

***Dancing on our turtle's back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence.* By Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. Kolkata: Adivaani. 2014 (First published in Canada, 2012).**

This book is a timely affirmation of Indigenous together with environmental issues. *Dancing on our turtle's back* refers to the continent of America, and implicitly Mother Earth, as the turtle we dance on.

Because we belong to the land—a special introductory section for the Indian edition makes clear what Indigenous peoples worldwide have in common, alongside an infinite array of differences—for one, an environmental consciousness in the face of ‘State-facilitated environmental devastation’; for another, a history of Resistance and Resurgence, ‘reclaiming and reoccupying our homelands’. In Canada, the indigenous movement known as ‘Idle No More’ has created potent political waves recently, reversing past takeovers. In India we still witness the opposite—thousands of Indigenous communities attempting, often against massive odds, just to hold onto their lands against a mass wave of corporate invasions.

An ‘intimate relationship to the land’ is central to all Indigenous societies. Leanne poses a couple of questions at the beginning of the book, with great relevance for Adivasi identity right now: ‘How will our ancestors recognize us as Indigenous? How will we recognize our great-grandchildren as Indigenous?’ Not by rigid adherence to custom. As the rest of the book makes clear, fluidity is intrinsic to Indigenous cultures, while rigidity and fundamentalism are characteristic of the colonial mentality. So a main purpose of this book is to re-affirm Indigenous identity at the same time as ‘to interrogate colonial thought and actions in all the ways it infiltrates our communities’—including its impacts, such as the sense of shame it uses to undermine tradition—‘an insidious and infectious part of the cognitive imperialism...’—shame in being ‘tribal’, all too often, and in the insidious divisions aroused.

What is so special about Indigenous communities, that all of us, tribal or non-tribal, need to learn from, is that ‘*it is Indigenous economic intelligence that has sustained us for most of our histories*’—and this includes all human beings. Tribal societies are obviously far more highly developed than the mainstream in the arts of long-term sustainability. If mainstream society has largely lost this consciousness of balance with future generations, more and more people in the mainstream are beginning to realize how vital it is to relearn this, which means learning from Indigenous communities as well as supporting their mobilisations to resist the takeovers and stay on their land, instead of justifying the displacing projects with a developmentalist ideology that says Indigenous people should develop ‘like us’. On the contrary, we in the mainstream need to learn from Indigenous economic intelligence—what in India can be called ‘Adivasi Economics’.

The opening chapter is *Nishnaabeg Resurgence: Stories from Within*, which contrasts mobilisations of resurgence with conventional social science terminology such as ‘social movement theory’. The difference is subtle and comes from an inner orientation, through awareness of Indigenous language and thought, as well as Indigenous political traditions of government and social organisation. Similarly, the author questions the Canadian government’s emphasis on ‘reconciliation’, which often serves as a mask that formalizes the takeovers and closes the door to the history of remembered events and traditions. ‘To me, reconciliation must be grounded in cultural generation and political resurgence. where the abusers must face the full impact of their actions. Reconciliation then becomes a process embodied by both the survivor and the perpetrator... The interrogation is focused on the perpetrator of the violence, not on the survivors. The responsibility and the authority for restoration are in the agency of the survivors,

not the perpetrators themselves. 'The authority to hold the state accountable then rests with Indigenous nations, not the liberal state.'

The following chapter, *Theorizing Resurgence from Within Nishnaabeg Thought*, emphasizes the many levels of story-telling. The myths and stories so pervasive in Indigenous cultures, are not just pretty tales, or 'folklore' to be collected and stored, but multi-level bodies of theory and inspiration crafted so as to pass highly-evolved philosophy on through the generations. This emphasis recalls a similar book from the Maori tradition of New Zealand, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Linda Tuhiwai Smith, London: Zed, 1999/2012). What these, and many other works by Indigenous scholars affirm so strongly is the tremendous creative power in Indigenous thought, that can be unleashed when the colonizing ideologies that painted Indigenous societies as 'backward' and 'primitive' are thoroughly deconstructed, and Indigenous traditions of thinking reaffirmed. This chapter starts to bring Nishnaabeg mythology alive, as something completely relevant to the present, through personal teachings and the opening of individual reflectiveness.

The publication of Leanne Betasamoske Simpson's book builds a new and vital bridge between Indigenous Americans and India's Adivasis. Indigenous Americans have a longer history of standing up against the colonizing, industrializing impulse that came from Western Europe. In Canada, and throughout the continent of America, the confrontation was stark, where in India it was delayed and mediated by a long history of Adivasis living alongside mainstream societies, which until British times tended not to try and displace or 'develop' them. India's present scenario of rapid takeovers of Adivasi land and resources in the name of 'development' resonates with the history of takeovers and escalating assaults on the environment faced by native Canadians such as the Ojibwe people whose tradition this book comes out of.

As in India, names for Indigenous groups have changed quite fast in north America, as Indigenous terminology returns. European/non-tribal names have been giving way to Indigenous peoples' own names and classification of their groups. Ojibwe are one of several 'tribes' who call themselves Nishnaabeg ('the people'), whom anthropologists and linguists refer to as the Algonquin language group of tribes.

Gdi-Newinaa: Our Sound, Our Voice explores a number of Nishnaabeg terms that focus thought around Resurgence: *Biskaabiiyang*, 'decolonizing' or 'returning to ourselves'—*Aanjigone*, an 'ethic of non-interference', based on understanding that 'if we criticize something, our spiritual being may take on the very things we are criticizing'—*Naakegone*, 'a culturally embedded concept that means to carefully deliberate and decide when faced with any kind of change or decision'—and *Debmewin*, the sound of one's heart, or 'truth'. Profound gentleness and kindness characterize the tradition passed on by Elders, encapsulated in the word *Nengaajdoodimoowin*, 'the art of being gentle or of doing something gentle to someone', and *Gdi-Newinaa*—listening with our full bodies to the sound of our own voice.

These details give a few glimpses into traditions and thought processes both very distant, and very close to living Adivasi traditions, whose wealth is rapidly eroding in the rush for change. *Dancing on our turtle's back* complements a gentle conjuring of Indigenous consciousness, with vast sensitivity towards issues of child-rearing and female identity. India needs a resurgence of indigenous consciousness and thinking processes, in a time when many people are losing awareness of deep spiritual links to the land; when Indigenous cultures face many levels of genocide; and when movements of resistance to unjust takeovers and repression need to call on ancient, enduring forms knowledge lying dormant in the land and people's hearts.

Review by Felix Padel