certain that "There are something we can't cure like we used to, not since the white people came" (Silko 38). He also admits that others who have gone through The Scalp Ceremony some of them are not better either.

On the other hand Betonie, another medicine man who treated Tayo, believes that Ceremonies have always been changing. It must change with the change of time because change leads to growth. Moreover, it is this growth that keeps the ceremonies strong.

Change of Ceremony in the rituals performed by Betonie can also be seen as the result of cultural clash. Betonie explains that since the white settlement things have changed and it does not work the way it did before. So, ceremonies have also changed with the change of time. He says that to keep the ceremony strong it must change and "things which don't shift and grow are dead things." (Silko 126)

Indians who leaves the Reservation to seek a better opportunity in the white man's world are more acquainted and adoptive of the whites' way. So when they return back they find difficulties in adapting life at the Reservation. Harley, Emo, Leroy, and others after their return from the war to the Reservation, finds themselves unable to adapt to their age old tradition. And having nothing much to do spend most of their time raising hell in the Reservation. They spend their time drinking alcohol and telling stories of the past event to each other. They believe that by doing so they are trying to get back the good times they had when they were in their uniforms.

There are also some people who believe that assimilation with the dominant culture would change their lives and make things better. Such kinds of people adapt to the white ways and think they are better than the ones who have not assimilated with the dominant culture. In *Storyteller* of *Storyteller*, the jailor who is an Inuit (Eskimo) does not speak Yupik to any of his prisoners. He ignores them until they speak English.

"The jailor was an Eskimo, but he would not speak Yupik to her. She had watched people in other cells, when they spoke to him in Yupik he ignores them until they spoke English." (Silko 17)

Again, the dormitory matron who is also an Eskimo, but had worked for the BIA for a long time considers her people who didn't assimilate with the white culture as backward people.

It is seen that those who are use to the whites ways and had been away from home to be at the boarding school are more likely to forget their culture and cultural traits like - how to set nets in the river and where to hunt seals in the fall.

But assimilation has not always proved worthy or advantageous for the Indians. In *Lullaby of Storyteller*, Chato fine talks in both English and Spanish have not changed his condition. His years of loyalty to the white rancher have not made any difference in his decision to remove Chato's family from his house. When Chato broke his leg and could not work he was not paid and when he became too old to work for him anymore he was asked to move out from his shack the next afternoon. In the case of Ayah, she suffers because she has learned some of the whites' way. By learning how to sign her name she signed away her children thereby giving authority to the people who came to take her children.

Assimilation has also not worked for the Indians who have served the US army. In *Tony's Story of Storyteller*, Leon who has just come back from the army to the Reservation see things in a different manner than his other fellow friends whose lives have been limited to only Reservation. He has a different view and understanding of "rights" and "goodness" than his Reservation friend. Once when Leon and Tony went to Grants to get a roll of barbed wire for his uncle, they were stopped by a white cop for no reason. From his statement – "I don't like smart guys, Indian. It's because of you bastards that I'm here. They transferred me here because of Indians. They thought there wouldn't be as many for me here. But I find them" (Silko 119). It seems he is in the lookout for any Indians to be bothered, whether it be anywhere on the highway. Leon is very angry and shook his head saying – "He can't do it again. We are just as good as them" (Silko 118) He believes that like the other white people they too have got every right to be on the highway. But Tony on the other hand understands that it is not all about "rights" or "goodness" that they are after. Tony whose world is just limited to the Reservation has learned to compromise their liberty and be tolerant about such torments by the whites. Instead he finds Leon and others who have come back from the army as troublemakers because they cannot adjust to lives at the Reservation.

In *The Man to Send Rain Clouds* of Storyteller, the sprinkling of holy water at times of funeral to the dead body is interpreted differently by the Teofilo family. Here Teofilo's dead has made his family members think that he is the man to send Rain Clouds. Leon while painting the old man's broad nose and chin he says – "Send us rain clouds, Grandfather" .P- 174 At time of his funeral Louise thought about calling the priest so that he could sprinkle holy water to the dead body. She believes that by doing this his dead Grandpa would not be

thirsty. So, Leon goes to ask the priest if he could bring his holy water to the graveyard. But the priest insisted that for a Christian burial there should at least have the Last Rites and a funeral Mass. He however at last agrees and took his holy water. He sprinkles the grave but the water disappeared almost before it touches the cold sand. So, he sprinkles more water, he shook the container until it was empty. Leon is happy and satisfied about the sprinkling of the holy water. He is sure now that the old man would send them big thunderclouds. But the priest, who has just sprinkled the grave, keeps wondering about the need of the sprinkling of the holy water.

1. Clash of religion and social beliefs between the Whites and the Native Americans.

If Silko's *Ceremony* and *Storyteller* presents the clash of culture between the assimilative and non assimilative Native Americans based on views, ideas and beliefs, *Garden in the Dunes* presents the clash of culture between the Whites society and the Native American based on religious and social front. In *Garden in the Dunes* Silko has carefully depicted about the Indian ghost dance, which is actually a result of the fusion of the traditional Indian dance with western notion of Jesus Christ. The Indians have a particular belief that Jesus is not dead but live somewhere in the high mountain. And when the Indians will dance this dance Jesus Christ would come to them along with their love ones who are dead. According to a Paiute woman a Paiute prophet named Wovoka died and visited Messiah who gave him instructions about this dance. Jesus was very angry with the white people at the destruction they have done to the earth, to all the animals and people. They believe that through this dance – "the used-up land would be made whole again and the elk and the herds of buffalo killed off would return" (Silko 23). Though the dance was a peaceful dance and meant no harm to the white people, they however took it otherwise. They feared the dancers were a secret army in disguise ready to attack them.

Indigo when she was young and was together with her mother, sister and grandma, she has witnessed the event at a close range. She heard her mother and sister say they saw the Messiah walking beside His mother followed by his eleven children. Indigo described his coming thus –

" . . . Their white robes shined . . . the Messiah and the others, who seemed almost to float as they descended the high sandy hill to the riverbank." (Silko 31)

So when Hattie confronts her about her being orphan as recorded in the school, Indigo assured her that she was no orphan. She told Hattie that she knows where her mother and sister were. She says her mother had escaped with the messiah and his family and the other dancers into the mountain. But Hattie is more surprised to learn from Indigo that the Messiah she was referring to was no other than Jesus Christ. She is shocked to know that the Messiah was still alive and lives with his family up in the mountain. Though she clarifies saying – "the Jesus I know lived very long ago, far across the ocean . . . Jesus died in Jerusalem" (Silko 124), Indigo still inclined to her beliefs and told Hattie many

were fooled by what happened. She says after the soldiers tried to kill Jesus, he left that place and returned to his home up in the mountain.

Sand Lizard people are proud of themselves for they know how to eat nearly everything. But Indigo misadventure during her stays at Mr. Abbotts' house (Hattie's Father) has landed her to the small settlement of Matinnecock Indians near Manhassat Bay. Her short stay at this place has led her to peek life of the Matinnecock Indians at a close range. She is surprised to know that people there cooked and eat the odd flat rocks they get at the beach. Though their people know how to eat nearly everything, they didn't know how to cook and prepare rocks. She is also amazed to learn that the flat rocks didn't require much time to cook.

Indigo also expressed her dislike for an English word 'Goodbye' when Hattie and Mr. Abbott came to take her after her misadventure to this small Reservation because 'Goodbye' means gone, never seen again. Though she called out the word to the woman while taking leave she strongly says "I hate that English word" (Silko 171) with tears on her eyes. And when Mr. Abbott enquire the word that means goodbye in her language, she says – "The Sand Lizard people don't have any words that mean that! . . . They say, we'll see you soon, or we'll see you later." (Silko 171)

The vehement reply by Indigo startled both Hattie and Mr. Abbott. There is no doubt under the care of Hattie and Edward, Indigo has learned to accept and appreciate whites mannerism/ways, but there are certain things which she could not appreciate like - Susan's attempt to beautify her garden which is under renovation at the sake of planting big trees brought from other place. She could not appreciate her idea of planting big trees brought from other place just to give a mature touch to her (Susan) new garden. Indigo could not understand the need for such thing and that also is done in such a pompous manner. Indigo is shocked to see the great copper beech trees brought in such manner -

"Wrapped in canvas and big chains on the flat wagon was a great tree lying helpless, its leaves shocked limp, followed by its companion; the stain of damp earth like blood seeped through the canvas. As the procession inched past, Indigo heard low creaks and groans – not sounds of the wagon but from the trees." (Silko 183)

Indigo pitied the trees lying helplessly rather than enjoying the pompous procession.

Indigo is very fond of nature – it can be any birds, animals or plants. Her concern for the parrots, the monkey and the tree shows her fondness for nature. This fondness of nature is also innate in Sister Salt heart. When Candy took her to the sandy ridge high above the construction site after rescuing her from jail for petty thief, she is shocked at the destruction meted out by the whites. She sees that the river had been forced from her bed into deep diversion ditches, where the water ran angry red. Besides big earth-moving machines has uprooted groves of ancient cottonwood trees. Sister Salt says –

"The poor cottonwood trees and willows were ripped out and plowed into mounds of debris, where their roots reached out plaintively like giant skeleton hands. Oh poor trees! I'm sad for you, Poor River! What have they done to you?" (Silko 216)

Indigo has never wanted to accompany Hattie and Edward to their majestic tour to the east. She has never wanted to part with Linneaus, the monkey, had it not been her only dream of seeing the messiah who had escaped the soldiers to the Far East with her mother. She hopes to find her mother if she sees the Messiah. Their visit to a small town of Bargo led them to learn about the appearance of the image of Jesus' Blessed Mother on the front wall of the little schoolhouse which is at the edge of the village. The people there also told them that the miraculous wall brought them a steady stream of visitors to their village. But recently a disagreement between the townspeople and the church official sprang up as the visitors and pilgrims who used to visit the gold and silver portrait of Mary in the abbey shrine seldom go there anymore after the appearance of Mother Mary on the front wall of the school, where no offerings are required to see the Mother of God.

During their visit to the site they witness the exchanged of loud words between the family of their hosts and a smaller group of villagers led by the Catholic monks. Indigo believes that after the exchanged of such ugly words The Blessed Mother was not likely to appear because she remembered what the Paiute women have told that "people must be kind to one another or the Messiah and his family would not come down from the mountains"(Silko 319). But a moment later as the light changed Indigo sees reflection glittering on the surface of the school wall. She narrates the scenario just like the night before when the Messiah appeared with his family.

On their journey back to Livorno from Bastia they are detained by the custom officers at the pier in Livorno. Later Edward is arrested in charge of smuggling as the custom officials found many cuttings of citron twigs in their luggage while Hattie and Indigo are asked to remain at the American consulate until further noticed. Hattie though shocked at their arrest, still hopes that there was a misunderstanding because her husband had special authorization from the U.S. Agriculture Secretary. Hattie could not believe such things happened to them; she did not break down when she sees all their belongings scattered nor did she cry when they took Edward away, but she breaks down when they were led to a room set aside for American citizens in distress. Indigo, however, takes Edward's arrest in stride as it didn't mean anything because back at home people get arrested for no reason. So there is nothing to feel ashamed or bad about it. Moreover, the police there are not like the Indian police and soldiers of Arizona who shove or kick the people arrested. Indigo to cheer up Hattie tells her stories about the times Grandma Fleet and Mama were caught and later escaped them. She also tells how she and Sister Salt were caught and were tied so that they couldn't escape.

Indigo and Sister Salt years of separation has led both sisters to acquaint themselves with the world/society they live into. And when they finally met



each other they talked nonstop in a mixture of English and the Sand Lizard language. But after days of togetherness Sister Salt finds Indigo's behavior just like the white people. When Indigo got uneasy waiting for Hattie's return who promised to come after every 30 days, went on to check for a letter if Hattie might have written any. She finds nothing and came home with tears rolling down her cheeks. At this Sister Salt feeling angry at the woman for letting her sister cries with a loud whisper said "She's not coming back!" (Silko 446) The Chemehuevi girls, Maytha and Vedna, also agree with Sister Salt but Indigo thought otherwise. She murmurs if this is how her sister repays the kindness and generosity of a stranger (Hattie) who too eats the food Hattie brought, see by the light of the lamps and oil that Hattie brought. Sister Salt is shocked by the comments made by her sister and at her behavior accuses her saying – "You sound like a white girl! Listen to yourself!"

"Listen yourself! You're the one! You hurt feelings without a second thought just like white people!" (Silko 446)

It is not only that Indigo has learned the white ways during her stay with Hattie rather Hattie also has changed her perspective about her understanding of the Messiah after her stay with Indigo. Hattie so far has been concern over Indigo's wrong notion about Jesus, the Messiah who claims to have seen the Messiah during the ceremonial Ghost dance. She thought the harsh experiences and losses that Indigo has gone through at an early age have made a deep impact on her mind. So, both Edward and Hattie have decided to ignore her exaggeration and fantasies about Jesus. But later at the end we find Hattie accusing her father when he came to take her away from the care of Indigo and Sister Salt, thereby intervening in the Ceremonial ghost dance, where all the dancers gathered to meet the messiah at this fourth day. Hattie was so angry she told her father –

"The authorities might have ignored the gathering one more night if he had not come looking for her there . . . this fourth night of the dance she hoped to see the Messiah. Don't let the authorities interfere!" (Silko 470)

We find Hattie waiting impatiently for the coming of the Messiah at the Ceremonial Ghost dance so that her spiritual beliefs could be lifted up. She changed her notion about the Messiah and now wants to seek resolution through this Indian ceremonial belief for she remains irreparable after being ravished by her people for going extra miles to help Indigo. But unfortunately before the arrival of the Messiah the ceremonial Ghost dance was stopped when Hattie's father along with other Whites' officials came looking for her. The novel begins with this ceremonial Ghost dance and ends with it, leaving many people lives' irreparable.

Leslie Marmon Silko, in both *Ceremony* and *Storyteller* has presented the clash of culture between the Assimilative and non Assimilative Native Americans based on ideas, views, beliefs etc. Many Native Americans who have assimilated to the dominant Whites culture thinks of themselves better than the ones who have not assimilated and consider those as backward. They also have

viewed assimilation as the only means to stop racism. Some have viewed as an answer to the question of survival. But assimilation has not always proved worthy or advantageous for the Indians. It has not changed the plight of the people. Rather they find themselves caught in between. They are neither accepted in the American whites society nor are they able to adapt to the life at the Reservation. Silko, no doubt has believed in changes as change is the source of strength for tribal tradition but by change she does not mean switching over to whites' ways. Rather by change she means 'adapting to use alien (whites) tradition for their own purpose' and also keeping in mind one's root.

However, in *Garden in the Dunes*, Silko has brought the clash of cultures between the Whites and the Native Americans based on religious and social belief. Here, Silko has begun the novel with the incident at the Ceremonial Ghost Dance. This incident happened because of the two contrasting cultural views. The whites have this idea that the Indians has gathered up to attack them. But the Indian has performed this ceremony so that they can be healed for their year's long endurance of loss, pain, segregation etc. by invoking Jesus Christ through their peaceful dance. They believe in healing rather than blaming. They meant no harm; however they are taken otherwise.

In this age of the cross-over or the hybrid, encounters of cultures often lead to clash of cultures. The Native Americans who have to move between two different cultures everyday – one of the tribal heritage and the other of the mainstream American culture –it is obvious for them to be influenced by the mainstream American culture. So, clash of views, ideas, beliefs, etc. can be seen between themselves, which has termed as clash of views between assimilative and non-assimilative Native Americans. Many Native Americans who have assimilated to the dominant Whites culture thinks of themselves better than the ones who have not assimilated and consider those as backward. They also have viewed assimilation as the only means to stop racism. Some have viewed it as an answer to the question of survival. But assimilation has not always proved worthy or advantageous for the Indians. It has not changed the plight of the people. Rather they find themselves caught in between. They are neither accepted in the American Whites society nor are they able to adapt to the life at the Reservation. Silko, no doubt has believed in changes as change is the source of strength for tribal tradition but by change she does not mean switching over to Whites' ways. Rather by change she means 'adapting to use alien (whites) tradition for their own purpose' and keeping in mind one's root.

This paper explores the theme of Clash of religion and social beliefs between the Whites and the Native Americans. In *Garden in the Dunes* Silko has carefully depicted about the Indian Ghost dance, which is actually a result of the fusion of the traditional Indian dance with western notion of Jesus Christ. But this ceremonial Ghost dance is banned by the U.S. Government for they cannot think of an Indian to be a Messiah. It is a peaceful dance and meant no harm to anyone but the Whites take this gathering as signaling an attempted attack on the Whites. The Indians perform this ceremony so that they can be healed for their year's long endurance of loss, pain, segregation etc. by

invoking Jesus Christ through their peaceful dance. They believe in healing rather than blaming. But anyone seen participating in this ceremony are punished, arrested, and taken to prison. As a result of this many are segregated from loved ones.

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