

## Racial Favouritism in *Three Day Road*

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### Abstract

Literature has had a significant impact on people's lives. It uses an empowered vocabulary to depict mankind's inner reality. There is room for recollections, contemplation, reflection, foreshadowing, flashbacks, and horrible memories tinged by suffering, injuries, and trauma. Contemporary writings create stories of anxiety by making the character feel free to express the difficulties caused. Joseph Boyden, a renowned Canadian writer and activist, examines the social, political, and spiritual bonds people face through his writings. He wishes to depict the pain and anguish of the characters in order to acquire self-awareness and self-confidence in expressing one's issues. Boyden has also faced racial troubles. He is a Canadian of Scottish and Irish descent, who are called Metis Canadians. His tribal recognition has been criticised by some activists because of his mixed identity. The present study, 'Racial Favouritism in *Three Day Road*', presents the racial indifferences portrayed by Joseph Boyden in his novel *Three Day Road*.

**Key Words:** racial discrimination, intergenerational, aboriginal

### Racial favouritism in *Three Day Road*

Aboriginal communities worldwide are always targets of discrimination of various kinds. They are racial, communal, language, religious, and similar things. The group or individual who discriminates against the aborigines claims and tries to establish that they are more culturally developed and civilised than the aborigines. The colonisers subsequently subdued the aborigines not by their superior wisdom but by their sophisticated weapons. Consequently, the colonisers established their supremacy over the natives by marginalising them. The natives, after losing their land, culture, religion, and language, fight for their survival.

Violence against the affected is generated when they seek, quarrel, or fight for their rights. Some discrimination is opposed orally by the discriminated individual or community, and they might succeed. Some opposition turns their lives and communities into slavery. Such people are unable to raise their voices against the colonisers, who are more powerful. It becomes more painful for the people when they are relegated to the position of slaves in their own land. This, in fact, leaves an indelible scar of humiliation for the future generation. To heal the scar inflicted thus or to step out of the trauma caused, the offspring of the colonised choose literature. It is widely believed that indigenous people were a major earmark for racial targets by settlers and explorers until the freedom

struggle among nations. Joseph Boyden has exposed the humiliations of Cree people in Hudson Bay, which is the setting for his Bird series' of novels.

Joseph Boyden was born in 1966 in Ontario, Canada. He is of Irish and Scottish descent and is widely known for his writings on indigenous people in Canada. He has published four novels, three non-fiction books, and a short story collection to date. These works commonly present racial discrimination and distortion in native life. The article entitled "Racial favouritism in *Three Day Road*" throws light on the racial bias targeted by the colonies against the natives in Canada. Alienation and racial discrimination in the war field and in residential schools are some of the racial troubles faced by the natives, as narrated in the novel.

*Three Day Road* begins with Niska, a medicinal woman, waiting in a railway station for Elijah, who is returning from the war field. Elijah does not have the strength, both mentally and physically, to confront war due to combat trauma. Surprisingly, Niska finds that it is Xavier who has returned from war and not Elijah. The novel brings details about the confusion later, as the military badges are bartered by Elijah and Xavier at the war field. Niska, Elijah, and Xavier are the primary characters of the novel. They are close relatives, and they belong to the Cree tribal clan of Hudson Bay. Niska travels in a canoe for three days, carrying Xavier, to reach her home in Hudson Bay. During the course of her journey, she expects to heal Xavier from physical and mental trauma before reaching home to start a new life. The novel ends after their canoe journey, with the hope of survival after healing. The novel discusses issues such as war confrontations, alienation, distorting the natives and their community by settlers, racial issues in war, native residential schools, etc. In this article, various forms of racial discrimination presented in the novel are discussed.

The natives in the novel are alienated by the colonisers. The bias expressed by the settlers is seen through the characters Niska, Xavier, and Elijah. Alienation occurs to them in various forms, especially to people whose livelihood is still in the lineage of native life. Niska is one of the natives who is still residing in her native land. She neither indulges in non-natives nor practises their culture, but she never disrespects their way of life. The whites stare at her and talk about her as if they have never seen anyone like her before. She is socially alienated by the Wemistikoshiw. She calls the non-natives "wemistikoshiw" (16), and to the wemistikoshiw, Niska is a "wild old woman, an Indian animal straight out of the bush." (16) Niska is able to understand the inner voice of the Whites through the way they look at her. The Whites expect their culture, tradition, language, and religion to be followed by the natives. The natives who do not retreat from the Whites' expectations will be recognised as Whites. Niska is seen as wild and uncivilised through the eyes of the whites, as her life seems to be uncivilised among the Whites.

Niska is seen differently by the Whites, as she does not have the values of the other natives who have amalgamated culturally with the Whites. The novel does not show the privileges offered by the settlers to the natives who do not resist the life of the Whites. Instead, it reflects the outcome of the settlers expecting a wemistikoshiw life from the natives. The development of social and communal unfairness among the natives has become common among the Whites. But Boyden's second novel, *Through Black Spruce* (2008), points out the privileges for the natives who are in support of Whites, even for socially disapproved matters. *Through Black Spruce*, the local police do not charge or punish people who are doing socially unapproved business, such as selling drugs made by the Whites. No solution is given to the affected people or their families when a crime is committed by a person who supports the settlers. Though Boyden expresses racial humiliation through Niska, she is not the only character who is facing the same, there are more people like Niska who are racially humiliated by the

Whites. The racial difference among the natives represented through Niska is intergenerational. The racial turmoil affects people for generations and is shown in the novel.

Elijah and Xavier face racial threats while travelling on a train in combat fatigue. Though the soldiers are travelling in the same train, cabins are allotted for them on the basis of their race. A fellow soldier asks Elijah and Xavier not to enter their car, as separate cars are allotted for Indians. As soon as they entered the train, "A man in a uniform said to us, soon as we got on, "No Indians in this car." He pointed down the aisle. "You belong four cars to the back"" (168). The sad thing is, cars with good seats are allotted for whites, and cars with seats made of wood are for natives. Xavier said that "The seats are wood and uncomfortable. The smell of animals in the next car is strong" (168). The sufferings of Niska, Xavier, and Elijah show the attitude of European settlers towards the indigenous people. When Elijah and Xavier are reported to Lieutenant Breech about their talents on the battlefield, "Breech says that it is our Indian blood, that our blood is closer to that of an animal than that of a man" (109). Elijah and Xavier are two of the best snipers in their troop. Their indigenous experience in hunting for years makes them able to shoot down enemies precisely. But appreciation from an officer for gallantry needs racial acceptance.

The third racial disapproval referred to in the novel is racial threats in the residential schools of Canada. The purpose of residential schools in Canada is to disrupt native children's indigenous systems in their society, community, and family. The final report submitted by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in December 2015 described the residential school system as "aggressive assimilation" (12). They have referred to their outputs in the third page of their final report as "The Canadian government pursued this policy of cultural genocide because it wished to divest itself of its legal and financial obligations to Aboriginal people and gain control over their land and resources. If every Aboriginal person had been 'absorbed into the body politic,' there would be no reserves, no Treaties, and no Aboriginal rights." The residential schools have achieved their purpose of purging all the strengths of Indigenous and First Nations cultures.

The native children in the Canadian residential schools are troubled at school because of their racial identity. Children are abused sexually, physically, and emotionally by the residential institution. Children are not given the freedom to do activities or games based on their age, especially indigenous crafts, games, and sports. In schools, parents are not permitted to meet their children, and the children are not allowed to visit their parents at home because children are supposed to meet their parents only during yearly holidays. Xavier, Elijah, and Niska suffered in residential schools.

Niska describes her experience at residential school as unpleasant. Niska is forced to learn English, and she is punished if she is caught speaking in her tongue. While speaking about the punishment for speaking in Cree, Niska says, "When I was caught speaking my tongue, they'd force lye soap into my mouth and not give me anything else to eat for days" (101). Her hair is shortened from her waist to her neck so as to represent that having hair until her waist could mean natives are superior to whites. Niska says that, "They were going to remove the black hair that reached to my waist as a symbol of wemistikoshiw authority, of our defeat... "they sheared us like sheep"" (101). When Elijah and Xavier are at school, Magdalene, a nun in the residential school, tells them that "The Cree are a backwards people and God's displeasure is shown" (65).

Throughout the novel *Three Day Road* from a native's perspective, the Europeans have disregarded the natives. The portrayal of racial indifference traumatises the natives. This situation is called as racial trauma. Racial tensions, including racial prejudice and racial assault against their skin colour.

This unsafe environment against their skin tone leads a person to experience racial trauma. It affects all oppressed or marginalised ethnic or racial minorities in large numbers. The Bird family had their own laws and rules in Hudson Bay before the entry of the colonies, but the colonies ruled over the natives. The natives' culture, traditions, and children are under the umbrella of the European Union. It is clearly seen in the novel, the indigenous community of Canada is targeted by European settlers. Through the treatment received by Niska, Elijah, and Xavier during their time at residential schools, the battle field, and their encounter with Whites.

*Three Day Road* justifies that the indigenous people are subjected to racial threats by the White and European settlers, which distort native life for them neither by force nor by amalgamation in lifestyle by the natives themselves. They were unable to drive out the traumatic situations and share the same with other people. The effects of the stories of the past led to intergenerational trauma. Sigmund Freud, in his book *The Origin and Development of Psychoanalysis*, speaks of this psychic pain as "*but in the unconscious the suppressed wish still exists, only waiting for its chance to become active, and finally succeeds in sending into consciousness*" (21). Healing is the only possibility of getting out of the racial trauma. This novel can be further read on the basis of psychoanalysis and healing.

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