



**IN THE BACKGROUND 'THE SPIRIT WEEPS' AND IN THE FOREGROUND
'THE SPIRIT SINGS', AN APPRECIATION OF STEPHEN HUME'S ESSAY 'THE SPIRIT WEEPS'**

ASHA.M.NAIR

Guest Lecturer

NSS College, Pandalam, Kerala



ABSTRACT

Stephen Hume's essay titled 'The Spirit Weeps' appeared in the Edomonton Journal and in some of the southern newspapers between February and June 1988. The essay discuss about the pathetic condition of Canadian aboriginals. The exhibition named 'The Spirit Sings' conducted as a part of 1988 Winter Olympics shows the inhuman behavior of the officials towards aboriginals. The authorities were celebrating with the ruins of aboriginal culture. Colonization entirely damaged the culture and tradition of natives. Now they took the role of preserver and show their interest to materials rather than humans. Hume presents his views about the discriminations of authority towards the natives of Canada.

Key Words : exhibition, relics, aboriginals

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Stephen Hume's 'The Spirit Weeps' was a comment on the controversy surrounding 'The Spirit Sings'. The exhibition 'The Spirit Sings: Artistic Tradition of Canada's First People' was held at Glenbow Museum as a part of the Arts Festival of the 1988 Winter Olympics. The main aim of the exhibition was to educate the Canadian people about the native heritage of their country and to bring the wealth of Canadian native materials kept in foreign countries. It was popular among the general public but some native organizations boycotted the event. Many representatives from aboriginal nations across Canada gathered to oppose the exhibition.

In his essay 'The Spirit Weeps', Stephen Hume powerfully expresses his views about the discriminations of authority towards the aboriginals of Canada. The organizing committee of the exhibition intended to show their stunning power and intensity. But according to Hume it was an act of

national hypocrisy. The great irony was that for the authorities the exhibition was an act of ethnological display but it drew the ire of aboriginals because it exposed certain relics to public view. The exhibition shows the culture and authenticity of colonized people. For them the relics, art and craft of these aboriginals are only materials to show public. But for the aboriginals it was related to their life, the root of their culture. So it created deep wounds in the hearts of them. The exhibitions became the greatest evidence against the destructive force of European settlement and the cruelties of Canadian institutions against aboriginals, their tradition and culture.

The relics displayed were the beautiful artifacts and art crafts of the native artists which were robbed from the rubbles of cultures and traditions. After colonization Canada was gone through many difficulties. Women and children were massacred by punitive fur traders. Economic improvement ceased. They were denied universal

access in the law. Children were not allowed to speak in their own language in federal schools. Ritual ceremonies and religions were legally banned. They were denied the right to vote. All these together made Canadian history a dark epoch.

The officials were celebrating the success of the show but young natives decided to put forward a rebellion against this cruelty. Some of the natives tried to recapture their holy relics legally. But all attempts went futile. The Papaschase lands, which originally belonged to the aboriginals, were occupied by the University of Alberta. The Lubican band arranged a public protest for the boycott of 'The Spirit Sings' epically against showing a sacred ceremonial mask. For the natives it was an act of showing total disrespect to their culture. But they were suppressed. The exhibition proved that the official authorities were interested only in materials and not in human beings.

The magnificent artifacts of the Martim Provinces, Hurons, Micmas and Caligulas were displayed in the exhibition. All these nations were either perished or endangered by European invasion. Hume says that this is a cultural destruction that approaches genocidal proportions. The ruling society rejected the social, political, cultural, spiritual and philosophical values of the natives. The native culture was only to enrich their museums. Thus it is proved that human life struggling for existence is less important compared to their ancestral wealth.

The pestilence and inflection of smallpox made the Assinbonies, from a powerful nation to a pitiful one begging for food. Now a day they live in Indian Reserve which was created to save a few aboriginals who survived the brutality. But even there they are not safe because some bureaucrats try to bring them under their domination.

In 'The Spirit Sings', they exhibit about thirty artifacts from the extinguished Beothuk nation in Newfoundland. The Beothuk nation was destroyed by these people and now they are exhibiting its remaining. They even displayed the skulls robbed from the grave of a Beothuk woman, her husband and child whom become prey to the cruelty of John Peyton's Party.

The spiritual nature of Indian life celebrated in the exhibition was remarkable but at the same time shameful. Hume explains the role of Christian missionaries who tried to displace all the spiritual beliefs the exhibition celebrates. Igloodik Community's Inuit settlement and Tsartlip Indian Reserve of Vancouver Island are living examples of this brutality according to Hume. The Canadian Parliament supported the church by prohibiting the practice of religious and cultural ceremonies. In a protest against this many people were arrested.

The aboriginals treated their ancestral materials and art crafts as sacred. They were the remains of the native culture. But for the officials who conducted the exhibition, they were only materials. The Ottawa Segment of the exhibition, Glenbow exhibition and almost all segments of the exhibition created deep wounds in the minds of natives.

One visitor of the exhibition wrote: "Sometimes our spirit has wept. Sadness for my people who lost so much of their spirit when their ceremonial objects were laid down or taken away."

Stephen Hume in his essay 'The Spirit Weeps' gives a clear picture of the brutality faced by the aboriginals of Canada. The people who destroyed their culture now take the role of "preserver" and pretends to save the native culture by exhibiting the remaining of the cruelties once done by them. The title itself shows the contradiction. For the officials it is 'The Spirit Sings'. But for the aboriginals it is 'The Spirit Weeps.' Hume warns that it is the responsibility of every Canadian to protest against this injustice. Hume concludes the essay with a request to the Prime Minister of Canada to kneel before the pathetic remnants of the Beothuks and pray to the god as invoking him in the National Anthem both for the national forgiveness and for what, that was done to the Beothuk, Huron, the Assinbonies; may never be done to Canada.

In the foreground the officials put the masks of preservers and conduct the exhibition as 'The Spirit Sings'. But at the background the aboriginals weep for their lost heritage.

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