

## WITNESSING, TESTIMONY AND TRAUMA IN *INDIAN SCHOOL DAYS*

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### ABSTRACT

Residential schools functioned from 1876 to 1996 in Canada in order to assimilate Indigenous children to Euro-Canadian culture. By implementation of Indian Act (1876), the Indigenous children were taken away from their parents and sent to these schools. The trauma that these kids underwent as a result of physical, mental and sexual abuse at these residential schools has been reflected in Basil H. Johnston's *Indian School Days*. The novel will be analyzed based on Judith Herman's concept of trauma and Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's concept of witnessing and testimony since the literary work can be a witness to the historical incidents that happened at residential schools in Canada. However, the novel also reflects the incidents that remained non-documented within various narratives within the selected novel.

*Keywords:* Abuse, Dori Laub, *Indian School Days*, Judith Herman, Shoshana Felman, residential school, trauma, witnessing.

### INTRODUCTION

Basil H. Johnston's *Indian School Days* deals with the scenes of witnessing and the question of how the trauma victims survive the trauma. Felman and Laub note that "the scene of witnessing is thus the scene of historical recording- and of the historical documenting- of an event" (1991: 168); however, in *Indian School Days* the scenes of witnessing are the scenes of non-recording and non-documenting of the historical events. Since the incidents have not been recorded or documented properly the question in mind would be "the unfolding recognition of the harms of residential schools corresponds remarkably with the phenomenon sometimes known as the 'human rights revolution'" (Capitaine and Vanthuyne 2017: viii). The events are witnessed, but they are not experienced. The experience of events is missed. The seeing and hearing do not match the exact time each event takes place which leads to lack of perception of the incidents. In this paper the significance of the survival, speech, silence, deafness and hearing would be discussed in *Indian School Days* in the light of Herman's concept of trauma and Laub and Felman's concepts of witnessing and testimony. In this selected novel, silence is an act of avoidance of hearing which leads to the denial of the acknowledgement. The transmission of witnessing to awareness is blocked as the reality was denied through blindness or deafness. Silence and not knowing can interrupt the process of historical documentation. The challenge is to make and rewrite history with the presence of the silence of the censor.

### METHODOLOGY

The word trauma originates from a Greek word meaning 'wound'. Sigmund Freud focused on trauma at the beginning of his career, but he left the topic later. He believed that sexual seduction in childhood is the reason of trauma later in victims' adulthood. Later on, he improved his research and considered unconscious fantasies responsible for neurotic

conflicts. He noticed that the traumatized subject suffers from the repetition of incidents in his flashback and nightmares. He believed that some people experience the series of painful events "to which they are subjected, and which seem to be entirely outside their wish or control" (Caruth 1996, 1).

Since 1960s, trauma emerged as an important subject of study. Various areas of social concerns such as post-traumatic stress among Vietnam war veterans, Holocaust survivors, women and children under violence led to study of trauma on these victims. The effect of war on traumatized patients led Freud to think about different kinds of pathology. In case of women and children, feminists played the main role by focusing on issues like female sexual slavery, genital mutilation, 'honor' killing, and rape. The clinicians perceived that when an overwhelming incident happens, the mind isolates the memories with the experience in specific areas of the brain that are inaccessible to the consciousness. As the memory is inaccessible, Freud's 'talk therapy' cannot fully access the unconscious of traumatized subject. Freud emphasized Oedipus complex as the cause of neurological problems. The primary loss which is related to oedipal drama of castration leads the subjects to neurosis later in their lives.

Later on, Judith Herman theorizes her concept of trauma as a pathology that destroys the social system of care and meaning. She was the first one who conceptualized complex PTSD. "Complex PTSD include a series of 'blow' to the developing child or adolescent's body and psyche in the form of psychological, physical, and/ or sexual abuse in a context of inadequate emotional and social support" (Söchting et al. 2007: 321). Herman notes "the conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma" (2015: 1). As the atrocities take place, people banish the memories from their consciousness; moreover, some of those atrocities are too horrible to be uttered and they remain unspeakable. The atrocities return back to the consciousness and remind the victim of the impossibility of denial. As a result, the victim needs to remember and tell the truth about the incidents that happened. In order to be healed the survivors of atrocities tell their experiences in fragmented and emotional manner; therefore, the listener should listen to the stories with patience to make sense of those broken phrases.

As the reality of the atrocities is revealed to the public, the actions need to take place; however this reality never lasts long since the society and each individual victim tend to keep the incidents as secrets, deny them, and repress them. If the society and individual do not deny and repress the truth, the unspeakable truth can be spoken. The victim can speak out the truth and be the first hand witness to the incidents.

To reach recovery from trauma, there are some stages to follow. The safe environment needs to be reestablished, the unspeakable truth reconstructed and the victims need to go back to their community and start their communication and interaction again.

When the victims are revealing the truth, they need action and engagement by the society. Remembering the atrocious experience can be very painful; therefore, the listeners should share the burden of its pain with victims by taking action against those atrocious events. The victims might suffer from the symptoms of trauma such as "insomnia, nausea, startle responses and nightmare, as well as dissociative or numbing symptoms" (Herman 2015: 31).

At the moment of trauma, the victims remain helpless and they go numb. The terror and helplessness, that the victims of trauma experience, threaten their bodily integrity.

Therefore, at the moment of traumatic incident, the victims are overwhelmed by extreme fright that leaves them with no sense of meaning and connection to the incident. These incidents affect emotion, memory and cognition. As there is profound change in memory, the traumatized subjects might not remember the traumatizing incident or just remember it in fragments without clear idea of the whole traumatic event. As they went through the moment of fright, they will always be vigilant and aware of their surroundings, but would not know the real reason behind their irritability. "The many symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder fall into three main categories. These are called "hyperarousal," "intrusion," and "constriction" (Herman 2015: 35).

Hyperarousal is the victims' constant fear of possible dangerous incidents; intrusion reflects the return of traumatic incidents to the victims' consciousness and constriction refers to the moment of being overwhelmed by fright and being numb. After the victims experience traumatic incidents, they will be always vigilant as they expect something dangerous happen at any point of time and take them by fright again; therefore, their system of self-preservation is threatened. As they are always alert, they are startled easily and can react to any kind of unexpected stimuli easily. These traumatized victims are anxious and they can react to any kind of provocations. They do not sleep well as they wake up frequently and any noise can disturb their sleep. Though the atrocious incidents might have happened long time ago, the traumatized patients feel they are at the moment of those experiences as the incidents return back to their consciousness constantly. Since they relive the traumatic moments, their normal life is interrupted. The patients experience the flashbacks of incidents when they are awake and have nightmares during sleep. Any kind of insignificant stimuli can return the traumatized patients back to moment of fright; therefore, no safe environment feels secure for them. The traumatic nightmares do not have any context, but they are set of crystalized images; fragmentary sensations. These fragmentary images contain traumatic memories. As the victims experienced powerlessness at the moment of trauma, and they could not resist the atrocious incidents, they surrender. The nightmares contain the moments when self-defense is futile. Besides, as the victims cannot defend themselves, but just surrender, they repress the memory. Therefore, later, they believe that it never happened to them, but they just observed it or they are just having a bad dream and it did not happen in reality.

Since traumatized patients experience the repercussions of traumatic moments by day and by night, they are very prone to use alcohol or drugs to alleviate their tensions. Substance abuse is a defense mechanism which helps the traumatized patients to suppress their thoughts regarding traumatic incidents.

The traumatized patients, who experienced atrocities imposed by others, can have poor communication and interaction with other people. They cannot form connection with their community as their trust was once betrayed at the moment of traumatic experience. In case, the patients were traumatized by their caretakers, it would be even more difficult for them to trust in people and have faith in them. As the caretaker turns the world into a hostile environment by his atrocious actions to the victims, the victims' trust is shattered. They were betrayed by their caretaker thus they feel abandoned or alone in their life. Instead of being protected by the caretaker, their life and integrity of subjectivity were threatened at the moment of traumatic incidents; therefore, bonding with other people frightens the patients. As the caretaker threatens the integrity and individuality of the child, his positive sense of self is questioned by himself; moreover, he loses his self-esteem. As a result, in the future, he blames himself for the traumatic incidents that occurred to him. The child is prone to feel

guilty and inferior. The inferiority shatters the sense of connection between individual and community; since he loses his trust in himself and in other people. The humiliation and helplessness that trauma patient undergoes at traumatic moment threaten his capacity for intimate connection with people in future. However, the patient needs to speak out about the incident to receive help and attention from his society.

As the traumatized patient speaks the unspeakable, the community needs to take action and support the person from harm and protect him from further dangerous situations. If the victim of trauma is a child, he will find himself trapped in the traumatic situation and he needs to adapt himself to the condition; it would be a burden for him to trust people who mistreat him. Rather than relying on protective adults and forming his subjectivity, his subjectivity is deformed by each encounter with fright. As his security is disrupted at this insecure environment, the child is alert to notice all the threatening situations.

Since the traumatic patient was betrayed by people before, he cannot trust people easily. However, recovery depends on creation of new connections and engaging in the community. Recovery can only happen in relationship with others. Therefore, he needs to trust people and form relationships with them.

The first stage of recovery deals with the patient's attempt to get rid of his fright and nightmare. Therefore his eating, sleeping and biological rhythm should be put into consideration. The second stage of recovery deals with the survivor's story of trauma. As the victim tells his story in set of images and fragmented components, it can be organized in detail step by step in time and historical context. The solidarity of a group helps the patient to trust again and recreate a sense of belonging.

## DISCUSSION

Basil H. Johnston (1929- 2015) was a Canadian author. He was a member of Chippewas of Nawash Unceded First Nation and he was sent to St. Peter Claver school. He narrates his experience at school in his novel, *Indian School Days*. He won Stephen Leacock Memorial Medal for humor for his collection of short stories *Moose Meat and Wild Rice*. In 1939, Basil told by his mom that he is going on a short trip. Once the agent arrived, he noticed that he is going to Spanish, St. Peter Claver's Indian residential school. *Indian School Days* was published in 1988 which accounts the narrator's being taken away from his parents and sent to Jesuit school in northern Ontario in 1939. The book is written in humorous way which indicates how the residential school students faced the bitter incidents in their lives by smile on their face. Like *The Kiss of Fur Queen* by Tomson Highway, this novel depicts aching loneliness, culture shock and deprivation of food and love within residential schools. Like Highway, Johnston expresses how students were whipped, kicked and beaten for making minor mistakes.

As the novel starts, the residential school students intend to go hunting together despite having class later. "Hunting?" I could scarcely utter the word" (1988: 13). The novel starts with doubt and hesitation and moment of reflection. Fear leads the narrator to difficulty in expressing himself since he could not imagine missing Miss Burke's class. They think that their teacher "won't see" them (1988: 15); however, another student expresses that the teacher "can see you plain as day" (1988: 15). The contrast of seeing and not seeing foreshadows the future events that either can be seen or not been seen by the onlookers. They missed the class with the excuse that they were sick; however, the teacher sees them playing outside and later she punished them by hitting their hand. "Put your hand out'. Wham! God, it stung. 'Now the

other hand'. Wham! My left hand burned. Wham, wham, wham. First one hand and then the other, until both my hands were thick and on fire and I was howling with each blow. After eighteen lashes, Miss Burke was puffing and sweating... and weakening" (1988: 17). As they were at school and they skipped the class, the teacher keeps on repeating "you belong in Spanish" (1988: 18). Later when the students are sent to Spanish, they are scared by even its name before entering it since their teacher mentioned its name before. Once they enter Spanish, the residential school, they know that the physical punishment is part of residential school program and the principals consider it as a way to civilize the savage Indian children. However, the punishment is always more than the committed crime and they did not deserve the harsh punishment.

The parents do not intend to send their children to Spanish; therefore, the agent threatens the mother "Well! If you don't want her to go, we'll take the whole family. Now! Get her ready. Hurry up!" (1988: 20). At this moment the narrator adds humor to reduce the effect of the agent's threat, but at the same time the reader can feel the fear the Indians go through by the use of humor.

The children that went to these schools varied in terms of their background. Some of them were orphans and they were supposed to be taken care of by principals. Some of them were sent away by their parents voluntarily to be educated. However, they were also those children who were sent to residential schools because of their misdemeanors. The innocent children who never committed any crimes were under the same roof as those who committed some crimes. Therefore, the innocent ones could be easily affected by the others as they could learn misbehavior from other students.

The agent who took the children away promised their families that they would take care of them as the narrative says the agent mentioned that "not even the combined efforts of Grandmother and Mother were enough to look after five children and that they ought to be relieved of two of their burdens" (1988: 19). It implies that the school would take care of the students and treat them well; however, it is not the case as later the students would have been punished for minor mistakes they make.

From the time the children were taken to school, they have been treated very harshly by the agent that they underwent too much stress. "The nature would not leave me alone, and I went in search of the 'poop house,' which fortunately was just around the corner. But before I got there, I was collared by the agent" (1988: 20). The stress leads the students to sensation of peeing all the time and they were not allowed to go to toilet since the agent was scared they might run away. Herman remarks that "psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless. As the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force" (1988: 33). These children have no power to defend themselves or make themselves and their feelings heard. They knew that they have been observed by the agent as the narrator expresses "though I could not see him I was certain that he kept an eye on us through narrow crevices from below, above and behind" (1988: 21), the emphasis on every direction indicates the omnipresence of the agent and his power. Here, the children are even scared of expressing their need to use the toilet as they are scared of the agent's threatening behavior. Later, when he allows the child to go to the toilet, he threatens him by saying "don't move; I'll be watching you" (1988: 21). He treats the kid like a criminal not a child who has just been taken away from his parents; still the agent cannot perceive the sadness and grief these children undergo as a result of separation. The moment of separation is traumatic moment for the children as they need to leave those they know and go to unknown place. Helplessness

and terror are the emotions that are evoked in traumatized patient (Herman 2015: 33) and at this moment the Aboriginal children experience this terror by the fact of separation. When an old man noticed the agent is mistreating the child, the agent responded that "'I... I... I'm taking them to Spanish... a... it's a school for bad students,' the agent stammered" (1988: 22). Even he is not sure what he is talking about, but he intends to justify the mistreatment of the child.

When the children reached school, they were given a number. "You are number forty-three" (1988: 23). From now on, they could not have their own names, but they are left as numbers. They lose their identity through being called by numbers and not their own Indian names. As the students start to know each other and communicate, the Fathers stop their gathering since they want them to avoid talking about their community, parents and culture. When Basil enters the school, he should get haircut and Euge is responsible for it. The children have met before in their own community, but Basil "could not recall ever having seen him before" (1988: 23). The change in his appearance does not let Basil remember Euge, the change is radical. Despite the difference in appearance, the students like to talk to their friends, but it is forbidden. Once Father Buck intended to stop the group gathering by calling the students one by one and Euge, one Indian student, got very disappointed and furious. "'Awright, Father.' Euge's visage darkened as every muscle stiffened. Almost involuntarily he clenched his fists till his knuckles whitened" (1988: 23). As he cannot express his anger toward the Father, he suffers in silence, but his bodily reaction indicates his feeling. The traumatized subject has his rage against his victimizer.

At school, the Aboriginal children are not allowed to use their native language since they need to learn English, but the paradox is that they learn English from the principals who are German and are not fluent in English. "You not like get up?" (1988: 28). The ungrammatical sentence shows how horrible the teaching is at residential school. The students are forced to learn a new language while the principals do not speak it correctly either. Further on, Father Buck addresses Simon "you deaf? You no can hear" (1988: 28). They insult the students in whatever way they can though here Simon intends to resist Father Buck by pretending not to hear the bell. Time and again the emphasis on blindness or deafness on students' side highlights their resistance to follow the instructions or to follow other students who force the principals' rules on them. When they need to get ready for breakfast students tend to fight each other as they do not intend to obey the instructions. "Hold your horses! Can't you see I ain't finished. What's a matter, you blind?" (1988: 29). They are under pressure by Fathers and they do not want to be under pressure by other students as well; therefore, they challenge each other as much as they can. Passive resistance happened at school; however, only once Basil witnessed students to "line up and then maintain the strictest monastic silence when no bell had rung" (1988: 30). The silence happened as the students heard the word 'ice cream' and they lined up in veranda and waited for their ice cream. In other occasions, they resisted passively without complaining to the principals.

The principals always expected silence on behalf of the students. Even when the class was silent still Father Buck commanded "Quiet!" (1988: 31). The students were not allowed to speak even while walking in the corridors. The silence even continued in the dining hall and "during the meal there was little conversation" (1988: 32). Basil, as a survivor, never witnessed verbal resistance on behalf of students. There were few moments that students would address the Fathers as "Nazi" out loud since they were German. The Fathers could

hear the resistance of students, but they pretended not to hear it. The students addressed them as Nazis since they were oppressed like Jews at Residential schools at the hand of Germans. Capitaine and Vanthuyn mention that "around this time, the residential schools also began to be defined by some social scientists as an attempted genocide akin to the Holocaust" (2017: 43). It is not surprising that the students compare themselves to Jews since they were belittled, demeaned and suffered from various types of abuses at schools.

Besides not being able to communicate to each other, at school they were forced to do some downgrading chores like brooming, cleaning the toilets and dusting. The newcomers had harder time than the others. The tasks had nothing to do with their future or their preparation to do jobs later. Father Buck handed Basil "a mop, pail, soap, and a peculiar, curved oval brush such as I had never before seen" (1988: 33). He had no experience cleaning the toilets before; therefore, the cleaning stuff that Father Buck handed him seemed so strange to him; however, he was expected to clean the toilet. The students should wash dirty toilets while even the Father could not stay in those smelly toilets to give instructions to students to let them know how to do their chores properly. Therefore, the process of cleaning the toilets would be like

I too had to out to avoid being overcome. While I stood outside breathing in oxygen, I developed a stratagem for cleaning up the toilets without collapsing. For self-preservation the job had to be done in stages. Flush the toilets, run outside. Wash the bowls, run outside. Hold breath, wash urinals, run outside. Hold breath, wash partitions, run outside, spread sawdust on the floor, run outside. Sweep up sawdust, run outside. (1988: 33)

However, after cleaning the toilet, the Fathers are not still happy with the job and they push the student to do the process all over again. The student is traumatized by cleaning the smelly toilet and like a traumatized patient describes the situation with a "set of images" that are crystalized (Herman 2015: 38). The incident of cleaning the toilet is encoded in the form of vivid sensations and images that even the reader can feel the smell and understand the trouble the kid underwent. Wunder notes that the aim of these schools was vocational training (1997: 69); however, the students were not prepared for their future jobs at the residential school, but they only did demeaning chores. The Fathers ask the students to do so much work that students consider it as a kind of harassment. Leon believes that he is under "unnecessary harassment at the hands of Father Rushman" (1988: 88); therefore, once he heard Father Rushman would move to another school he expressed his anger by saying "Good! I hope you go to hell- an' I hope you never come back" (1988: 88). Taking revenge is one of the desires of trauma victim and by wishing Father Rushman to go to hell; Leon takes his revenge through his words. Capitaine and Vanthuyn remark that "hate and anger which may indigenous students developed as a form of reaction to the abuses they suffered, are also by-products of residential school education" (2017: 123). The hatred and fear of the principals originate from unexpectedness of punishment. They students did not know when, where and for what reason they were punished. "Always there was the next hour, and the next. Sooner or later what we had done would catch up to us" (1988: 54). They may not be punished immediately for their wrong action, but they will finally get the punishment. The frightening part is they did not know when and it puts them on alert.

Besides the torturous tasks that students need to do, they were asked to repeat the same grade many times despite their success in the same grade. The Indian students could leave the residential schools only after 16; therefore, they need to repeat the same grades to reach the proper age. Herman mentions that the identity of traumatized patient is changed by traumatic incident (2005: 56); the Indian students' identity is destroyed as a result of repetitious disrespect by the Fathers. They needed to be 16 to be graduated and as there were not enough teachers to increase the grades, children should tolerate the pain of repeating the grades. "Now, you go with this Grade 5 to Father Mayhew's class.' But Father, I'm supposed to be in Grade 6. I was in Grade 5 last year" (1988: 34). They do not let the students make progress and move forward as a result one can see the intention was not educating the Indian students, but only keeping them away from their community. "Father. Someone made a mistake. I'm supposed to be in Grade 6. I passed Grade 5 already. I tol' Father Buck, but he won't believe me" (1988: 35). All that Father Buck says in his answer is "Soooooo!" (1988: 35). He is deaf to Basil's request since he knows Basil is right, but he cannot move him to sixth grade as Basil would finish before 16 and it is against the rules. No one listens to these students, or respects their needs as the only important thing is to avoid their contact with their Indian culture, language and in general their community.

The students work hard and study so much and they need proper food not to be weak or lose their energy, but the portion of food is not enough for them. Even the quality of the food is so bad that the principals do not eat the same food as students. "Hey! Father! An anonymous voice called out. 'How come you not eating carrots like us?' to which there was no answer" (1988: 38). Moreover one of the students complains that "if I starve to death, it's going to be their fault; we never have enough but they have lots for themselves" (1988: 37). The barley or pea soup was served to students while the teachers eat "roasts of beef and pork and poultry" (1988: 137). The students questioned their principals about the difference of the food students and the principals eat, but the principals were deaf to their questions since they did not care about health, portion of the food or even its quality. As the portion is not enough and the food does not have enough vitamins and proteins, the principals eat other food. Milloy notes that students suffered from poor- nutrition, unsafe buildings and neglect of their ill health by the principals (1999: 208).

The portion of food was so small that "I'm full' was an expression alien in our world and to our experience" (1988: 40). "Edward B., 'at the Union Lake residential school: we are going to tell you how we are treated. I am always hungry. We only get two slices of bread and one plate of porridge... We are treated like pigs, some of boys, always eat cats and wheat. I never ask anyone to give me anything to eat. Some of the boys cried because they are hungry. Once I cry too because I was very hungry" (Milloy 1999: 2590). The students complain about the quality of food, but no one gives them any reasonable response; therefore, "grumbling about food was a daily exercise performed with varying degrees of bitterness and ingenuity" (1988: 139). They showed their discontent with their complaints, but nothing has changed and this lack of action on the side of principals leads them to psychological problems. They knew they are not important and that the principals do not care about them. Even the smallest kid with small stomach would not feel full and those bigger size students would not have more food to eat. They all had the same amount. As a result of lack of enough food, they were prone to catch diseases very easily, some of the students died at the residential school. Mosby and Galloway claim that "hunger was so widespread that nearly 1000 malnourished students at 6 residential schools were used as subjects in a series



of nutrition experiments between 1948 and 1952" (2017: E1044). Despite all the malnourishment and hunger, the tragic news is that students' deaths were neglected even by the journals. "There had been one terrible period in the fall of 1918 when many boys died in the dread flu epidemic that gripped the world. There was one pathetic entry in the journal, '*Personne mourit aujourd'hui* [no one died today]" (1988: 82). The journalists were blind and deaf to the death rate of students at residential school and they denied obvious facts and the present evidences of their deaths. The journalists did not document the fact that these Aboriginal children die at residential schools.

The meal was so scarce that "meals became rituals" (1988: 40). The students did not talk during their meal as they intended to eat the small portion that they have been given within their limited time. While male students suffered from lack of food, they thought that female students have better life in the residential school as they look plump and healthy. "Only a few sidelong glances at the girls gave us reason enough to 'bemoan our outcast state and trouble deaf heaven with our bootless cries'" (1988: 58). Heaven hears their prayers, but despite their supplication, nothing changes in their lives. Not only the principals but also heaven is deaf to their prayers. When the boys have the chance to visit their sisters at St. Joseph's, "they got first-hand evidence of how much better the girls lived and of the vastly superior care they received from the good sisters" (1988: 81). Their observation is biased as they are obsessed with their hardships. In reality, both boys and girls experienced traumatic incidents at residential school, only the kind of trauma could differ. Capitaine and Vanthuyne note that at residential schools "people are different, but stories are basically the same" (50).

At times, the students cannot tolerate their condition anymore and they intend to escape the residential school. Gordon, one of the students, addresses his friend "I hate this place. I wanna go home an' never come back...I'm gonna run away, Ben! I can't take it no more. Maybe I won't see you no more... waah... waah" (1988: 108). The pauses in between his speech indicate that he intends to gather his thoughts. He suffered a lot and he does not like to stay there, but still he is not sure about escaping the school. Once in group, they decide to run away from school as they can think of the plights in their plan and they can gather food together. When the students stood in the line, Father Buck could not see Benedict Shigwadja, Gordon Solomon or Russel. He asked out loud from other students where these students could be but no one knew or they just simply did not want to inform him. Hunger, punishments, and death of their classmates are just a few reasons for the students to run away from school.

Not only the students suffered from physical hunger but also emotional. The principals punish them and beat them all the time rather than caressing them and giving them love now that they are far from their families and parents.

Food was the one abiding complaint because the abiding condition was hunger, physical and emotional. Food, or the lack of it, was something that the boys could point to as a cause of their suffering; the other was far too abstract and therefore much too elusive to grasp. (1988: 137)

As they are little children, they express lack of food but the main reason they suffer is lack of human compassion by the principals. "The traumatized people feel utterly abandoned" (Herman 2015: 52) and here the students feel lonely and abandoned as a result of indifferent, cold and harsh behavior of the Fathers. However, the reader can notice that the

narrator at the same time talks about few kind soul Fathers who take care of the students and give the love and affection they needed even though for a short while.

There were two young men who, by disposition and temperament, were well suited to look after the little ones. The first was Father "Barney" Mayhew, S. J., a man of tremendous compassion and understanding, who served the "natives" until his recent retirement... The other, Father Schretlin, S. J., who came some years later, was made of sterner stuff, with a strong predilection for law, order and discipline. (1988: 61)

Though these two Fathers are example of kind hearted people who give care and attention to students, the general atmosphere of schools is threatening. The Aboriginal students were taken away from their families with the promise that they would be in great care of the Fathers of the church and principals while, at school they confront all types of abuses. The paradoxical part is that when some inspectors from the main church report the health and food condition at Spanish residential school, they give false reports. They mention that they are at the residential school "to inspect the food and to make reports on the quality" (1988: 142) of students' meal; however, they join the conspiracy of silence as previously journalists and Fathers did. They do not listen to students' complaints about the quality of food, and they are deaf to their words. The students are ready to talk to investigators and discuss "how best they might assist the investigation and provide testimony" (1988: 142), yet the investigators ignore them. Despite the tales of misery and hunger they hear from students who are the victims of abuse at the school, the investigators were blind to the reality or they just did not intend to involve themselves when religious Fathers were in charge of the schools. They kept their silence against historical incident of hunger and lack of enough food at the residential school. They just gave false hopes to the students that they would reflect their words in their report; however, their report says that

Up to this point we can only report in generalities, but we do have enough information to state that it is our impression that the Indian boys are receiving as balanced a diet of protein and carbohydrates as is necessary for their growth and health. (1988: 143)

The students suffered from lack of enough food in their plates and the report says that the diet is suitable for their health. The hunger that they experienced was not recorded within the historical incidents at Spanish residential school. Instead of supporting the Indigenous students when they need help and care, Fathers and church support each other. In fact, it clarifies the point that they do not really care about what happens to these students at school as far as their civilized Euro- Canadian society is not threatened by these 'savage' Indians.

The cruelty toward these children is to the extent that the Fathers do not believe them when the students tell the truth. They would rather listen to them lying since they would have an excuse to punish them. In one of the incidents, Father Hawkins found the cigarette at school, but the students did not smoke it. However, Father Hawkins did not believe them and beats them. He beat their hands with the whip 32 times. He was deaf to the truth they said since he just intended to punish them with a simple excuse and the cigarette gave him enough excuse to punish the students even though they told the truth. *"Thirty-two.* At last what Father Hawkins was doing seeped into my skull. He didn't believe me, and he was doubling

the number of lashes that he was going to deliver on my hands for each untruth that I uttered" (1988: 160). The narrator accounts the incident with images and sensations. As Herman mentions the sentences of a traumatized subject is full of "indelible image" (2015: 38). By giving the vivid description of the Father and number of beatings, the reader can feel the pain and stressful condition of the incident. The sad point is they were punished for telling the truth. The students are always in terror because telling the truth or lies will lead to punishment. As Herman states "chronic childhood abused takes place in a familial climate of pervasive terror, in which ordinary caretaking relationships have been profoundly disrupted" (2015: 99). Rather than being trusted and respected by the Fathers, they are always in fear of being beaten; therefore, they grow to be traumatic. The Fathers do not listen to these students because they think the students are capable of doing any kind of harm. They are biased. "On the way upstairs I tried hard not to cry, but it is difficult to hold back bitterness and resentment when your account is discredited and you know that a lie would not have obtained the slightest remission of a thrashing by a single stroke" (1988: 160). Their ego is damaged as telling the truth did not change Father's harsh attitude toward them. This was not the only occasion that the students were punished even though they told the truth. They were punished once again when the eggs disappeared from the school and even though the students did not eat those eggs and the real culprit was "one of the good people of Spanish" (1988: 217), the Fathers did not give the students the chance to defend themselves. They did not behave wrongly, but they were mistreated which did not sound reasonable to them. However, the principals think that punishment is the only way to educate the uncivilized Aboriginal children. As the students do not know when they might be punished, they are always in fright as even by telling the truth they were punished.

The students whose parents could read and write can send letter home to tell their parents about their life at school and also know about their community and whatever happens in their absence. By writing those letters, they create their own witness of the incidents. Therefore, the parents tried as much to give hope and inspiration to their children and encourage them to continue their studies despite the difficulties. Eugene receives a letter from parents that informs him that he is going home. "I am going home" (1988: 78), he informs his friends. With this letter, they receive hope and they survive the tough days easier. He repeated the fact that he is going home since "it was delicious to say and to hear" (1988: 78). The repetition helps him believe that after all the plights, it is possible for him to go back home. Repetition is assurance.

Dear Son,

This is to let you know that we are all fine and hope you are the same. The weather has been real good hear.

We are trying to get you home. I spoke to the priest and the agent and they said that they going help.

That's all for now and be a good boy and do what the priests tell you. I pray for you every night for you come home.

Love, Mom. (1988: 79)

This type of letter gives hope to the students and reminds them despite the distance they are not forgotten. Therefore, they resist the plights with the inspiration they receive from the letters. As Charlie and Eugene are going out of school, the students ask them to "tell

everyone what it's like here" (1988: 157). They are creating witness of their horrible situation to testify others about the ordeal these students undergo each day at Spanish residential school.

When he finished all the grades, Basil left the school; however, after five years he returns back to residential school as they offered high school program for Indian students. He believes that higher education was his "only chance to escape a life of cutting wood" (1988: 178). As he entered the school, he noticed the changes. New principals took the responsibility of controlling the school and "under Father Oliver's administration the meals improved" (1988: 182). As the situation got better at school, the prior students could deal with their life easier and to some extent reconcile with the principals.

Besides the change of principals, the new students who were not forced to go to these schools, but they chose the school themselves changed the situation. They were confident, demanding and stubborn. "They brought with them pride in dress, in manner and in their persons" (1988: 184). As other students observe how these new students behave proudly, they learn to gain confidence and ask for what they need from their principals though they would not be successful in gaining what they asked for. They received Boston baked beans for a while, but Fathers stopped offering them this food without giving them any reason. The students complained to the Fathers time and again by mentioning "forget the day again, Brother?... We missed our beans this morning, Brother" (1988: 223), but the Fathers were deaf to their needs and complaints. The students just liked the beans and the Fathers took away the beans. The result of their complaints was that the Father asked them to either return back home or to keep silent.

Father Oliver threatened Cecil not to talk to those students who complained since he wanted to gather them all together and talk to them. Cecil was so scared that whatever questions the students asked him he answered "I can't tell you" (1988: 236). Father Oliver put silence on him by threatening him. Moreover he was confused why the students complain since "no one has ever got sick from the meals served; no one has died" (1988: 238). He is just blind to the reality that the food is not nutritious and its portion is not enough. He is blind to the fact that so many students are prone to sickness as their body is weak because of lack of vitamins and proteins and their body cannot defend them against viruses. Since the students intended to be educated, they preferred to stay at school. But after the incident the Fathers treated the students with silent treatment. There were days in which they did not know what they are going to study or where they need to go. Therefore, the students united against Fathers' silent treatment. "Finally we agreed; 'If they're not going to talk to us and not going to let us know where we're supposed to work, or where we're supposed to go to class, then we won't work'" (1988: 239). They needed to teach a lesson to their abusers. If they were silent to them, they would not do any chores in return. Their unity helped them to act strongly in front of their victimizers. Since the school principals punish the students all the time and abuse them physically, the students need to keep their unity and friendship to survive.

As the new students were not familiar with beating and whippings and lashing by principals at school, they had their own voice to express themselves. They disobeyed the Fathers when they thought they were right.

'These boys had the impudence... they won't do what I told them,' he was saying. 'Move! Outside! He commanded. 'You can't make us,' Dominic answered back. 'We

ain't movin'. We're not dogs that you can throw us outside anytime that you feel like it. We're men too, like you. We got feelings. We're going to stay right here. We're not bothering anybody; we're not doing anything to hurt anybody or break anything. (1988: 234)

The students know they are just talking to each other and there is not harm in it; therefore, they do not listen to the Fathers. Having brave friends around let the students get their voice and express themselves. Besides once the Fathers asked the students to go out after their study but Dominic was so tired of all the nonsensical rules and he stayed in his place despite the Father's orders. As the Father shouted at him, "Dominic jumped up. 'You don't have to come and attack me so suddenly like that. I'm not a dog to be thrown outside. Why don't you ask, once in a while, instead of always ordering, shouting. Orders! Orders! Orders!'" (1988: 225). The hard and demeaning chores exhausted these students and the way the Fathers punish them harshly lead the brave students to speak out and voice out their rage and resentment. Herman mentions that "feelings of rage and murderous revenge fantasies are normal responses to abusive treatment" (2015: 104). These students tolerated enough and kept grudges against their Fathers for long to have feeling of rage within themselves.

In addition to the changes at boys' school, girls' school improved too. Since boys' school was in front of the girls' school, the changes in one could affect the other. "Whatever course the boys' school set, the girls' school followed" (1988: 185). As the time passed, the principals noticed that they should improve educational system; food and hygienic condition at residential schools to attract more students. However one should notice that the situation was not good, it was changing from worst to bad, there was much more to do to reach the ideal level. When the principals were teaching the boys how to act properly at the table for lunch or dinner, the students "practiced with whatever grace [they] could on empty plates and empty stomachs" (1988: 227). Instead of feeding them well and teach them how to behave ironically they were hungry and they needed to act as if they are having a good meal and passing the food around the table.

After tolerating so many years of malnutrition, beating and hard condition, the students graduated from school. At the graduation the parents asked the students to "do something for your people" (1988: 242). Now that they are educated, it is their duty to their people and community to be useful and help them as much as they can. The moment of reunion with parents is a kind of healing for the students since now they know all the suffering will lead to a better future for their people through their future endeavor. "'We toughed it out, didn't we? They couldn't break us down, could they?' Dominic said with pride, as we shook hands; he would not- could not- say 'Farewell' or 'Goodbye' or 'Au revoir'" (1988: 243). Being together gave them the courage to survive in the most horrible conditions. They supported each other and the unity made them strong to overcome traumatic situations and as they went through all the plights, it was difficult to bid farewell to each other.

## CONCLUSION

Johnston's *Indian School Days* accounts the trauma of being Aboriginal child in Euro-Canadian society. The students underwent maltreatment, malnutrition and beatings, but at some points they toughed it out since they were supported by each other. As the residential school survivors tell us, the support can help these survivors to survive the trauma they underwent days and nights. Herman points out that "the victim demands action, engagement

and remembering" (2015: 7-8). The incidents that happened at those schools had ripple effects and deep harm and they should not be forgotten. In *Indian School Days*, various narratives such as reports in the journals and the report by investigators did not reflect the reality since the people in charge were deaf to reality of incidents at the residential school; however, Basil survived the situation in order to tell his story through which he recovered from his own personal traumatic past. As Michael Cheena, residential school survivor mentions, "I became an alcoholic. Many survivors use alcohol or native people use alcohol or stuff like this. These are coping mechanism to block your emotions and feelings" (2016). The self-expression is the path to recovery and Basil's novel is a medium through which he vocalized what remained non- documented and non- recorded throughout the history.

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