



Exploring the Distinctive American Aboriginal Culture in Louis Erdrich's *The Antelope Wife*

Ramesh Prasad Adhikary, PhD

ORC ID: 0000-0002-9889-3825

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Tribhuvan University,
Mahendra Multiple Campus, Nepalgunj

rameshadhikary29@gmail.com

Abstract

*The objective of this study is to investigate and analyze the various cultural aspects of Native Americans in Louis Erdrich's novel *The Antelope Wife*. This research also aims to examine how the novel challenges the marginalization of Native American culture by mainstream Western culture. The novel is analyzed using a qualitative approach through close reading and interpretation of the text. Native American thinkers such as Gerard Vizenor, George Elias, and Anna Secco provide theoretical insights that support the analysis. The research finds that *The Antelope Wife* portrays the complexity and plurality of Native American culture caused by different customs, language, rituals, and religion. The novel highlights the valorization of Native American culture through the lifestyle, clothing, behavior, attitudes, and values of protagonist Scranton Roy and other Native American characters. The research also shows how the novel challenges the relative marginalization of Native American culture by mainstream western culture by foregrounding Native American culture. Due to its rich and nuanced representation of Native American society, the study concludes that *The Antelope Wife* is an important contribution to Native American literature. The novel challenges the marginalization of Native American culture by mainstream western culture by highlighting the richness and diversity of Native American culture. The research emphasizes the importance of recognizing and valuing diverse cultures and calls for greater respect and appreciation for Native American culture.*

Keywords: *diversity, marginalization, mainstream, Native American culture, plurality, western culture,*

Introduction

Louise Erdrich's novel, *The Antelope Wife*, is the focus of this research, which examines how it assigns value to Native American culture. Furthermore, the study centers on the enhancement of knowledge pertaining to the richness and diversity inherent in Native American culture. The actions, attitudes, beliefs, clothing, and lifestyles of the characters portrayed in the novel present the richness of their culture. The specific cultural and sociopolitical realities of Native American locations are the subject of this study. The current research explores the aspects of Native American culture's valorization that mainstream western culture has concealed. To advance Native American culture through study, this research utilizes the insights of Native American studies philosophers such as Gerald



Vizenor, George Elias, Anna Secco, and others, who possess a profound understanding of the subject.

Through the inclusion of Native American culture, mysticism, issues of salvation, and the triumph of Native American cultural practices in the novel *The Antelope Wife*, which demonstrates the Americans' steadfast devotion to their culture, Erdrich has challenged the relative marginalization of Native American society with the negative stereotypes from the west. Protagonist Scranton Roy and other Native American characters in the book illustrate this. Throughout the story, the distinctive language and culture of Native Americans are used to highlight the distinctiveness of the American aboriginal people.

Aboriginal culture refers to the "living cultural heritage of Aboriginal people, which includes knowledge, beliefs, values, customs, languages, laws, music, dance, storytelling, art, and spirituality" (AIATSI, 2020, para. 2). Aboriginal culture is deeply connected to the land and the environment, and traditional practices and beliefs emphasize the importance of sustainability, respect for nature, and living in harmony with the natural world (AIATSI, 2020).

According to Gipp and Amundson (2018), Native American refers to "individuals who are citizens or members of tribal nations or communities, have a cultural and historical connection to an indigenous community or communities, and/or identify themselves as indigenous" (p. 20). The authors note that Native American people have a unique status as both citizens of the United States and members of sovereign tribal nations, and their experiences are shaped by both their tribal identities and their interactions with mainstream American society.

Louise Erdrich grew up in Wahpeton, North Dakota, where her parents used to work in the Bureau of Indian Affairs. He was born in Little Falls, Minnesota in 1954. In 1979, she graduated with a master's degree from John Hopkins University. Her Chippewa heritage is reflected in Erdrich's literary work, which spans fiction, poetry, short stories, essays, and literary criticism. In these works, the complicated sexual and family relationships experienced by Native Americans of mixed and full bloodlines are explored as they grapple with issues of identity in a white, European-American culture. Louise Erdrich, an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians, also known as Ojibwa and Chippewa, is regarded as one of the most significant authors of the second wave of the Native American Renaissance. She examines the idea of baptism by blood, water, or the essential desire for redemption in the Roman Catholic tradition in her critically acclaimed a book of poetry, *Baptism of Desire*. In her book *The Beet Queen*, Erdrich delves into the enduring enigma of the human condition with empathy, humor, and strength while weaving a vivid and emotionally powerful tale of desertion, sexual infatuation, jealousy, and undying love.

In *The Antelope Wife*, Louise Erdrich continues to explore the lives of the families found in her earlier novels, using her characteristic unsentimental and honest style to capture the Native American experience of despair, magic, and humor. *The Antelope Wife* is portrayed as a graceful woman who remains elusive and silent, with a mystical connection to nature. Her journey to find love and survive has a profound impact on the lives of those



around her. Erdrich weaves together themes of ancestry, fate, tragedy, and redemption to create a tapestry that is both modern and timeless, leaving a lasting impression on the reader.

A post-Civil War cavalry attack on an Indigenous community sets the tone for *The Antelope Wife*. When a newborn girl was born in the community, Blue Prairie Women tied her to a dog's back, which the dog subsequently jumped off of in panic. Scranton Roy, one of the troops, dismounted and started after the infant. He took her into his arms, nursed her, gave her the name Matilda, and nurtured her as his own daughter. Matilda's teacher, who Scranton Roy married, gave birth to a boy after their union. Augustus was his given name. Blue Prairie Woman, a female, became pregnant through her husband Shawano, a male, and gave birth to twin girls called Josephette (Zosie) and Mary; nevertheless, she was compelled to leave the infant twin behind in order to look for her first-born kid. She found Matilda and gave her directions, but she quickly died from a condition common to white people. She changed the name of her daughter to the Other Side of the Earth and made plans for an antelope herd to watch over her till she passed away.

The narrative then discusses the lives of Scranton Roy, Matilda, Augustus, and Zosie and Mary Shawano's contemporary children. Beads by Cally Whiteheart Roy is the narrator and imaginative reenactor of their lives. Roy is a descendant of some of those characters. Although though she tended to focus more of her narration on the life of her mother, Rozin, she is unquestionably a crucial character in the story. *The Antelope Wife's* core is centered on Rozin's violent conflicts with Cally's father Richard Whiteheart Beads and her handsome lover and eventual second husband Frank Shawano.

In *The Antelope Wife*, the stereotypical narrator Cally narrates and combines several tales to shed light on the background of individuals and situations that seem peculiar to her. For instance, Cally imagines the history of Sweetheart Calico, a character with unusual behavior who may be partially antelope based on Cally's perception of her conduct. Moreover, chapters told by a dog are inserted between Cally's narratives. The novel has comedy throughout and is both tough and humorous. The two ladies, Sweetheart Calico and Rozin, ultimately find happiness by emancipating themselves from tyrannical husbands.

Objective of the Study

1. To investigate and analyze the various cultural aspects of Native Americans portrayed in Louis Erdrich's novel *The Antelope Wife*.
2. To examine how the novel challenges the marginalization of Native American culture by mainstream Western culture.
3. To provide a nuanced and complex portrayal of Native American culture and to emphasize the importance of recognizing and valuing diverse cultures, specifically Native American culture.

The Review of Literature

Since its release, *The Antelope Wife* by Erdrich has garnered several critical reviews. This exceptional book is both a complex tale of mysterious individuals and a brazenly



unsettling reflection on the struggle to create a future full of promise and hope out of the remnants of the past. Various reviewers have examined the work from different angles. Native Peoples' emotionally uprooted existence as they attempt to uphold tribal customs while yielding to the temptation of the larger civilization are the topic Erdrich explores. Across time and across bloodlines, family stories seem to repeat themselves in patterns and waves. She presents the narrative of Native Americans who are uniquely valorizing their culture in a wonderfully written tale of intricate interactions among future generations. Ken Kessey states the following under this circumstance:

The intricate craft of Native American beadwork is the central metaphor upon which Erdrich strings her multiple, intertwined narratives. Everything is all knotted up in a tangle. A pull one string of this family and the whole web will tremble. Family -- both immediate and ancestral -- is a tensile bond that links the novel's characters, as much a hangman's noose as a lifeline. (p. 4)

Hence it can be seen that the author has the best success when writing about his own people, whether they are interacting with one another or having chaotic connections with the English or Americans. Kessey (2006) goes on to discuss the narrative elements of Erdrich's works, which she uses to illustrate the Native American cultures and customs. The characters in the story, which is completely alien to western culture, vividly show the family nexus and its obligation upon the members and society.

The novel, Keplom (2005) opinion, is smart and fascinating. The narrative begins like a nightmare with an American cavalry attack on an Ojibwa village, the death of an elderly woman who utters a critical phrase, the unintended kidnapping of a child, and a mother's agonizing quest. Over time, a kidnapping, suicide, and a child's death all happen. He receives a Blitzkuchen recipe, a strip of lover's calico, and a blue bead necklace as signs of his fate:

Two complementary tales of troubled marriages generate the emotional white heat in Erdrich's novel, despite the presence of many stories. Sweetheart Calico, silent and wrathful, is the "antelope wife" of the title, named for the fabric that ties her to Klaus Shawano, the man who abducts and enchants her away from the open places where land meets sky. She languishes in the urban prison of Gakahbekong (contemporary Minneapolis, where much of the novel's action takes place). Even more affecting is the story of Rozin -- one of a number of twins who populate this populous novel -- and her husband, Richard Whiteheart Beads, the charismatic, self-destructive man whom she feels a "hopeless mixture of tenderness, hatred, exhaustion. (p. 23)

In Erdrich's story, there are a lot of inexplicable disappearances, mythical stories, and human frailties. It also has a dog that cracks sexist jokes and a lady that is bare-chested when her anniversary is approaching. Erdrich highlights the contrasts of daily existence, exemplified by braided grandmothers who adhere to tradition but wear eyeliner and sneakers. Love, desire, and longing have the power to seduce both men and women, who become slaves to alcohol, secrets, or hope.



Derek Wright claims that the concept of freedom may be viewed as a scientific metaphor. Thus, the phrase "free state" seems to refer to the ad hoc movement of electrons about the atomic nucleus, whose speed and position may be detected, but never simultaneously, and which are said to be "in a free state" since their movement cannot be exactly charted. Like the characters in the narrative, particles move in unexpected, unsuspected ways.

The work eventually honors the bravery of pursuing one's predetermined route in the world and overcoming fate's trials, even though the plot occasionally sags under an excess of emotional complexity. It is a convincing illustration of Erdrich's narrative prowess. Like the chaotic motion of subatomic particles, the narrative's flow has a wandering, associative form of logic that encourages a variety of potentially false correspondences between its episodes.

Family stories pass down from one generation to the next through recurrent patterns. In a sensual novel, Erdrich returns to the emotionally uprooted lives of Native Americans who struggle to maintain tribal customs while falling prey to the pull of larger culture. In the opening scene of the novel, American cavalry besiege an Ojibwa village, which reads like a fever dream and ends with the death of an elderly lady who utters a vital line. A dramatic mingling of tragedy, farce, and spiritual revelation connects the progeny of the white soldier who kidnaps the newborn and the bereaved Ojibwa mother.

Over time, there is a further kidnapping, a child dies, and a person commits suicide. A blue-beaded necklace, a piece of sweetheart calico, and a recipe for Blitzkuchen are used to predict fate. A nude wife surprises her husband on their anniversary while the dog delivers naughty jokes in front of onlookers. Men and women are enslaved to alcohol, closely held secrets, or the alluring force of hope in every generation. Love, desire, and longing enchant them. This demonstrates Erdrich's narrative talent through several narrations. Erdrich strives to address all the many facets of Native American life by developing several story strands. In this regard, Aime Larsen explains:

The intricate craft of Native American beadwork is the central metaphor upon which Erdrich strings her multiple, intertwined narratives: Everything is all knotted up in a tangle. A pull one string of this family and the whole web will tremble. Two complementary tales of troubled marriages generate the emotional white heat in Erdrich's novel, despite its inclusion of many stories. Sweetheart Calico, silent and wrathful, is the "antelope wife" of the title, named for the fabric that ties her to Klaus Shawano, the man who abducts and enchants her away from the open places where land meets sky. (p. 59)

According to Aime Larsen, Erdrich effectively portrays Native People' cultural position by using diverse and entwined narrative styles. This story has a heavy emphasis on topics related to marriage, love, and sexuality in order to illustrate various family structures. By combining two parallel tales of unhappy marriages with a complicated familial nexus, the work is special in its own right, claims Aime Larsen.



In *The Antelope Wife* by Louise Erdrich, the story takes place in Minneapolis, but there are connections to the ancestral land where three families, white, Ojibwa, and mixed blood, were brought together. According to Vanessa Guignery, Erdrich's writing style is a blend of geographical, human, and literary elements that create a complex narrative weaving together both Native American storytelling and post-modern literature. This hybrid technique establishes a liminal territory that appears to be "cracked apart." *The Antelope Wife*, according to Vanessa Guignery, is a complicated book that combines ancient Native American tribal culture with postmodern literature. Examples of hybridization include the combination of several Native American tales into postmodern literary forms.

The literature review provides a comprehensive overview of the critical reviews of *The Antelope Wife* by Erdrich. The reviewers discuss the themes and elements of the novel, such as family ties, Native American culture and traditions, troubled marriages, mythic legends, and personal weaknesses. But they haven't touched the issue of the uniqueness of aboriginal culture of Native Americans in the novel *The Antelope Wife*. This research is unique as the researcher has raised a novel issue in it.

Methodology

This study employs a library-based approach and utilizes a rigorous discursive analytical method that draws upon Native American vocabularies and authentic sources. The research is founded upon the examination of texts related to the Native American cultural issue, and the application of these texts from the perspective of Native American culture is used as a tool. The researchers use Vizenor's (1968) writings on the issue of Native American culture, as well as the theories of other Native American cultural theorists such as George Elias and Anna Secco (1992), to support the hypothesis of this research.

Texts, journals, and novels related to the issue of Native American culture, which are used as tools to apply the perspective of Native American culture to the analysis. Writings by theorists on the issue of Native American culture, such as Gerald Vizenor, George Elias, and Anna Secco have been used for this research. This research is Library-based research, which would involve searching for and gathering relevant sources from various academic databases, archives, and libraries. The discursive analytical method, which involves closely examining and analyzing the texts and sources to identify and interpret key themes and patterns related to the research question. Close reading, which involved analyzing specific excerpts from the novels to provide evidence for the hypothesis. The application of the Native American perspective, using vocabularies and cultural perspectives of Native American culture to analyze and interpret the texts and sources.

The field of Native American Studies has seen an increased interest in hybridity, transnationalism, and diaspora, leading to mixed reactions. Arnold Krupat was one of the first critics to view Native American literature as a form of resistance against efforts to establish imperial hegemony and essentialist definitions of Native identity, using cultural translation, hybridity, and interstitial spaces. Gerald's research in "Recovering American Indian Intellectual Traditions" focuses on Native American culture and how they have been



"othered" by mainstream Western culture. These theoretical issues have been used for the analysis of the novel.

Native Americans have unique clothing and eating habits that are steeped in tradition. Different tribes in North America had their own distinct styles of dress, headdress, and ornamentation. Native Americans are indigenous people who settled in parts of the United States, Canada, Alaska, and Hawaii, and are believed to have arrived in North America thousands of years ago. It's estimated that there were up to two million indigenous people living in the United States and Canada at the time of European discovery. Many researchers believe that Native Americans migrated from Asia and parts of Europe by crossing the Bering Strait and traveling across oceans.

Textual Analysis

In her 1998 novel *The Antelope Woman*, Erdrich integrates a wide range of motifs, symbols, and viewpoints pertaining to the cultural renewal processes occurring in modern Native American society. These elements have been mythologically crafted to mirror the experiences, problems, events, and contradictions that many Native Americans face challenges as they attempt to blend their varied cultural traits and legacies into a strong and unified identity. The main images and figures illustrate a perceived gulf between Native American and non-Native American cultures. This division appears in a variety of dualistic pictures, such as twins, gender ambiguity, and connections between humans and animals. The novel's diversity of people, lifestyles, and viewpoints highlight the wide-ranging implications of cultural renewal and heightens its complexity. *The Antelope Wife* is a tale that depicts pictures and symbols of Native American culture's resurgence and makes recommendations for how to preserve traditions while thriving in the contemporary world.

In Erdrich's novel, *The Antelope Wife*, the author, who is herself of German and Chippewa descent, prominently features characters who share similar mixed-blood backgrounds. Through the exploration of these characters and their experiences, the novel investigates the complexities and misunderstandings inherent in the concept of being "mixed" or "split." The narrative takes identity into account in light of current Indian, American, and human experiences. In a 1987 interview, Erdrich stressed the importance of an identity issues and the challenges associated with blending non-Indian and Indian cultures. Her book does, however, imply that negotiating the difficulties of divided, mixed, or blended worlds is possible. Lorena Stookey contends that the novel's depiction of characters surviving a tragedy and celebration of the life-affirming force of the resolve to endure make perseverance in the face of apparent incompatibility an important issue.

In *The Antelope Wife*, Erdrich shifts her focus from the North Dakota town that served as the setting for her earlier works to fresh group of people and issues in Minnesota. The three complex, interrelated extended families at the core of this novel, which crosses generations and nations, are the Roys, the Whiteheart Beads, and the Shawanos. The protagonist, who stands in for three families, embodies virtues. She is an intelligent, young Native woman. The characters in this work who experience existential failure are those



who, on the other hand, are unable to let go of the past (or view it honestly) or who are too deeply steeped in the negative aspects of current Western civilization.

The Antelope Wife goes beyond being a simple book since its themes are similar to the twin tales that are common in Native American cultures. Myths, which are accounts of a culture's distant past or origin, can operate as a benchmark for moral behavior. It is appropriate that there be a legendary representation of the resurgence of Ojibwe culture. The writings of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Paul Radin, which explore Native American twin myths that relate to Erdrich's story, are helpful in illuminating the mythological aspects of *The Antelope Wife*. Lévi-Strauss and Radin both believe that twin tales are "common" and "fundamental" examples of Native American myths. They are so common and well-liked among American Indians that they inevitably draw notice. Erdrich's work, which closely follows the twin tale pattern, shows how they have affected him.

In his paper titled "The Fundamental Myth of the North American Peoples," Radin acknowledges the myth as a flexible storytelling structure. Folktales, myths, and legends, he claims, "pour into each other ceaselessly and continuously" (p. 19). The "shape and substance" of myths, according to Radin, "is not set," which would be impossible given the ongoing flow of new influences and goals that permeate all human groups (p. 370). Radin's concept of the genre's flexibility better explains the genuine stories that he and other fieldworkers frequently encounter. It's true, he says, that every age tries to "rewrite" its folktales (370). Similar to this, Franz Boas, one of the pioneers of anthropology in the United States, notes the diversity of generic form and content in his analysis of the Northwest Coast Indian myths: "It would seem that mythological worlds have been built up only to be shattered again and that new worlds were built from the fragments" (p. 18).

Erdrich commences the novel by depicting the twins engaged in sewing, and this introductory scene serves as a formal indicator of the book's themes. The imagery in the opening passage confirms the idea of a divided and polarized world. The novel portrays the difficult circumstances faced by Native Americans who have lived in America since ancient times, and highlights their strained relationship with mainstream Americans, who consider them outsiders in their own land. The following lines symbolize the fragmented nature of human existence, particularly for Native Americans:

Ever since the beginning these twins are sewing. One sews with the light and one with the dark. The first twin's beads are cut-glass whites and pales, and the other twin's beads are glittering deep red and blue-black indigo. One twin uses an awl made of an otter's sharpened penis bone; the other uses that of a bear. They sew with a single sinew thread, in, out, fast and furious, each trying to set one more bead into the pattern than her sister, each trying to upset the balance of the world. (1)

The aforementioned statement indicates how the book's basic ideas of balance and division are made plain very once. Native Americans' "fast and furious" labor on a complicated pattern of "bright and dark" is unequivocal proof of their dualistic existence. *The Antelope Wife* emphasizes these underlying social issues of conflict or division as fundamental and enduring aspects of myth by highlighting the legendary trait of twins. The



one thread here relates to humanity, through which we may dissolve all of the distinctions between Native and mainstream Americans, as has been done from ancient times. As it characterized as the condition of light and dark, humanity's solitary danger might stitch the hierarchy between them.

Despite the main character, *The Antelope Wife*, exhibits a divide between a woman and a hooved one, the twin hero Cally finds a replacement for her lost twin sister Deanna. According to Levi-Strauss (1966), incipient twin hood, such as anything that has physical characteristics like a cleft palate or cloven hooves that give the appearance that it is going to split apart, is just as important as genuine twins in reflecting the underlying duality that is typical of myth. As seen by the fact that Erdrich frequently refers to "hooved ones" rather than merely deer or antelope, she is aware that the distinctive characteristic of antelope and deer is their split hooves.

Furthermore, upon So Hungry's marriage to a deer, she becomes connected to all creatures possessing hooves. As a result, it is deemed acceptable for the antelope, who share a hooved identity with the deer, to provide care for Matilda, the daughter of their related hooved counterparts and the ancestor of the antelope wife, as they reside on the Plains. Lévi-Strauss (1966) asserts that a twin, whether possible or actual, is always linked to and represents inborn dualities that need to be symbolically resolved or mediated (99). In *The Antelope Wife*, several characters have problems that need to be fixed or managed. These crises make up the novel's climactic scenes.

Native American language is used to elevate the cultural heritage of Native People in *The Antelope Wife*. The novel's opening section uses Native American language to highlight Native American culture. The following words indicate that Matilda Roy, who was held captive by Scranton Roy and later bonded with a dog, spoke in her own language:

He braced himself against her to pull free, set his boot between her legs to tug the blade from her stomach, and as he did so tried to avoid her eyes but did not manage. His gaze was drawn into hers and he sank with it into the dark unaccompanied moment before his birth. There was a word he uttered in her language: *Daashkikaa. Daashkikaa*. He saw his mother, yanked the bayonet out with a huge cry, and began to run. (50)

The extracted lines demonstrate that our cultural rules do not permanently fix the association between the signifier and the signified.

After spending years healing in the forest in the wake of the devastation, he "saves" the baby and raises it to become Matilda Roy, Scranton Roy's daughter. Matilda seems pleased in the white world, the new society, with a schoolteacher she likes as a friend, then sister, and who would have become her stepmother. She may be aware that she is in a foreign country, but her true mother, Blue Prairie Woman, cannot bear to lose her child and longs to be reunited with her. A Blue Prairie woman's close relationship with Shwano led to the birth of twins. The following sentences demonstrate how marriage in Native American tradition is only seen as a component of sex:



They got teased too much and moved farther off, into the brush, into the nesting ground of shy and holy loons. There, no one could hear them. In solitude they made love until they became gaunt and hungry, pale windigos with aching eyes, tongues of flame. Twins are born of such immoderation. By the time her husband left again with his sled of traps, she was pregnant and calm. (13)

The woman spends each day scanning the horizon in search of her daughter, causing her to be referred to as "Other Side of the Earth," further emphasizing the idea of a division. In American culture, the conversation around marriage often centers on sex, but for Native Americans, sex did not hold such a central role in marriage. Rather, it was expected that young people engage in sexual activities prior to getting married, and sex was not necessarily restricted to marriage.

The character named Other Side of the Earth is mourning the loss of a daughter to this strange white society, just like so many Indian parents before them. As the death of her daughter "cracks apart" her life, she leaves her twins and travels west till she meets her first daughter. The twins were left with their grandmother, who was feeding them. They become ill while traveling with their grandparents and receive medical attention from the healers. Native American cultural practice explicitly emphasizes the healing provided by healers, as seen by the following lines:

Those old ladies? Sure! They're healers, bead workers, tanners of hides. They make cedar boxes. Or they work as language consultants in the school system. Maybe one's a housekeeper for a priest. The other dances. I hear she won the Senior Ladies Traditional twelve years in a row. Bums, they roam the streets. Windigos, they ate a husband. Oh, too bad, one or the other died and was buried the month before. Tough luck, I missed her. (71)

Many Native Americans still follow their ancestral faiths and use conventional medicine. The high newborn mortality rate is a result of both a harsh physical environment and a high frequency of diarrhea. Native American culture is inherently rooted in the ritual practice of spiritual healing. In the commercial society of today, this practice may seem important and out of the ordinary, but for Native Americans, it is an integral part of daily existence. These customs have been followed from the beginning of time.

Seven years old Matilda Roy satisfied in her current situation with her teacher, who would later wed Scranton Roy, and her "father" Roy. She can sense her mother's presence and is aware of the allure of another realm. She eventually departs with the sound of clattering beads and a brief message that reads, "She came for me, I left with her," taking the blue beads that were on her cradle board when Scranton saved her. The mixed feelings that many Native American kids experienced when they were taken away and integrated into the white world, whether through boarding schools or other institutions, are reflected in Matilda's story. They felt a great tug in their old culture and family, even if they did not completely understand it, despite the fact that they had grown to love some parts or people in the new environment. As Matilda doesn't know her mother's language, she is unable to converse with her, but she is still drawn to her and her culture.



Klaus Shawano, a trader who works at contemporary powwows and is fixated with the fabled Antelope Woman, is introduced in the book. By receiving medication from an elder, he wants to win her over. Both an antelope and a woman, *The Antelope Wife* is thought to be a direct descendent of Matilda Roy, who was abandoned to live among antelope. The mother of Cally, Rozina Roy, struggles with her identity and lives in the neighborhood where Klaus returns with *The Antelope Wife*. In this novel, the two episodes of hunger and thirst enhance the mythological aspects. In contrast to *Blue Prairie Woman*, who gets fulfillment for her hunger by finding beauty in animal who becomes her, Klaus cannot slake his thirst until he drinks from Mississippi.

Cally's grandmother's grandma, *Blue Prairie Woman*, taught her "The Deer Husband" story, which she has treasured and retold. As a young lady, her ancestor enters the woods to make a full lunch for herself. Despite eating "the entire rabbit, she's curious to learn more. She wanted to swallow her own arm. They called her name *Such a Hunger*. With her hatchet in hand, she approaches the deer with the idea that she will eat him once he joins her. Nonetheless, she finds it fascinating when she stares into his eyes since she can detect sincere yearning. Instead of eating him, she shares her stew with him. The author states it in the following lines:

Unafraid. She had this feeling. Full. So this was what other people felt. She looked over at the deer. His eyes were steady and warm with a deep black light ... Who he is. No different. Of course, too bad that he's a deer. Still, she made a bed out of young hemlock branches and curled against his short, stiff pelt. She began to live with him, stayed with him out in the woods, and traveled with him on into the open spaces. Became beloved by his family, too. (56)

With her spouse the deer, *So Hungry* is happy. She makes a decision in her kinship idiom that is typical of Native American tales of her relationship to nature. Instead of consanguinity, the structural relationship is based on an affinal link. This illustrates how nature is viewed as a possible companion in Native American cosmology, where there is a reciprocal relationship.

She thus perceives the deer as "no different." In actuality, Indians in North America have a long tradition of creating tales about a husband and wife who are animals. That indicates a better and healthier connection with nature than modern Americans have, who, like Richard, are more likely to destroy environment or kill and eat nature than to see it as a partner. The Native American society hasn't always had a harmonious connection with nature, which makes sense. And *So Hungry* was quite keen to eat the deer before she understood he may be her spouse. Similarly, other characters in the novel are willing to eat puppies in soup. In mythical stories about animal weddings, nature is not romanticized; rather, it is depicted as a partner, one that we must make an effort to get along with, just as we do with spouses. *So Hungry* succeed in her quest despite the assistance from her family, but Klaus and Richard fail.

The truth is that her family drags her from this world. Her brothers kill her husband. *So Hungry* still maintains close ties to "the hooved ones," who twice saved her kid. They



first warn her of the approaching attack, giving her time to cling to a dog's back and save her child. She eventually recommends Matilda to the hooved ones after she has passed away. It's likely that Matilda is the deer husband's daughter, which would explain why she's able to coexist among animals with hooves and give birth to a line of descendants who would turn into "antelope women" like the title character. It's important that this story and the other traditional tales it alludes to demonstrate that even among traditional Native Americans, the concept of mixed blood was not unusual. Her own experience proves that it is okay to mix different racial groups, cultures, and species. She plays a symbolic role resembling that of a 'bricoleur'.

Because he is thirsty, Klaus notices an image that represents the strange and dangerous longing he has for his antelope wife: "he couldn't stop his imagination from changing his sweetheart into a Disney character a blue fairy. Her radiance increased. Her words were as cold as a river, and her smile ultimately turned into a jagged expression of sympathy (94). He confuses his love for the mythical fairies from his childhood with his love for this "magical" being, who is made up of an antelope and a lady. This vision of her overwhelms him in the same way that his love for Sweetheart, Calico did. He feels that he must give in to his want to drink since his desires outweigh his sensitivities. In his mind's eye, she torments his thirst:

His lady love was still there in the back of his mind, standing in a ball of blue light. "I'd like a drink of water," he said to her. She had a glass of water in her hand, too, Sweetheart Calico, but she poured it out in front of his eyes. The molecules dissolved all around him and did nothing for his thirst. (94)

His Sweetheart is still seen by Klaus as the Disney fairy who is shown as "standing in a ball of blue light." Sweetheart Calico is unable or unwilling to satisfy his desire, however much he needs and wants her to. The nutrients the fairy delivers is just as enigmatic as the molecular-looking dust it produces with her wand.

So Hungry's acute appetite is satisfied by developing a close relationship with nature with the help of her deer husband. Traditional stories usually include descriptions of these exceptional cravings and the methods used to satiate them, which might be confusing to modern readers. If this story had been left untold, it may have become a forgotten allusion to an earlier time without any bearing on the current narrative. It is extensive and all-encompassing in scope. Hence, Hungry's deeds have consequences and parallels for her descendants in contemporary Minneapolis. One of these offspring is Sweetheart Calico, *The Antelope Wife*, the result of So Hungry's marriage to her deer partner.

Furthermore, So Hungry's extreme hunger and the never-ending thirst of Klaus are complementary. While less blatantly or entirely animalistic than So Hungry's deer husband, Klaus also marries a non-human. It is logical to assume that the animal partner of Klaus will also have some diluted traits given the loss of both his ancestry and his connection to the traditional customs (i.e. half-human). His connection with her is as modern as he is, including a kidnapping in a van, a wedding night spent in a hotel, and a terrible hunger brought on by alcohol-induced dehydration.



Klaus Shawano has a thirst that rivals So Hungry's voracious appetite in intensity. It seems Klaus has unquenchable hunger while she observes customs, communes with nature, and finds fulfillment there. His wife shares his desire for freedom. Stookey (1999) wrote that the spell of their unfulfilled desires imprisoned and trapped both character and as a result, they spend their days in a state of waiting. When Richard learns Klaus is ill as the two of them are binge drinking, he rejects his repeated screams for help. He can't help but be drawn to Sweetheart Calico. This is undoubtedly the root source of both problems.

Cultural studies of Native Americans mostly interpret the culture. In order to understand cultures throughout the world, it is vital to look for fundamental absolute values. In the absence of a foundational set of values, the defense of "this is my/our culture" may end up becoming the strongest one, compelling the other side either to concede or to respect it. The promotion of Native American culture depends heavily on cultural knowledge. This is particularly crucial because one of the objectives is to elevate the culture and spread it around the world, yet we have a tendency to perceive most civilizations as patriarchal.

Conclusion

In Erdrich's novel, the problem of Native American culture is made explicit. Scranton Roy, the protagonist, and other Native American characters act as mediums for Erdrich's depiction of Native American culture. Native People are 'othered' from mainstream American society while being Native Americans and the novel explores this by focusing on the distinctive language, culture, rituals, and religion of Native Americans. Characters are the finest way to illustrate how the culture is divided between the past and the present. In terms of Native American culture and how it has evolved in the modern world, *Antelope Wife* represents the link between the past and the present. She represents Native American culture by being both an antelope and a woman/wife. This book contains enough stories, characters, activities, and performances to understand Native American culture. When describing Native American culture, Erdrich emphasizes the distinctiveness of words like 'Daashkikaa,' the practice of spiritual healing, the culture of tobacco, clothing, and other rituals, as well as the pastoral setting and relationships that Native Americans have with their animal companions.

By having her main character reflect both past and current Native Americanness, Erdrich protects the identity and culture. Erdrich succeeds in keeping her cultural stance as comparable to that of current Americans while preventing Native Americanism from being incorporated into mainstream American history. Native American culture is strengthened when Native American terms like "Daashkikaa Daashkikaa" are used.



References

- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. (2020). *What is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture?* <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4434691>
- Darnell, R. (1991). *American Indian Reference Books for Children and Young Adults*. Englewood, Libraries Unlimited, Inc.
- Erdrich, L. (1998). *The Antelope Wife*. New York, NY : Harper Flamingo.
- Gipp, G., & Amundson, R. (2018). *American Indian education: Counter narratives in racism, struggle, and the law*. Routledge. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.4324/9781315163585>
- Keplom, J (2005). *New Lights on Native American Novelists in English*. New Delhi: Sarup And Sons.
- Kessey, K. (2006). *History and Culture in the American Context*, Gale Virtual Reference Library.
- Kuiper, K. (2011). *Native American Culture*. New York: Britannica Educational Publishing,
- Lévi-Strauss C. (1966). *The savage mind: The Nature of Human Society Series*. The University of Chicago Press,
- Secco, A. (1992) The search for origin through storytelling in native." *RSA Journal of American Studies*,1 (1).
- Stoddard, A. L. (2009). Purpose of a vision of quest in native culture." *Alternative Spirituality*, 12 November.
- Vizenor, G. (1968). *Darkness in Louis Bearheart*. The University of Cambridge Press.



@ 2022 by the author. Licensee University of Chitral, Journal of Linguistics & Literature, Pakistan. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).