

CULTURAL ANTHROPOLOGY OF NATIVE AMERICANS IN *BLACK ELK SPEAKS*

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ABSTRACT

The research examines the issue of the cultural anthropology of Native Americans, which is embedded in the work Black Elk Speaks by Deloria and Neihardt (1979). It shows the multiplicities present in native Americans' culture, and struggle for the survival of that culture. This is a literary study using qualitative paradigm of research as it is used to gain an appreciative of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations. Sub-category is Ethnographic research in that it talks about the shared experiences of the peoples regarding their culture and ideologies. The research talks about the lives of black people as how they live in past and in present era. "Black elk speaks" delineates their rituals and ceremonies such as their hunting process, war procedures, getting food from animals and their connection with the nature. The study covers the central event of history of Native Americans. Neihardt and Deloria (1979) show the importance of animals and nature in their lives. Hunting is the main part of their culture and for this purpose they use bison. After hunting, there are proper celebrations of making and preparing food. According to their views all the things take place in a circle. There is circle for moon and seasons. There tepees are also in the form of circles. The research also depicts the contrast between whites and blacks. Blacks live in round houses and whites in squared houses. Both of the nations have exclusively different cultures. In Black Elk Speaks (1979), Black Elk is a major character. He is telling the story of himself but it is not the story of Black Elk, it is the story of the whole Native American nation. In the past natives lived with peace and harmony. Their culture was far better than the white culture. Animal imagery is a key point in their culture. Their names are based on the names of the animals. Their visions are very strong. They have the ability to do predictions for the upcoming situations. The study will aim to provide an opportunity to study native American culture that is not as much as famous comparing to other American culture.

Key words: John G Neihardt, Vine Deloria, Cultural Anthropology, Native Americans,

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Anthropology is a study of human societies, culture and their development. It tells us about the past, to see how people lived hundreds or thousands of years ago and what was important to them. Cultural anthropology focused on the study of cultural variations among humans. It is the study of commonalities and differences of both past and present culture. According to Carol and Ember (2010) cultural anthropology defines as the set of learned behaviors and ideas that are the characters of particular populations.

Deloria (1979) said that twentieth century was an era of conflicting ideologies. *Black Elk Speaks* is based on the beliefs of the Indians who have been searching for roots of their own in structure of universal reality. It shows spiritual and cultural ideologies for Native Americans. Electronic media shuffle them from the reality of human history. Native Americans are unable to bear the attack of media and industrialization, because these things snatch their cultural and sociological ideologies.

The study is an inspiration for other work related to Native Americans. They wanted to inherit the vision for next generations. In the work, *Black Elk Speaks*, the *Sioux* has lost the sacred hoop of their nations. They did not lose it through the lack of faith or other internal weakness; they lost it to the forces of white Americans.

1.2. Significance of the study

Black Elk speaks (1979) is valuable from an anthropological standpoint because it covers the *Sioux's* transition from pre-reservation to present reservation life. It includes descriptions of hunting, cooking foods, ceremonies and rituals. It depicts Indian behavior at war and it offers a privileged glimpse into the Indians spiritual and social life. Deloria (1979) said that the book's greatest effect has been on young Indians who are trying to establish their culture. *Black Elk Speaks* call attention to the loss of cultural symbols most importantly the circle, which is the central symbol to Sioux belief because the power of the world always works in circles. It is also said that *Sioux* culture was never lost; it only went underground or transformed itself under new appearances.

1.3. Statement of the problem

The problem which is addressed in this research is cultural anthropology of native Americans which is present in the work *Black Elk Speaks*. *Black Elk Speaks* call attention to the loss of cultural symbols most importantly the circle, which is the central symbol to Sioux belief because the power of the world always works in circles. It is also said that *Sioux* culture was never lost; it only went underground or transformed itself under new appearances.

1.4. Research Objectives

Research objectives that can be formulated in the study based on the problem, such as: it shows the history of Native Americans culture and their relationship with animals and nature. It shows the fight of black people against white people for the persistence of their cultural heritage.

1.5. Research Questions

1. How this research depicts the tragedy of Native Americans culture?
2. How it covers the central events of history?
3. How animals reflect the Native Americans relation with the nature?
4. How different groups of people get food?
5. Why humans compare with the animals in Native Americans history?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Lewis (2009) Native Americans paint their face to represent their cultural and spiritual ceremonies and rituals. Ceremonial paint is also used to obtain power from the spirits. Several concepts related to spirits are dominant part of native Americans culture.

Zedeno (2008) said that native Americans have a strong bondage with nature, the earth and the animals. They have a belief that their relation with these things reward them with extraordinary powers and characteristics such as courage, strength, stealth and health etc.

According to Paterek (1994) black peoples also have a tradition to rub fish oil on their bodies for safety. Tattoos and masks are the most popular South-east traditions. Nevertheless, face paint was used as a "masculine adornment" during festivals. Red, black, russet, and yellow, are the most common colors between them, and white was used on the last day of the festival.

Demallie (1948) said that Black Elk had a strong desire to study other religion. He converted into catholic. Black Elk was still a holy man, only now it was for the Catholic Church. One missionary reported that Black Elk was responsible for about 400 conversions.

Deloria (1988) condemned anthropological group keeping to its unoriginal dissection of living Native American cultures. Twenty-five years later, anthropologists have become more sensitive to Native American concerns, and Indian people have become more active in fighting for accurate representations of their cultures. Indian and non-Indian scholars examine how the relationship between anthropology and Indians has changed over that quarter-century and show how controversial this issue remains. Practitioners of cultural anthropology, archaeology, education, and history provide multiple lenses through which to view how Deloria's message has been interpreted or misinterpreted. Among the contributions are comments on Deloria's criticisms, thoughts on the reburial issue, and views on the ethnographic study of specific peoples. A final contribution by Deloria himself puts the issue of anthropologist/Indian interaction in the context of the century's end.

Animal foods is also a major part of the Native American diet. When humans first arrived in North America they appear to have been predominantly hunter-gatherers and megafauna including mastodons and giant ground sloths as an important part of the diet. Native American diet depends to a large extent on the indigenous plants and animals in the area where they lived. For example, saw palmetto berries are a unique common food of the Florida tribes, desert tribes used the fruit and leaves of the prickly pear cactus, and bison is an important food of the Native American tribes of the western Great Plains, and is one of the few large mammals used for food by the early Clovis people that avoided extinction.

According to Adair (2015) the native Americans are familiar with a great many herbs and roots, of which the general part of the English has not the least knowledge. If an Indian were driven out into the extensive woods, with only a knife and a tomahawk, or small hatchet, it is not to be doubted but he would fatten, even if a wolf would starve. He could soon start a fire, by rubbing two dry pieces of wood together, make a bark hut, make earthen vessels, and a bow and arrow; then kill wild game, fish, fresh water turtles, gather a plentiful variety of vegetables and live in affluence. He also described some of the fishing methods that impressed him the most, such as wrapping one's hand with a cloth and putting it into underwater holes where catfish waited and would swallow their hand, allowing the Indian fisherman to pull the catfish onto the bank of the river or stream.

Black Elk Speaks represents the issue of Native Americans culture. They lost their cultural heritage due to the wrong and forceful policies of white Americans. They look to it for spiritual guidance, for sociological identity, for political insight, and the affirmation of the continuing substance of Indian tribal life. Sioux hunting practices shows the example of the loss of culture. The bison is the symbol of source for them. Even the Transcontinental Railroad's separation of the herd into two halves, when Black Elk was still a child, did not seem especially threatening; as he says, half of the herd was still more than they could use. A complex cultural event, the great bison hunt, occurring just after his vision, is an arena for the hunters on horseback to display their courage and bravery.

The food supply is a source to control the behavior of Native Americans. "When the bison herd was lost, so was contact with the sacred along with a sense of Sioux identity and

independence” (Neihardt, 1979). Loss of their wandering way of life was another example of cultural displacement of Native Americans. He said that in the loss of traditional practices, *Black Elk* calls attention to the loss of cultural symbols, which is central to Sioux belief because "the Power of the World always works in circles": The world is round, the moon is round, and the seasons return to repeat themselves cyclically. In reflection of this, tepees were built around circular frames, and the structure of the community was understood as a circular image, the sacred hoop.

The research provides a support to the research questions which are mentioned above. The basic purpose of the research is to show the diversities of Native Americans culture, development of the culture, and their relationship with one another. *Black Elk Speaks* shows that how Natives spend their life in past and in present time, and how white culture impact on it.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The framework which is used in this research is ethnographic research methodology. Ethnographic research is a type of qualitative research. It studied people in their natural occurring setting. It provides the detailed description of people's daily life practices. *Black Elk Speaks* represents the daily life practices of Native Americans. It shows their closeness from their reservation. Ethnography is a methodology for descriptive studies of culture and people and looks at the people, cultures and commonalities of shared experiences. This research is basically focused on the Native Americans cultural heritage which is mentioned in *Black Elk Speaks*. The data are collected or studied from different articles, websites, and journals and from books which are related to research topic.

4. Discussion

Black Elk Speaks (1979) is divided into twenty chapters which depict black elk's early life. It symbolically shows the life whole Native American nation. It shows the mystical vision which is present in them. As a tribal history, it records the transition of the Sioux nation from pre-reservation to reservation culture, including their participation in the Battle of Little Bighorn, the ghost dance, and the massacre at Wounded Knee. It shows the sufferings of natives from the hands of the whites. It is an elegy for the passing of an age of innocence and freedom for the American Indian and his current cultural displacement. It is an autobiographical work. *Black Elk* points out that my story is the story of the whole tribe. The story is narrated from the first person point of view and in this *Black Elk* used "I" not for himself but for whole Sioux tribe. He gives us the message of collectiveness.

Black Elk and *Neihardt* smoke a red pipe, and for them it is a very sacred pipe that they offer to the great spirits. The four ribbons tied to the pipe represent the powers of the four quarters of the universe:

The black one is for the west where the thunder beings live to send us rain; the white one is for the north, whence comes the great white cleansing wind; the red one for the east, whence springs the light and where the morning star lives to give men wisdom; the yellow for the south, whence come the summer and the power to grow. (p. 2)

All four powers unite in one Great Spirit, which is represented by the eagle feather, also a recurrent symbol in the Native Americans culture. Every sacred thing is attached to their culture.

Black Elk Speaks shows the increasing tension between Native Americans culture and White Americans culture. Whites are wanted to settle on the lands of natives and for this purpose they are trying to destruct black culture. Whites have a lust for gold and land. White culture is totally opposite to the black culture. Black Elk tells the story of past events when Indians and animals lived together in harmony, "Once we were happy in our country and we were seldom hungry, for then the two- leggeds and the four- leggeds lived together like relatives" (p. 9). Hunting was poor, and people suffered from snow blindness during this cruel winter. Black Elk most often refers to geographic locations according to features in the landscape, especially rivers, which were important as a source of water and food. Black Elk's statement that he was born on the Powder River, rather than in Wyoming or South Dakota, is an expression of Indian culture that contrasts with the U.S.

Black Elk Speaks talks about the war methods, used by Indians during their battleship with whites *Black Elk's* elders threaten the children with the white man, so that they grew up in fear of whites; the young children act out their war games against imaginary Wasichus (whites). "All this time I was not allowed to play very far away from our tepee, and my mother would say, "If you are not good the wasichus will get you." (p. 13). War with whites became a game for small boys:

But all the boys from five or six years were playing war. The little boys would gather together from the different bands of the tribe and fight each other with mud balls and the big boys played the game called Throwing – Them – Off- Their – Horses, which is a battle all but the killing; and sometimes they got hurt." (p. 15).

Natives fight without clothes and Whites were iron clothes to protect themselves. Black Elk tells that we feel comfortable to be fight without clothes. He said that whites use different weapons to kill us while we make our own strategy to kill them. They settle their horses into two circles and both circles move in anti-directions. It was difficult for wasichus to shot them. The word circle is very important in the lives of Native Americans. For them the power of the world is done in a circle. Birds make their nests in circles. The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle. The moon does the same and both are round. Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing and always come back again to where they were.). Black Elk tells that our strategy is better than their strategies and they called us uncivilized people.

Native Americans have the strong power of great vision. They have the ability to do the prediction for the coming events. The vision comprises a coherent system of image that has commonly understood meaning among the Sioux. The numbers four and twelve have major significance, for example, the number 12 is used in the number of virgins, horses, and bison. There are four directions (north, south, east, and west), four seasons, four ages of a person's life, and four ages of tribal history. Different colors and qualities, as well as sacred objects are associated with the four directions that mark out the four quarters of the world.

Nature is very important for Native Americans. Animal imagery is a very dominant aspect in Native Americans history, for example, in their names, their foods, their plays, animals are present. Nature is the dominant environment for the Sioux. They calculate time according to events in nature, "have made little islands for us and other little islands for the four-leggeds, and always these little islands are becoming smaller, for around them surges the gnawing flood of the Wasichus; and it is dirty with lies and greed." Respect for animals is a major feature of Sioux

culture throughout *Black Elk Speaks*. The bison herd is central to the Sioux way of life; its existence is incorporated into ritualized hunting practices and feasting, and bison are killed with economy: Nothing is wasted, Black Elk says, in contrast to their arbitrary slaughter for sport by whites. The horses, which were so important to the Sioux for warring and hunting, are cared for and guarded carefully. They become sacred animals in Black Elk's vision, which he later enacts as the "horse dance." Black Elk's vision sensitizes him to animals; he can hardly bear to hunt after having the vision, and he feels a special kinship with the eagle after being given the power name Eagle Wing Stretches.

CONCLUSION

The research concludes rituals and ceremonies which are present in Native American culture. It also provides the evidence for the research questions which are mentioned above. It shows that how natives live in their societies, what type of culture they have and how it develops. It tells us how Native Americans live in past and about the things which are important for them. It shows the conflicting cultural ideologies which are present between whites and blacks.

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