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**Literary Theories**

### **Hauntology in Indigenous Knowledge System and Cultural Revitalisation: An Overview on The Only Good Indians**

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the indigenous epistemology and revival of one's culture in the work *The Only Good Indians* by Stephen Graham Jones. The analysis integrates the theory of hauntology as stated by Avery Gordon, and it analyses how the spectral elements presented in the novel are not just a horror device, but they are the representation of unresolved social, cultural, and historical contradictions that still continue to influence the present life of indigenous communities. The elk spirit shown in the novel is the symbolic return of suppressed communal responsibilities, knowledge, and ecological morality, which have been disrupted by modernity and urban transformation. Through the elements of intergenerational tension and violence, the novel portrays how indigenous memory, land-based ethics, and collective communal obligations are reshaped. The past injustice and broken cultural norms haunt the contemporary moment and seek recognition and accountability, as stated in the theory of hauntology. By examining Jones' work as an element of indigenous knowledge and hauntological revival, the paper exposes how literature can function as a mode of cultural revival and the restoration of ethical relations between human and non-human beings living in the environment. Adding to that, the element of horror becomes a genre of survivance, while the haunting works as a mechanism for cultural continuity and the decolonization of modern societies.

**Keywords:** Hauntology, Indigenous knowledge, culture, ethics, ecosystem, modernity.

### Hauntological Perspective in Cultural Revival

The *Only Good Indians* (2020), written by Stephen Graham Jones, is an important work which shows contemporary indigenous reality and how horror works as an element for cultural memory, ethical practice, and revival of indigenous knowledge. The indigenous literature always addresses the issue of survival, identity, and the cultural impact. The selected novel introduces many supernatural elements. These supernatural elements are not just the device of Gothic fiction, but they act as an ethical element which addresses historical violence, suppressed community knowledge, and cultural obligations, which are written into the present. The paper portrays the elk spirit and many haunting episodes in the novel. These episodes are interpreted through Avery Gordon's theory of hauntology as presented in her book *Ghostly Matters: Sociological and Hauntological Imagination*. In the book, Gordon argues that haunting is nothing but a constellation of meanings which combines unresolved social conditions with the present. These unresolved issues continue to disturb the present as they refuse to remain buried. And mostly the ghosts which appear in the story are not just an evil power, but they portray a loss which is both incomprehensible and unaccounted for (Gordon, pg.151).

Through the hauntological perspective, the novel opens up how indigenous cultural ethics and ecological responsibilities return to the present when a distortion happens by modernization or new practices that colonise the communal knowledge. Also, this book serves as an indigenous survivance literature where haunting works as a form of cultural revival and not just a gothic element of terror. Avery Gordon defines haunting as "one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life" (Gordon, pg. 8). The traditional Gothic elements of ghosts frighten the readers or the other characters in the book, but Gordon's hauntological ghost demands something more than that. It demands recognition, accountability, and restructuring of the social distortions. Here, haunting collapses the linear time and brings up these submerged histories to showcase that the past always continues to the present to structure it and to reform it. Especially in indigenous literature and context, this theorization is much more relevant as it shows how settler colonialism produces systematic erasure of land rights, relationships, ecological knowledge, or ceremonial protocols. When indigenous ghosts return, they act as reminders of obligation and things that are lost in modernity. Also, it disturbs the colonial power that interrupts the tradition and the present time. In other words, it can be interpreted that hauntology aligns with indigenous knowledge and understanding of memory, rationality, and survivance.

Therefore, the ancestors and non-human beings can remain active participants in the cultural life, and they need to be protected for better environmental outcomes. This can also support cultural revitalisation and strengthen biodiversity through the restoration of relationships. In the case studies on Canada and New Zealand, it is found that indigenous-driven conservation can strengthen biodiversity and restore the land relationship. (Mason et al., 2022)

### **Violation of Indigenous Ecological Knowledge**

Jones portrays the Elk's haunting as a culturally significant element. The illegal slaughter of elk cows during a restricted ritual time, which is also on the reserved land, is not just a means of violence, but it is a disruption of Blackfeet indigenous and ecological ethics. The Blackfeet ecological ethics focuses on reciprocity, restraint, and respect for non-human creatures around them. Therefore, hunting in many indigenous cultures is not an act of domination, but it is regarded as one of the means of gratitude and ceremony. If hunting is regarded with the ceremonial aspects, the four protagonists, Ricky, Louis, Cassidy, and Gabe, in the novel abandon these cultural and ethical practices and do the ideology of extraction rather than creating a relation with the nature. When these characters kill the Elk, the Elk becomes a ghostly figure at its time of death, and it also brings up the unresolved ethical and unethical behaviour in the hauntological cycle. In the latter part of the novel, the Elk becomes a vengeful spirit that seeks revenge on the characters. Its transformation from being a vulnerable elk to a spectral agent reflects how indigenous storytelling traditions contain stories of animals possessing spirit or some other agency. The ghostly Elk does not set in the gothic area, but it explicitly showcases the ethical imbalance happening in the community. The hunting represents a social figure that has been systematically denied, as suggested by Gordon (Gordon, pg.19). Through this portrayal of Elk, Jones brings back the indigenous ecological philosophies that are suppressed under colonial modernization, which also contributes to underestimated or diluted land rights and beliefs.

### **Haunting as a corrective mechanism**

The elk spirit starts to kill the characters in the novel. It is not an act of vengeance, but it is a corrective mechanism that urges the society and the readers to recognize the broken segments of indigenous knowledge. For Lewis, who lives in an urban environment, the Elk's return disturbs his attempts to adapt to a modern American lifestyle and married life with a non-native woman. Adding to that, his suburban job and his distance from his own community showcase how individuals get away from Blackfeet and shift towards something more modernized.

Therefore, the haunting clearly showcases how getting fit into a new society doesn't neutralize the indigenous identity, but it merely displaces the cultural adaptation until something returns spectrally from the culture. In the same way, the Elk's presence in Lewis's urban space, such as the bathrooms, bedrooms, and kitchen, showcases the intrusion of unresolved cultural responsibilities in the modern spatiality. Gordon says that haunting alters the experience of being in time, that is, haunting always disturbs the linear temporality by making the present waver with the weight of the past. (Gordon, pg.xvi). Lewis experiences this temporal wavering through hallucination, déjà vu, and violence in his dreams. On the other hand, Gabe experiences haunting not only as a punishment, but also the intergenerational demand to opt for accountability. His daughter, Denora, becomes a central character in the latter part of the novel, where the elk spirit tries to correct the cultural fault through the youth. Denora occupies a liminal space as the follower of Blackfeet tradition who has not fully attained the adult world. Her survival showcases the potential for survival cultural revival, which is much better than destruction. Jones refuses the inevitability of indigenous erasure, and instead, he reassures that survivance and attempts for it will actively engage the indigenous knowledge in the present context.

The reservation land, after taking away most of the homeland, becomes a site of hauntology. These hauntological spaces are the products of colonial destruction. These places are both displaced and still contain the indigenous population. They are the places of trauma, survival, and cultural resilience altogether. In the novel, it is portrayed through the Elk's return, which completely brings up a new view of the land as a passive backdrop into an active place of cultural rupture. In other words, it can be said that the land remembers even if the character forgets. So it can be regarded that land is not just a material property, but it is a living entity within the memory of these indigenous cultures. That is why, indigenous knowledge always seeks to connect people with their land and nature to shape their relationship, governance and understanding of their culture. (Niigaaniin & MacNeill., 2022)

### **Indigenous Literature and Cultural Revival**

In recent times, the indigenous literature has shifted from a view of narratives that focus only on loss and trauma towards a narrative that focuses on resurgence. *The Only Good Indians*, written by Stephen Graham Jones, is a resurgence of indigenous literature through which the three interconnected hauntological elements can be observed: memory, relational ethics, and survivance. Memory is a political and cultural force that is portrayed through the elk spirit that requires the characters to confront the memories they have suppressed to live their modern life.

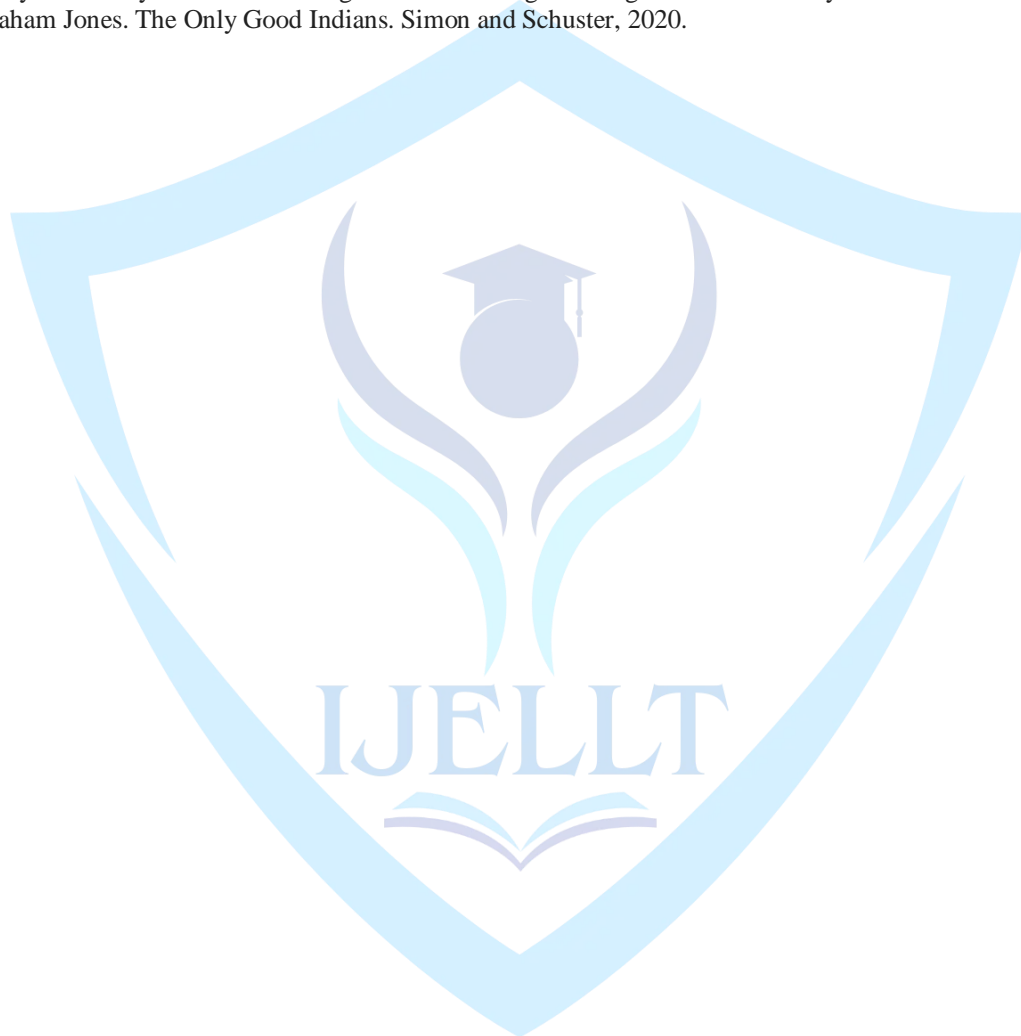
Relational ethics showcases the ecological dimension of haunting. In the novel, the restoration of the relationship between humans and non-humans adds to the ethical behaviour towards ecology. Survivance can be observed through Denora's final confrontation with the elk spirit at the moment when the cycle of violence is terminated, not through domination, but by recognizing it. Denora's survival also indicates that the future exceeds colonial temporality and haunting always demands a response to what has been unresolved, buried or silenced. Graham Jones extends this demand across generations. From Gabe, it is passed to Denora, and Denora's resolution with the Elk is more than a monster that seeks cultural revival. The Elk spirit, when encountered by Denora, understands that there is a possibility for ethical repair and resolves to end its vengeance. In this resolution, Jones showcases how the indigenous future is not terminated by colonial trauma, but it can be revived or restructured through revitalising and understanding the cultural ethics. In this contemporary ecosystem, cultural revitalisation, ecological awareness and healing can be easily achieved if the community or the family-based land management resists the colonial management and reconnects the people to their land and identity. (Reed & Diver, 2023).

### **Conclusion**

The *Only Good Indians* is an indigenous revival text in which haunting is not just a supernatural phenomenon but a mode of ethical restoration. Through Avery Gordon's hauntological perspective, the elk spirit is the representation of the return of suppressed indigenous histories and responsibilities in relation to the ecosystem and ecology. When the communal protocols are disrupted by modernity and urban assimilation, the indigenous memory and the land-based ethics seek a demand for accountability from both the individuals who commit the crime and the modern community as a whole. This novel is interpreted as one of the powerful corrective forces that reorients the characters towards cultural ethics with the land and the non-human beings connected to the community. In such a process, horror becomes a mode of survivance, and cultural trauma becomes a revitalization process. Contemporary studies on indigenous scholarship also showcase that cultural revival and environmental healing are strengthened when the indigenous knowledge system is guided properly with the proper governance and conservation rules.

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