

## ***REVISITING LEGENDS AND THE CONFLICT OF THE LIBERAL WORLD IN LOUISE ERDRICH'S NOVEL THE PAINTED DRUM***

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### ***ABSTRACT:***

Tribal culture and tribal knowledge are an up-and-coming genre of study to understand their culture, heritage and legacies better through literary works. A literature that is fast rising and changing according to social vicissitudes, the exceptional traditions of addressing their issues and bringing to light their struggle to a world that keeps changing is commendable. Louise Erdrich is one kind of a multi-ethnic writer who shares stores from first hand experiences. Being a member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, she explores themes further into native experience and how it feels to be an outsider in their own land. Her novels have a deep personal level of connection, things she saw as she grew up at the reservation and stories she heard from her grandparents and her mother. *The Painted Drum* is a different tell, it is a modern version where a woman goes on a journey to revive a very unique tribal artifact that mends the past and the present of the troubled souls lives in a mystic way. The novel calls out the emotions in distress and unhappy and binds them together in the process of revival.

### ***INTRODUCTION***

Tribal literature is a reflection of the experiences of native/ Indigenous people, their life being an unspoken race that is widely exploited and displaced in various ways. For centuries oral tradition of carrying their culture, myths and heritage was highly rich and

celebrated. At the break of early 20<sup>th</sup> century things started changing when invasion, exploration of sea fares and religious workers intruded their lands and foreign settlers increased the crisis for their original identity was fast rising. The natives took to writing their complexities and fading myths amidst the rising issues of mixed blood, change in multiple ideologies that endangered their species.

Louise Erdrich one of the finest native writers was born to parents of two different identity. She felt the need to trace back her originality and kept visiting the reservation to connect with what she thought would give her the sense of belonging. In today's modern time it is really challenging to find one's roots that connect you to the sense of belonging, it is a frail perspective that could be side tracked in today's world that victimises one's identity and emotion. Louise Erdrich through her novel creates a world that connects Native and non-Native culture, family relationships, emotional turmoil in the reservation that stunts their race and the myths and elements of Ojibwe myths and legends.

### ***REVISITING LEGENDS***

*The Painted Drum* is a novel that discovers the modern notion of Aboriginality. Built around the stories of characters of Ojibwe tribe that interweaves with a Painted Drum in the artifacts house left unheeded. The Drum entices Faye Travers, an estate appraiser who is part-Ojibwe called to the ancestral home of a recently deceased neighbour where she stumbles upon an incredible collection of American Indian artifacts. The neighbour was a descendant of an Indian agent on the Ojibwe reservation where Frye's grandmother lived as a child.

The fates of every character in the story are differently interlinked with their aboriginality, the Drum is the centralised artifact that links them all. Faye Traves partially an Ojibwe has a successful real-estate business in the rural parts of New England far away from the possible

native call yet she is drawn to explore the long-lost roots and find herself in the attics amid artifacts.

Shaawano, who stayed true to his the traditional Ojibew identity lived his life by making a living through hunting and fur trading, created the Drum from scratch in the memory of his deceased daughter. Bernard, the grandson of Shaawano, is a middle-aged caretaker in a hospital of an Ojibwe reserve who inherited the knowledge and stories surrounding the Drum from his family and relatives. Shawnee, a young nine-year-old lives a life of poverty and malnutrition on the reserve, developed a mystical connection with the Drum while rescuing her siblings from a house fire and a blizzard. This was the first time the drum made connection to the living; it's been saving the souls in distress.

The connection between the characters and the Drum is more emotional than mystic or superficial. The even ground to all the characters in the novel is the transformation the Drum causes with its feral music. Bernard recapitulates the power of the drum perfectly saying:

*“All of the people who lived close to the drum and dreamed up its songs or helped the drum somehow—repaired it or gave it gifts [...] That’s what the drum is about—it gathers people in and holds them. It looks after them [...] but this drum had its own history and sorrow.” (198)*

The Drum is even when it takes and gives, it connects people and transforms lives as an Entity would. Other characters like Shaawano and Faye, walked out of tragic familial histories and develop a newfound sense of confidence and direction in improvising life. Further characters like Bernard and Ira (Shawnee’s mother), were able to meet and create new connection with new people and become deeper engaged with their cultural and social roots.

Yet in other aspects the Drum did show some imperfection. It has a more of a sub plot history involving Shaawano, the tragic death of his daughter, and the betrayal of his wife and overall, it deemed to be an epic tale of truly mythical magnitudes. There was also situation in history, the Drum was also hidden, neglected, and eventually sold for profit. The full antiquity of the Drum is incomplete, and many of its songs long forgotten, faded from collective memory. Like most cultural artifacts, the Drum is not immune to the passage of time and the faults of cultural transformation. Despite its power, real, mythical, supernatural, or otherwise the Drum holds diverse symbolic value to different people at different times.

***That's what a drum is all about - it gathers people in and holds them.”(268)***

*Louise Erdrich (The Painted Drum)*

### ***References:***

- Erdrich, Louise. The Painted Drum. Harper Collins UK, 2006.
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- <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/louise-erdrich>