About Us: http://www.the-criterion.com/about/

Archive: http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/

Contact Us: http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/

Editorial Board: http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/

Submission: http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/

FAQ: http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/

ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Bi-Monthly Refereed and Indexed Open Access eJournal

www.galaxyimrj.com

Strategy for Survival as Reflected in *The Curse of the Shaman*

Anjum Tahir
Research Scholar
Central University of Jammu
Jammu and Kashmir.

Article History: Submitted-06/06/2017, Revised-22/07/2017, Accepted-27/07/2017, Published-31/07/2017.

Abstract:
The paper analyses Inuit children's literature, its emergence, it being a tool for survival of culturally, and traditionally rich group of native people of Canada through the works of Inuit story writer, Michael Kusugak. Inuit are a group of culturally similar Indigenous people inhabiting the Arctic regions of Canada. Prior to contact with Europeans, Inuit were entirely self-sufficient. They shared a unique relationship with nature and were able to understand the working of nature. The European arrival tremendously damaged the Inuit way of life. The Inuit culture has been exposed to many outside influences, which have changed the traditional ways of life and have affected the culture but Inuit people have managed to retain their culture in essence by transmitting oral story telling. Michael Kusugak's *The Curse of the Shaman* and *Baseball Bats for Christmas* depict the rich Inuit culture, its different shades and also show the impact of invasion on their culture and life. The Inuit are in constant fear of losing their identity and rich cultural heritage amidst such huge influences and thereby change in lifestyle. Therefore, the Inuit are devising various plans to preserve their culture and one such method is making their children familiar with their roots so that they don't feel alienated and may feel belonging to a rich cultural heritage. The objective of this paper is to analyse and study the various strategies used by Inuit people especially the Inuit elders to retain their identity and culture in the Eurocentric and Anglophonic world and make themselves culturally relevant.

Keywords: Inuit, Children's Literature, Oral transmission, Eurocentric.

Inuit are a group of culturally similar Indigenous people inhabiting the Arctic regions of Canada. Inuit are one of the three groups, along with First Nations and Metis people who are documented in Canadian Constitution as Canada's Indigenous people. Inuit are the descendants of Thule culture. The Thule people replaced the related Dorset culture. Before the arrival of the Europeans, Inuit led a nomadic way of life and were completely dependent on land and water resources for their survival. The Inuit were essentially a hunter-gatherer society. Prior to contact with Europeans, Inuit were entirely self-sufficient. They lived in small, autonomous, nomadic groups, dependent upon hunting, fishing and gathering for survival and for all their physical needs. They shared a unique relationship with nature and were able to understand the working of the nature.

They practised a form of shamanism based on animist principles. They believed that all things had a spirit, including humans and that to some extent these spirits could be influenced by a pantheon of supernatural entities that could be appeased when one required some animal or inanimate thing to act in a certain way. Family was at the centre of Inuit

society and men and women traditionally functioned with very specific roles. The Inuit followed customary law, characterised by its informal nature, flexibility, and its reliance upon social pressures to ensure that people acted appropriately. Inuit had developed a rich material culture, based primarily upon hunting and fishing technology. A variety of taboos affected many aspects of life and a rich mythology explained both the natural and the supernatural world. The European arrival tremendously damaged the Inuit way of life, causing mass death through new diseases introduced by whalers and explorers, and enormous social disruptions caused by the distorting effect of Europeans' material wealth. As contact with outsiders increased in the twentieth century, Inuit culture began to alter and adapt to the modern world. Inuit culture has been exposed to many outside influences over the past century. These influences have changed the traditional ways of life and have affected the culture but Inuit people have managed to retain their culture in essence by transmitting oral storytelling. Many Inuit continue to have close ties to the land and consider their relationship to the land to be essential to their culture and to their survival as distinct people.

In Canada, Michael Kusugak is virtually the sole Inuit children's writer with a body of work published in the mainstream press. There have been a handful of other books published over the years such as Markoosie's *Harpoon of the Hunter* or Peter Pitseolak's *Escape from Death* but they were not specifically children's books and although, beautifully produced, they have not remained visible. Kusugak has published eight picture books and a novel. Kusugak grew up on the land, steeped in the rich oral tradition of his culture. By the time he was bringing up his own children though, his entire life had changed. Looking for books about his own culture, he found they were written by outsiders, filled with misconceptions, misrepresentations of traditions, and held a colonial view of the Inuit as a primitive culture. He was galvanized, as he says, "to set the record straight" (Schwartz 70).

In the wake of the enormous shifts that have happened to Inuit society in the twentieth century, the oral tradition has been dramatically undermined and consequently, the status of the book, still in its infancy, is rising as a conveyor of culture. Not only is the transition to print inevitable at this point of time, as a result of these dramatic changes, but ironically the book is the vehicle which will preserve and pass on the traditional stories to future generations of Inuit children as well as opening windows to a non-Inuit audience. Therefore, to retain their identity and to preserve their culture, the Inuit are making their children familiar with their history and to the different ways of their life on the land amidst harsh climatic conditions.

In ancient times, the belief of Inuit people was deeply rooted in spirits and witchcrafts. The Inuit used to live in snow-houses and the harsh nature of the climate and their surroundings, with violent storms outside, provided opportunity to tell tales in the self-made huts. The Inuit people lived close together in a society but remained isolated from other local communities. The Inuit were close to nature and were completely dependent upon resources of the nature and this close association with nature and dependence on it led to the firm belief of people on nature, giving rise to various imaginative stories. The Inuit consider nature to be endowed with spirits. They believe that everything around them including stones,

birds, animals, straw and organisms are alive and have a soul. They also believe in the migration of soul from animal to animal. The Inuit people widely used both myths and legends. These widely spread semi-nomadic people are connected to each other through songs, dances, art forms, myths and legends. The Inuit believe that the deities living in the spirit world possess powers of good and evil.

The ancient Inuit oral tradition was considered the most important medium or method of conveying and preserving ideas. Inuit myths and legends are short dramatic forms that deal with the creation, the heavens, birth death, love hunting and sharing of food, polygamy, murder, infanticide, respect for the aged, incest, death and mystery of an afterlife. Inuit myths are full of curious behavioural codes making them simple but at the same time, the people living outside the society may not understand them fully. Inuit have great faith in magical powers of animals. They feel that animals have the power to hear and understand the human word and thus Inuit believe that they have a close relationship with all of nature. Due to this reason, hunters in their camps call the animals they use to hunt by different names. This creates confusion among the animals that are necessary for their survival. Until modern times, Inuit believed that there were other worlds beneath the sea, inside the earth and in the sky. Some gifted Angakoks (Shamans)were supposed to have the power of journeying into these mysterious places in trances and in dreams. These were those places where ordinary individuals could not go and which they would experience only in some after life. Dreams have played an important part in the lives of the Inuit. They serve as the basis for some myth forms. Inuit traditional religious practices are a form of shamanism based on animist principles. Inuit mythology differs in certain respects from what the term "mythology" commonly means. Inuit like most people think of mythology as a narrative about the world and place of people in it.

In the second section of his book, *Mythologies*, titled "Myth Today", Roland Barthes discusses myth and says that myth is, in fact, the manner in which a culture signifies and grants meaning to the world around it. Barthes' concept of myth seems similar or at least draws on the concept of 'ideology' as formulated by Marx in *The German Ideology*. Ideology, according to Barthes' version in "Myth Today" is not entirely concealed and is subject for scrutiny through its cultural manifestations. These manifestations, according to Barthes present themselves as being "natural" and therefore, transparent. At the beginning of "Myth Today", Barthes defines myth as a speech. Myth is speech in that; it is part of a system of communication in which it bears meaning. By this definition, Barthes expands on Levi-Strauss' perception of myth to include every symbol which conveys meaning. For Barthes every cultural product has meaning, this meaning is conditioned by ideology, i.e. myth, and therefore any cultural product can be the subject of mythological analysis and review. For Barthes, meanings and myths are historically produced and conditioned, and they are not eternal but rather constantly mutating and reforming. Myths de-historicize and de-politicize meanings that are always historical and political. The myth, according to Barthes, is an ideological apparatus, which portrays reality in a certain manner and in compliance with a certain ruling ideology. The myth does not deny the presence of anything, but it does deny its historicity and it being open to other readings. The myth compresses and limits the scope of

meaning of the sign it uses and makes sure it could be understood in only one manner. This is the power of the myth. Like Levi-Strauss, myth for Barthes is a type of collective illusion, a story that society tells itself in order to justify its own world the way that it is.

Michael Kusugak's*The Curse Of The Shaman, A Marble Island Story*(2006) tells the story of Wolverine, who is cursed at birth by a grumpy shaman; everyone forgets about the curse until wolverine grows up and wants to marry shaman's daughter. Qabluittuq, The –man-with-no-eyebrows and his wife, can't –see took their newly born son Wolverine to Bit-of-sand to find a Wife-to-be for their son as it was the tradition in the Inuit society to find a match for a newly born child. Wolverine had his grandfather's name, who was not alive now as this was also a part of their tradition to name a child on an ancestor's name who had died. It was believed that the child who has been assigned that name carried not only the name, but also the traits of the person. It was rebirth of the dead person and in case of The-man-with-no-eyebrows, his father was reborn and it was a time of great happiness for him. The-man-with-no-eyebrows took his family to Paaliq's (an Angakok) igloo. Paaliq was a good shaman but he was short tempered. That day when The-man-with-no- eyebrows asked him for his daughter's hand for his son; Paaliq, was already angry due to his daughter Breath's crying and he refused and instead cursed his son by saying, "As a matter of fact, when your son is of age to marry, he will never set foot on this land again!"(152-53)

The curse had been uttered, everybody knew what it meant and there was no turning back. Even Siksik, Paaliaq'stuurnngak-a spirit represented by an animal, had heard it. Siksik was a squirrel and it was the source of power for Paaliq, in fact it was this creature, Paaliq's magic animal that would follow his master's orders and execute all the things for him. The Inuit have traditionally been fishers and hunters, who hunted whales, walrus, caribou, seal, polar bears, muskoxen, birds etc. The Inuit depended entirely on hunting, not just for their food but also for materials to make tools, build shelters and make clothes. The men hunted, made tools and built kayaks while the women prepared animal pelts, sewed clothes, dried meat, looked after the children, fished and gathered lichen, seaweed etc. All these different aspects of Inuit culture have been shown by Michael Kusugak in *The Curse Of The Shaman.* The-man-with-no-eyebrows and Paaliq hunted, provided food for their families, made tools; Auq and Can't- see looked after their children and performed other household chores. The Inuit usually lived in groups made up of several families; so during an Inuk's lifetime, he or she might meet only a few hundred people, mostly belonging to the same mutual-support network. The bigger the network, the better were the chances of individual survival. The Inuit family cell was made up of a couple, their unmarried children and sometimes the widowed mother or sister of one of the spouses. The oldest male still able to work acted as the family's spokesperson. For instance, Paaliq's family consisted of Paaliq, his wife Auk, his daughter Breath and his mother whereas The-man-with-no-eyebrows had his wife, his son and a daughter as his family. The second level of family organization was a group of several families that joined as a hunting group. Decisions at this level were made in common. The size of the hunting group depended on how much prey there was in the region, and if the food became scarce, the group would split into smaller units. The Inuit led a nomadic life moving between their summer camping grounds and winter hunting grounds. The people living in a

group shared their food and other things with the entire members of that group. The-man-with-no-eyebrows would usually trek towards north in the winter and would come back in summer to the In-there camp whereas Paaliq would go south in winter and to the In-there camp in summer. When the hunting group hunted a whale or a caribou, it would be equally distributed in the community.

Another important aspect of Inuit society is myths and legends associated with Inuit people. In *The Curse Of The Shaman*, Michael Kusugak has also reflected on these myths. The myth of the old woman under the sea, Nuliajuk is one of them. There are various stories about her and the famous one is that when Nuliajuk was just a girl, she refused to marry. Her family had a hard time, they had nothing to eat and were starving. They headed off to another hunting place leaving Nuliajuk behind. As she did not want to be left behind, she waded into the water and swam out to the boat. She grabbed the gunwales and tried to climb aboard. Her father took his axe and chopped her fingers off to restrict her from climbing in. She slipped down to the depths of the sea with all her fingers also falling one by one and they became the animals of the sea. Now, Nuliajuk has no fingers with which to comb her hair and when her hair is all tangled up, these poor animals are caught in it and are unable to get out. They tickle her head and that makes her angry. She shakes her head, screams, flails her arms about and makes the water to boil until there are big waves. If her hair gets tangled up, there are no animals to hunt, no meat to eat, no sealskin for boots and no whale-meat to feed the dogs. Nuliajuk is the most feared creature in all the land and has the power of life and death over all the people. It was only the shamans who could calm her. The-man-with-no-eyebrows, once was unable to get any fish or any other animal; and whatever he had in store for his family, was being exhausted. He waited for many days to get a good catch. Every day he would walk along the sea-ice with two of his best sniffing dogs only to return in despair. Finally, he decided to go to Paaliq and talk to him about it, as shaman was the caretaker of his people. It was believed that Nuliajuk had become angry and that was why there were no animals to fish. Only shamans could talk to her and calm her down. So Paaliq stood up, walked in a circle, slowly and started his chants saying, ‘’PAMIUQ, PAMIUQ, PAMIUQ!!!”(226-27) His body was there, but Paaliq was far away under the ice calming Nuliajuk. He ran his fingers through her thick, graying slick hair. He released the seals caught in it. Thus, he calmed her, everything was normalized and The-man-wit- no-eyebrows was able to hunt seals.

Another legend or myth was the story of Kiviuq that Wolverine heard from Breath’s grandmother. According to the story, once a little orphan boy used to live with his grandmother in a village. There were mean boys there who would laugh at him on his inability to hunt and provide for himself and his grandmother. They would run after him, fight with him, make him cry and would even tear up all his clothes. The poor boy would go home to his grandmother who would sew his clothes all back together again. However, the mean boys would again tear the clothes whenever the poor little orphan boy went out. Fed up with all this, her grandmother one day gave him the sealskin and asked him to make a head cover with eyeholes out of it. The boy made it and was ordered by his grandmother to put his head in the pail of water and keep his head underwater as long as he could. He kept doing it until he was able to keep his head underwater for a long time. Then his grandmother asked

him to go the beach and swim underwater along the shore. The boy did the same and behaved as if he was a seal and made all those boys follow him. When the boys were way out at sea, the little seal (orphan boy) began singing and calling the wind. The wind heard him and came crashing down on the kayaks and flipping them over. One by one, the mean boys who had teased him and made him cry sank to the bottom of the sea. Only two kayaks were left there that belonged to Kiviuq and his brother. Kiviuq was a strong boy and was very good with a paddle. He survived this storm and bravely paddled his kayak in the wavy sea with the help of a little white bird, a snow bunting. After narrating the story grandmother said,

> I don't remember whatever happened to that little orphan boy. He swam back home and lived quite happily without all the mean boys, I imagine. Take heed, Wolverine and Breath, always be kind to orphans like Paammakuluk here. They have something very powerful looking out for them (321-26).

There was always a moral in the stories of grandmother. That was the way of old people. They taught the young morals, morals by which they would grow and that would guide them in their lives.

Wolverine and Breath grew up and had chances to see and meet each other only at the summer camps. Their parents were happy with their friendship. Paaliq asked The-man-with-no-eyebrows for the marriage between their children to which he gave his consent and the entire community had a grand feast on this occasion wherein all the members worked together for arranging the feast. The young couple was to marry after a year. Everybody had forgotten about the curse. It was a good thing in Inuit society that the parents of the engaged children regarded themselves as having a kinship bond even if the marriage arranged in childhood didn't take place. Wolverine was growing up to be a man and was good at hunting. The-man-with-no-eyebrows took Wolverine to Marble Island. When they landed there, Wolverine's father asked him to crawl up the beach a short distance lest death should befall him before summer came again. This shows the great respect that the Inuit people had for nature. They were very devoted towards it and lived in harmony with it. Wolverine obeyed his father and after exploring the Island when they started for their home, a wind rose forcing them to go back to the Island. They shoved off again and again the wind got stronger and stronger, making them to go back. His father left alone, no wind rose and he was able to go. Wolverine was left back on the Island with the only company of Ukpigjuak (owl) whom he had helped once by nursing him and making him fly again. Since then Ukpigjuak and Wolverine had become good friends. Wolverine's father came after some days bringing more things for him that would help him to sustain there on the Island. It was because of the curse that had been uttered by Paaliq that Wolverine was unable to swim back to the mainland. Paaliq tried hard to call out his tuurnngak, but Siksik was reluctant to execute this task and had therefore, burrowed itself down beneath the rocks. Inspired from the story of Kiviuq, Wolverine practiced to keep his head underwater for a long time and then set out for his home fighting the wind bravely. Ukpigjuak accompanied him who was flying overhead. Wolverine kept paddling for three days. On the third day, Ukpigjuak was getting hungry and decided to keep his friend on his own for a while and eat something. He found an old

Siksikand grabbed it firmly. He tore up the meagre flesh with his sharp beak and ate. As he ate, he noticed that the weather had changed, the wind had stopped and the sea calmed. The Siksik he had eaten was Paaliaq's tuurnngak and then the curse was broken and Wolverine reached safely to the mainland, married Breath and lived his life happily.

Thus through his stories, Michael Kusugak makes Inuit Children familiar with their culture, beliefs and also about various myths and legends prevalent in Inuit society. Narrating stories to small children is a way of investing for the future of a particular community, society or a country. Myths supply a model for human behavior. The story narrated by the myths constitutes a knowledge, which is esoteric, not only because it is secret and is handed on during the course of an initiation but because the knowledge is accompanied by a magico-religious power. Michael Kusugak creates such situations in his stories where the child reader is made to think. Kusugak introduces different mythical characters in a beautiful manner so that the children find it friendly and not fearful and violent. The children are shown the ways and various tacts to deal with different situations that they may face in their lives.

It can be said that the concept of myth is taken very seriously in understanding how people think about the world in different cultures. Myth is not false, but shapes peoples' conceptions in particular ways. There is no one version of a myth or narrative in oral cultures that can be called the only 'correct' or 'true' one. Myths and narratives vary substantially between groups and in every retelling. Indeed, while they are often represented as fixed in its description of the past, they also change according to the context in which they are told in order to stay relevant in the present. Of course, when myths are written down in the local language, people then have recourse to a fixed version of the past. Having a written version of a myth changes the dynamics of the way people think about it substantially.

Through his stories, Michael Kusugak is teaching the younger generations about hunting and survival skills, interpret the weather and wildlife patterns, the geographic features and place names, food preparation and preservation, skin preparation and traditional clothing production adapted to the land and marine conditions that would help them to become competent and promote strong identity and self-esteem. Essential for Inuit skill development is to learn using traditional methods; to learn through watching and doing.

The Inuit children's literature reflects and transmits Inuit culture and that it can play a role in shaping national identity. In addition, scholars and critics as being of high literary quality recognize much Canadian children's literature. Every piece of children's literature, through its text and illustrations, has the potential to shape or influence a reader's thinking. Reading and exploring literature can open a public space where conversations among various voices can take place. In these spaces, Inuit children might recognize reflections of their own identity, and they might also come to see the complexities inherent in issues of power and social justice, and of the ideologies presented through books and the popular media.

Therefore, Michael Kusugak wrote stories for Inuit children in order to give them a realistic and fair account of their past so that they feel culturally rich. In the present

modernised and globalised world, the Inuit elders are afraid that they may get lost in this world due to the changes that are occurring in their society and the response of the younger generation to such changes is positive. Thus to save their culture, it is important to acquaint Inuit children with their culture and their history so that they may come forward and carry the responsibility of preserving their culture.

Works Cited:

Aries, P. *Centuries of Childhood*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1960. Print.

Barry, Peter .*Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory*. 3rded. New Delhi: Viva books, 2013. Print.

Barthes, Roland.*Mythologies.*Trans. Annette Lavers.New York: Hill and Wang, 1972. Print.

Bradford, Clare.*Place And Politics:Aboriginal Texts For Children*.Viewpoint 10(Summer 2002):3-6

Guerin,Wilfred L, etal.*A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*.5th ed.India: Oxford UP, 2007.Print

Harry,Margaret.*Literature In English by Native Canadians (Indians and Inuit*).Studies in Canadian Lit./Etudes en litteraturecanadienne[online],10.1(1985): web.26 Apr.2014.

Hunt,Peter.*An Introduction to Children's Literature*.Oxford:Oxford UP,1994. Print.

Kusugak,Michael.*The Curse of the Shaman,A Marble Island Story*.Illus.Ippiksaut Friesen. Toronto: Starbust DRI,2014.Print.

Levi- Strauss, Claude. *Structural Anthropology*, vol.i. New York: Basic Books, 1963. Print.

O'Neill,A. *Aboriginal Australian and Canadian First Nations Children's Literature*.CLC web: Comparative Literature and Culture 13.2(2011).web.10 Apr.2014.http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clc web/vol 13/iss 2/4

Ryan, Michael.*Literary Theory: A Practical Introduction*.2nd ed.India: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.2007.Print.

Schwartz, Joanne.*Transmitting Oral Culture To The Page: The Emergence Of Inuit Children'sBooks.*web.21 Mar.2014.http://www.ibby.org/

Stott,Jon C. *Spirits in the Snowhouse:The Inuit Angakok(Shaman) In Children's Literature*.web.10 Apr.2014.http://www3.brandonu.ca/../stott.pdf/