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of
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Volume 8
Special Issue
on
ABORIGINAL WRITING

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UGC Centre for Australian and New Zealand Studies
Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla

2015-16

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From the Editor

As I take over from Professor Pankaj K. Singh, my mentor, it becomes an overwhelming and emotional experience for me, since to reach the benchmark set by her remains a formidable task. Hence, the present issue of IJAS is my humble attempt to sincerely strive to follow her dedication towards work and her meticulous attention towards detail. It is also a modest effort and a resolution to get somewhat close to her academic acumen.

Aboriginal Australia did not have a script; in fact the early literary accounts emerge from the journals of the European explorers. With the learning of the written script the Indigenous people of Australia started to articulate their concerns in their own voice. Embedded deep into “time immemorial” notion of being, these also persuasively communicate issues of the contemporary times while strengthening their own position in the oeuvre of Australian literature. Resistance and reclamation find a central position in writings of even 21st century Aboriginal works as both men and women writers assert their pride in their unique Indigenous culture, express angst at the loss of family while a sense of dispossession still engulfs them.

The present issue was conceived keeping in view the way the Australian Studies have taken shape in India. Perceiving, if not similarities, but certain parallels in the forms of negation of humanity, the Aboriginal writings especially have found a wide readership in India. With impetus on research as well as knowledge enhancement this issue brings forth varied perceptions of/on Aboriginal works of Australia and New Zealand. These echo tensions, denial and conflicts; emerging from a colonial legacy; especially of identity and belonging. Most of the articles revolve around fervent protest and resistance against mainstream oppression.

Marking the presence of Maori culture, in an interview with Sylvie and Alexander, Selywn a Maori artist, asserts his own distinct position in New Zealand. Girija Sharma focuses on belonging and

assertion of the self as well as on cultural and political aspects of Aboriginal drama . Jane Harrison's conversation with Ishmeet Kaur reveals her choice to write about women of Indigenous Australia and bonding with the community. Rekha Sharma and Supala Pandirajan's papers offer insight into landscapes and spiritualism along with Aboriginal dreamtime, their songs and oral culture respectively. Anita Sharma examines mainstream white writer Judith Wright's poems to establish them as compassionate take and support to political movement of the Aborigines. Malathy suggests a dialogue between present day environmentalists and Aboriginal wisdom to understand Australian land. Virender Pal concerns over the human rights violation of the Aboriginal people. Reclamation of self along with redefining the difference with the whites is the centre of Shiwani Khatri's paper. Nisha Misra foregrounds the traumatic memories of life writings of stolen generations. Prakash Mehra attacks the religion of the whites which was used to colonize the minds of the Indigenous children. Majorly reclamation of self through communal bonding underlines the writing of Indigenous - both in New Zealand and Australia.

The delay in bringing out this volume due to some technical reasons is regretted. Keeping in mind the long time span lost two combined volumes have been planned – 2015-16 is with us and 2017-18 too would be published soon. Since this volume got delayed many entries are from the year 2018 as the articles have been updated. As has been the precedence, after this Special Issue the next one will be General Issue (2017-2018). The editor would specially like to thank Professor Pankaj K. Singh and Professor Girija Sharma for their valuable support at various stages and UGC for its financial assistance for the publication of the journal.

Neelima Kanwar

Selwyn Vercoe speaks

by Alexander Dales & Sylvie Haisman

In this interview, Maori visual artist Selwyn Vercoe talks about Maori culture and the role of art for Maori people historically and today.

My name is Selwyn Vercoe. Before addressing any group of people, Maori traditionally give what we call a pepeha—it's a way of introducing yourself by acknowledging the higher spirit and talking about the places and people you are connected to. Maori identify strongly with the geographics of our local tribal areas, the mountains and rivers, and also our whakapapa, our genealogy, is very important to us. It's quite similar to how the Jewish people give their genealogies in the Bible. You know, they say Jacob son of Isaac, Isaac son of Abraham, all that business. That's why at a certain time a number of theologians claimed that Maori were the lost tribe of Israel. That was taught as fact in the schools for a long time; it's been discredited now, but there are similarities.

Myself I like to keep things short and sweet so I just give a short pepeha, I just say my iwi—that's my tribe—and hapu (sub-tribe), marae (that's a piece of land where we have all our gatherings, and there's usually a carved meeting house on the marae), the waka (canoe) that our ancestors migrated to Aotearoa (New Zealand) on, and the awa (river) and maunga (mountain) from our local area. When I'm speaking in front of a gathering I give my pepeha in the form of a Powerpoint show, so that people can visualise my maunga and so forth. It's like a modern pepeha.

I'm a secular person so I don't usually give a karakia or prayer, but I do like to start my pepeha by thanking the higher spirit. My pepeha from my father's side is Rangitiaki, that's my awa (my river), my maunga is Putauaki—it used to be called Mount Edgecombe back in the day, before the period in history during which the New Zealand government started restoring a lot of places to their pre-colonial Maori names. My marae is Tu te Ao, and I'm one of the Ngamaihi people from the Ngati Awa iwi, travelling on the Mataatua waka.

I identify more strongly with my father's side because I grew up near Whakatane, but my mother's people are important to me too. She's

Ngati Porou, from the Rangitukia hapu; her awa is Waiapu, her maunga is Hikurangi and her marae is Ohinewaiapu. The Ngati Porou people trace their descent back to the Pacific island of Rarotonga, and they arrived in Aotearoa on the Horouta waka.

My father has Ngati Porou connections too, through my paternal grandmother—her father was one of the last *tohunga kauae*, so he was a master in Maori tattooing. He travelled right around Aotearoa tattooing people of high rank, emblazoning them with the particular patterns and symbols that would illustrate their rank and achievements. His name was Tame Poata (<https://teara.govt.nz/en/photograph/41244/tattoo-expert-tame-poata>). Another family member from Ngati Porou was my kuia, my great-grandmother Herewaka, Princess Te Rangi Pai; she composed "Hine E Hine", the famous Maori lullaby that used to play on New Zealand TV every night after the programmes finished back in the day.

You can read about my mother's father and her uncles in the Maori Battalion book. They all served in the Second World War. They liberated Monte Casino; the Nazis surrendered to them. But it was quite a sad story for them; my grandfather, Koro Taki, and his brother, Koro Jack, witnessed their brother being shot in Italy. They were all together in the Maori Battalion, so that was a traumatic thing, seeing their brother being shot, it reverberated throughout the generations. A lot of veterans were traumatised, when they returned back from war they had shell-shock. I believe there's a relationship between that trauma, people's inability to deal with it, and the extremely high suicide rates in New Zealand now. That generation, unlike the modern generation, they had work. There was full employment, so the way they dealt with their trauma was by working, that was a bit of therapy for them, and by drinking, because alcohol was part of the social norm—feel bad, have a drink, you know. Then that drinking culture carried on to the next generation, but round that time Maori were encouraged to leave their traditional setting of maraes in rural areas and migrate to the cities to join the trades and professions, but only ten percent of them succeeded in that. So they ended up with low-paid work or later on they were unemployed, and as well they were away from the support of their marae

and their family structures, which led to a lot of societal breakdown. And then the next generation they were even more separated from extended family and Maori culture and they had even less work, and the only thing they were doing was drinking.

I don't drink myself. Almost no-one in my immediate family drinks, none of my aunts and uncles. It's unusual and a lot of people think it's a religious thing with us but actually it's medical, it's not in our genetic makeup to deal with alcohol, we get alcohol poisoning. I had one drink about twenty-five years ago and I ended up in hospital. Just one glass and boom I was sick. The doctors say we can't filter the poison in alcohol, we just get sick. This inability to tolerate alcohol is similar to the Australian aborigines, who are even less equipped to tolerate the effects of this fiery liquid, and I suppose this is to do with us only recently being exposed to alcohol, so not having had sufficient time to evolve to withstand it, as is the case for those societies who have been drinking for millennia. While not many Maori are as susceptible to alcohol poisoning as some of the members of my family, the Maori word for alcohol "wai pirau" ("rotten water") certainly attests to a Maori wariness of the substance.

Through urbanisation a lot of Maori people have lost contact with their marae and their whanau, their extended families. Myself I've been urbanised but I do go home to my marae. Maori from the cities go home to their marae for funerals, sometimes weddings, various meetings; lately there have been a lot of Treaty of Waitangi settlement meetings at our marae. The Treaty was an agreement between the British sovereign Queen Victoria and the Maori people, and was later contentiously used by the British to justify their claim of absolute sovereignty over the New Zealand isles, whereas the Maori who signed it and those who came afterwards didn't interpret the treaty they signed in this capacity. Whether the misunderstanding that arose was due to poor translation of the treaty (most of those Maori chiefs who signed the treaty possessed at best only imperfect English so based their understanding of it on the Maori translation of it alone), guile on the part of the colonisers, or an insufficient overlap of world views between colonised and coloniser (the Maori at the time of colonisation did not

believe in land as something that even could be owned in the way the British did) is hardly a moot point— it was clearly for all of these reasons. Even within the terms of the Treaty historically the Crown broke a lot of the unambiguous promises they had made, for instance dispossessing the Maori of huge swathes of land, and banning the speaking of the Maori language, but in recent years there have been efforts to honour the Treaty by making settlements to address the harm caused to Maori by the breaking thereof. Lately we're encouraging people to go back and reconnect with their marae. The people who live on the marae all year round are called the *ahi kaa*, the ones who keep the fires burning. *Taha whanau* (connection with family values and culture) is very important now because like I said before New Zealand's got one of the highest suicide rates in the world, especially among the young people.

The Maori idea of an artist is a bit different from the Pakeha (Western) idea. Community consultation is very important for Maori, for instance a good friend of mine has done a lot of portraits of *mana wahine*, strong Maori women, women with integrity, and in the process has courted a lot of controversy in the community about that. If you're going to depict a prominent member of a tribe then it's very important that you get permission from the *runanga*, the tribal authorities. You can't just use things that belong to the community to sell your wares. Really if you use cultural things in your art it should be for educational purposes, not for making money or furthering the career of an individual artist. So as was the case with a project I did a couple of years ago on *Te Ariki Tapairu*—women of high birth, princesses—none of the work in that exhibition was for sale, because the objective was to imbibe the knowledge of these important people, not appropriate it. I would have felt wrong if I was to profit from that, it wasn't my thing, I did not use these people for commercial gain, it was about education. So Maori art is more about the collective culture and less about the individual.

All civilisations and cultures have identified themselves with art and Maori are no different in that. For me in art I see a universal connection in humanity through art-forms. When I first started doing art that was something that interested me; I could see a lot of correlations of patterns and designs in the art-forms of different civilisations and

cultures. Traditionally the role of the artist in Maori society was to make carvings. They were very tapu, very sacred. Traditional Maori carvings were how we depicted our ancestors, our whakapapa or genealogy. So when you go to a marae you see all our ancestors depicted in the carvings in the meeting house. When the Christian missionaries came here, Maori noticed that the Gospels begin with the whakapapa (genealogy) of Jesus Christ, and that was something that got our ancestors interested in the Bible, because they could see that correlation with something so utterly innate, primal and transparent to them. Maori carvings also play a strong role in storytelling or narrating on the marae. Usually it would be a tohunga (adept) who would take on the role of explaining the significance of the carvings to the people. A tohunga is like a specialist doctor or a priest, able to diagnose or proclaim that all art has some meaning, some story behind it.

I used to be on the committee at the Auckland City Mission (a charity helping people in need). There used to be a Maori carving class at the Mission, and I thought it would be good to introduce art classes for young people. We had ceramics, photography, painting and so forth. It's about using art for therapy, if you're in a bad mood or as a way to wind down or to forget about things, and also a way for young people to connect with their culture and therefore their extended families. We need to teach our kids these things; taha whanau is very important and we're advocating it strongly because family dysfunction is a big contributing factor to the high suicide rates and other indices of societal breakdown. Kids need the support of extended family because their parents are so often dysfunctional, and they're not getting that support from their peer groups.

I've been to China and South East Asia but I've never been to India; the Taj Mahal is a great landmark I'd like to visit. There are theories that Maori have connections with India. Anthropologists have made claims that we've got direct Indian connections; they've found similarities between the cultures. I don't believe in those claims, but we have got things in common with the Indian people. One thing we have in common is that the Hindu people observe a festival celebrating the rising of Krittika, which Maori people call Matariki—the Maori New

Year, harvest-time when the Pleiades rise in mid-winter. The festival of Matariki was revived in New Zealand in the year 2000 and it's become really popular; all the city councils have got involved in celebrations. Matariki was many things traditionally, one of them being a time when artists showcased their best work, Maori artists such as carvers and weavers and all that stuff, so it's become really important in the arts sector in New Zealand. We're celebrating Matariki in Christchurch this year and I'll be taking works down there.

When I was doing my residency with the Auckland City Council at Studio One I was appointed to curate the Matariki exhibition. That was an honour, that was humbling because I got to invite some big names, established artists, and I had some famous artists making new work for that exhibition. So that was really humbling, because I was the first self-taught artist to be selected for a residency with the City Council or I think with any institution in New Zealand. I haven't been through the art school system. To be honest I didn't put my hopes up high for being selected because of being self-taught, but that time happened to be a period when outsider and subaltern artists were starting to get a bit of recognition. I don't have any desire to go to art school, I've never had that ambition, I don't feel I need to; I'm happy with what I've accomplished as a self-taught artist, and I'm more of a practical person than a theoretical person. And I've been invited to exhibit in the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts and places like that, so I'm happy. I'm a bit unusual in New Zealand though, even among Maori artists all the famous ones have graduated from art school.

I suppose I first started making art at school. I did traditional Maori carvings. I didn't really classify it as art though, which in the traditional sense I didn't consider my thing. I've come to prefer contemporary art because there's not so many restrictions, you don't have to worry about whether things are tapu (sacred) and so forth. I'm in favour of positive change and progress generally. When it comes to marae protocol, like how people speak at meetings and so on, I'm more with my mother's side. Ngati Porou women have more equity and they can speak on the marae and take on more leadership roles. I think we can learn some positive things about equity from tikanga Pakeha (the

Western way of doing things). I first seriously considered myself as an artist back in 2015, so I haven't been a fulltime artist for long. Making art is very therapeutic for me, it's something I enjoy, and it's a way to explore my culture.

For me, personally speaking, the role of the Maori artist today is about promoting our culture in modern form. In order to create a tohu, a personal signature, I have done a lot of work using UV paint, for viewing under black light. In some pieces I combine this with 3D glasses so you can appreciate the work in another dimension. It's all aimed primarily at younger people, Maori and non-Maori alike, because they're the foundation of the future. So all my work is based around my culture, enlivening the knowledge of our culture. I'm not really interested in self-expression as a value in and of itself. The art that I've got here on the wall, these patterns were inspired by traditional weaving patterns, raranga whakairo patterns. Basically I brought them out in contemporary form, and they're designed for black light, UV. I don't have many specifically non-Maori influences in my work. I have done a David Bowie tribute piece, but it had Maori designs on it. Pretty much all my art is based around my culture; one of the main focuses of my art is incorporating the importance of taha whanau, getting people interested in culture and family, and not just Maori kids—it's a universal thing, the family dimension, and ultimately our smaller families are a microcosm of the larger human family we all belong to, our smaller families are the strands that weave us into the collective whole.







From 'Where do I belong?' to 'I belong here': Battling the Scarred Past and Reclaiming the Self in *King Hit* and *Rainbow's End*

Girija Sharma

The history of the aborigines, the indigenous peoples of Australia is often termed as the “the longest unbroken history on Earth” (Larsen 74). It is steeped in strong cultural and spiritual practices, emanating from an ardent animistic faith that their forefathers, since the “Dreamtime”—the beginning of the world, so termed by the Aborigines—stand metamorphosed as rocks, rivers, the sky and the flora and the fauna of this Earth. Hence, it entails a deep reverence for the land. However, this glorious and serene history suffered a rupture when the first coloniser James Cook arrived in 1770's. And then began the most violent chapter pertaining to the aborigines of Australia who, at present, represent only 2.6 per cent of Australia's population. In the recent times, the stories of massacres of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people after the settlers invaded have been unfolding through oral histories and an emerging body of documented evidence. These accounts bear testimony to the violence and terror perpetrated upon the original inhabitants of Australia across the continent. Amongst the most painful of the memories of these times are the ones of terror unleashed through mass shooting, rapes and burning of bodies. This violence continued unabated for about 150 years leading to trauma and dispossession of the Aboriginal people and culminated in the policy of assimilation formally adopted by the Australian Government in the 1950s. As per this policy, at least one in three Aboriginal children began to be forcibly removed from their families and communities. After being 'stolen', they would be placed in dormitories, non-Indigenous foster homes and other institutions.

The objective of the state was to erase the distinct cultural identity of the Aboriginal people. The overtly racist and discriminatory policies of the Establishment inflicted the deepest wounds on the souls

of the Aborigines. A ray of hope was kindled in 1992, when the High Court of Australia gave a verdict in their favour, recognising their rights to land and acknowledging their sustained association with land based on their spiritual leaning. This paved way for the Commonwealth government's Native Title Act of 1994, meant to settle indigenous land claims. However, it proved only marginally successful. The agony of dispossession, child removal policies coupled with abject poverty and coercive assimilation have left a deep impact and scarred the psyche of the indigenous communities. Nevertheless, the Aboriginal people have shown resilience in the face of harsh conditions owing to an inherently strong culture and traditions. Their life-force is their ability to communicate and connect even as the two thirds of world's population are victims of the communication gap and estrangement. As Amartya Sen puts it, "It is bad enough that the world in which we live has so much deprivation of one kind or another (from being hungry to being tyrannized); it would be even more terrible if we were not able to communicate, respond and altercate" (Sen 415). It is this urge and power to communicate, respond and altercate, and their strong cultural traditions that have not only made them survive hardships but also led them to create some extraordinary works of art. Aboriginal drama symbolizes this creative impulse of a culturally vibrant but marginalised people.

Some initial steps towards a multicultural Australia were initiated by Whitlam Labour government, while the official national multicultural policies were implemented by Fraser Conservative Coalition government in 1978. In the 1980s these policies were adhered to by Bob Hawke and till the early 1990s these were further continued by Paul Keating until his defeat in 1996 elections. Australia claimed to be a multicultural society, particularly with regard to the immigrants, who could openly express their cultural identity with almost 26% of the country's population from across the world. The Aboriginals, who constitute a mere 2.6% of the country's population, remained expectedly at the lowest rung of the social ladder. And in 1996, twenty three years after Australia had had an official multicultural policy in place, having begun the tradition of celebrating National Multicultural

Festival and Harmony Day, came a Prime Minister who had once promoted a One Australia Policy having been a strong critic of multiculturalism. Even as John Winston Howard supposedly retracted his earlier stance, an independent Member of Parliament made a powerful speech against multiculturalism and even floated a party called 'One Nation'. Howard refused to censure her, calling her speech a new freedom of expression. As late as 1984, historian Geoffrey Blainey had commented, "we should think very carefully about the perils of converting Australia into a giant multicultural laboratory for the assumed benefit of the peoples of the world" (Blainey, qtd by Dimech 2)). Voices against the policy of multiculturalism, stemming from deeply prejudiced minds, continued to be raised emphatically. Officially however, multiculturalism remained a policy of Australia.

In such a scenario as this, the construct of official multiculturalism does appear to be—not so straight, not so unambiguous. In a sense, Australian indigenous drama interrogates the premise of official multiculturalism itself. While it is argued that the state control is important and that in the name of allowing the continuation of worn-out traditions, the "politics of indifference" does more harm to the indigenous communities than good. However, that is only partially true.

In response, multicultural theorists agree that cultures are overlapping and interactive, but they nonetheless maintain that individuals belong to separate societal cultures. In particular, Kymlicka has argued that while options available to people in any modern society come from a variety of ethnic and historical sources, these options become meaningful to us only if

...they become part of the shared vocabulary of social life—i.e. embodied in the social practices, based on a shared language, that we are exposed to... That we learn...from other cultures, or that we borrow words from other languages, does not mean that we do not still belong to separate societal cultures, or speak different languages. (Kymlicka103)

Liberal egalitarian defenders of multiculturalism like Kymlicka maintain that special protection for minority cultural groups still holds true, even after we adopt a more cosmopolitan view of cultures, because the aim of group-differentiated rights is not to freeze cultures in place but to empower members of minority groups to continue their distinctive cultural practices so long as they wish to (*"Multiculturalism" Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*).

In fact, in the face of dominant discourse of One Australia, the outcome of the official policy of multiculturalism is rendered suspect. Decentring of almost everything leads to homogenising and totalizing of cultures which in turn leads to a spurious uniformity. As such "it is the return of the Same in the guise of the Other" (Moore-Gilbert, et al. 3).

It is in the backdrop of such clamour for and against multiculturalism in Australia that the resistance and resilience of the Aboriginal literature should be understood. However, in the context of the younger generations and their suffering in a world whose complexities they do not understand, the situation becomes even more distressing. Sen begins his book *The Idea of Justice* by quoting from Dickens's *Great Expectations*, where Pip, the little boy, also the protagonist, says, "In the little world in which children have their existence, there's nothing so finely perceived and felt as injustice" (Sen vii). In the plays that this paper proposes to examine namely *King Hit* by David Milroy and Geoffrey Narkle that deals with the trauma of Stolen Generations and *Rainbow's End* by Jane Harrison which foregrounds the struggle and triumph of a Koori family, a hostile and unfeeling world is in the first place encountered by children—young and grown up—recollecting their humiliating and painful encounters in unsympathetic and intimidating surroundings. However, the texts also underscore strong perception of manifest injustice by the adults.

Seeking to re-examine the obvious and the static truths, the paper attempts to underscore voices of assertion surfacing from the subterranean domains of trauma experienced by those living on the edge. As both the playwrights are Aboriginals, the politics of exclusion and difference is their primary concern. Debarred from the mainstream

society on the basis of the colour of their skin or the idiom of their speech or simply their lineage, the Aborigines have been pushed to the periphery ever since the colonial settlers dispossessed them of their land, culture and political rights.

King Hit, co-written by David Milroy and Geoffrey Narkle, has strong autobiographical overtones. Using flashback technique, the play chronicles Geoffrey Narkle's personal history as a member of the marginalized Noongar community. It is a series of narrations by Geoff, a member of a travelling boxing troupe about his journey from childhood to adulthood. Right in the beginning, in a flashback, Geoff recounts the reaction of his parents as they return from a funeral, to find that their children have been taken away:

BELLA: My babies, Largy! My babies!

LARGY: Come on, Bella, they're gone. There's nothing we can do. (*King Hit* 90)

And then, addressing the audience, Geoff says: "...When I decided to share my story and write this play, I travelled to the reserve where I was born" (*KH* 90). Geoff poignantly narrates the saga of the painful existence of the Aboriginal families, whose children would be taken away without even informing them from the reserves so that they could be raised in white households or missions. Based on the Darwinian notions, it was assumed that the Aboriginal population was disappearing. Hence, the so called 'Protection' policies for those who had survived the massacres and disease in the early 1900s led to the Aborigines' exclusion and an enormous constraint on their freedom. Through assimilation the Establishment sought to breed out Aboriginal culture. It was this official policy that led to a forcible removal of children from their families to be put in institutions or with white foster families so that they could learn European ways and values. They suffered interminably at the hands of the white masters who brutalised them in myriad ways. By integrating them into white culture and through their breeding with other "half-castes" or whites, the Establishment hoped that the Aboriginal blood line could be exterminated, which in turn, would lead to the 'whitening' of Australia. The way to achieve this objective was to get the half-castes out of the

way. A.O. Neville, whom the Aboriginal people referred to as “Mr. Devil” held an extreme position advocating not just cultural assimilation but total absorption of the Aboriginal people through control on relationships and marriage so that the Aboriginal population is completely wiped out (Zubrick SR, et al. xxvi). The picture of the Aborigines, painted in a popular journal *The Golden West* (Vol.I, 1906), speaks volumes about the deep-seated bias against them in Australian society:

The West Australian Aborigine stands right at the bottom of the class to which we belong....The native black has no intelligence, though his powers of imitation carry him up to the border line. He is as a general rule, to which there are few exceptions, brutish, faithless, vicious, the animal being given the fullest noose, a natural born liar and thief, and only approached by his next of kin, the monkey for mischief. The Australian black may have a soul, but if he has, then the horse and the dog, infinitely the superior in every way of the black human, cannot be denied the vital spark of heavenly flame. (Clark Spear R. quoted by Zubrick SR, et al. xxxi)

The above observation foregrounds the extent of insensitivity and heartlessness to which the white settlers could go in a country that they had invaded. In the 1880s, the realisation that the Aboriginal population was dying out led to the formulation of an extremely restrictive race-based policy in the guise of legislation of 'protection'. The *Aborigines Act 1905* not only made the Chief Protector responsible for the education of all Aboriginal children but also the legal guardian of children below sixteen years of age, extended to twenty one in 1936 (Zubrick SR, et al. xxv). Their draconian policies truly deprived the Aborigines from the benefits of education and health until 1963 when some restrictive provisions were repealed when *Native Welfare Act* was promulgated. In 1995, the Aboriginal Legal Service of Australia (ALS) brought out *Telling Our Story* report highlighting the trauma suffered by the Aborigines on account of child removal policies.

A touching account of how children were picked up from homes

and lodged in missions forcibly without their parents' consent is given by Geoff again in detail in the play *King Hit*. Geoff was 'stolen' too, when his parents were away to Perth to attend a funeral: "We were playing out the back as the car pulled up at the front. . . . When the man told us we were going to live on a mission my sisters started crying. . . . As we drove off I stared at my brother's house hoping he'd grab us out of the car" (KH 100). Geoff is given the job of a dairy boy on the mission. He tells the other boys that his mother loves him and that she would take him away. On not reporting the theft of another boy, who had stolen eatables from the pantry, Geoff is punished and not taken in the truck for the Narrogin show along with other children, where his mother lived. Re-living his deep agony and helplessness, he says:

Geoff [*to the audience*]: After not seeing my mother for three years I burst into tears. I couldn't believe I was not going to see her. The next morning, I raced to the top of the hill behind the church and climbed the tallest tree. I watched as the truck travelled down the old Pingely Road past the farm and then disappeared from sight. (KH 103).

Later, in another flashback sequence, he recounts his reaction when his mother comes to see him in the mission. When he sees her walking with Father Lumen, he gets into his room and closes the door. Father Lumen tells him to open the door but Geoff does not relent. Desperate, Bella exclaims, "It's me Geoffrey, your mum....You're still my boy Geoffrey" (KH 105). Father Lumen then tells her most unfeelingly that she's wasting her time and that the boy is not interested. Geoff then addresses the audience, saying:

Geoff [*to the audience*]: When Mum came to visit me, I went into a shock. All the years that I had hoped we would live together as a family again had turned to anger and resentment. There was only one door separating me from my mother's arms and I wanted to open it, but I couldn't. (KH 105)

The play captures the deep anguish of the mothers of the 'Stolen Generations', as Bella says, "It killed me inside when they took you kids

away” (KH 114). The pain of the mothers was augmented by the fact that the Aboriginal children incarcerated in missions that were scarcely better than prisons where they were kept locked in dormitories from morning to evening and meted out severe punishment for absconding.

The big and small indignities that the Aboriginal children and their parents grow up experiencing – indignities that scar young minds forever-- are brought out most poignantly in the play: “Went to buy some medicine for Grandma Hilda yesterday. I had to wait an hour while all the Wadjullas [white people] got served first”(KH 93). The play narrates how an Aboriginal child as he enters school learns that from now on he was going to be addressed as 'Abo', or 'Nigger' or Boong'. The humiliation of sticking the citizenship papers on one's forehead and being treated as a second rate citizen is movingly recounted by Geoff as he remembers his good-natured father Largy and his mother Bella taking him out for a movie. Largy asks Bella to give him some glue. When she asks what for, he tells her:

LARGY: So I can stick it to my forehead. C'mon, we're going to the pictures.

LARGY and BELLA *walk arm-in-arm down the street with GEOFF behind.* A WHITE MAN *walks past and BELLA and LARGY step aside to let him pass.*

One day we won't have to get off the footpath to let them pass. . .

LARGY: Three *tickets* please.

MAN: First three rows are for the blacks and don't forget, leave the theatre. . . after the white folks have left. (KH 96)

Another flashback sequence comes much later in the play. Geoff hitchhiking on a truck, with Normie Rowe's 'Que Sera Sera' being played in the background finally meets his mother and tells her that he wants to stay with her and that he needs to talk to her. Bella, however, tells him there's nothing to talk about. To which Geoff's question is “Why?”, and so replies Bella:

"You don't belong here Geoffrey".

Geoff: Well, where do I belong?

Bella: Not here. (KH 112)

The play outlines the journey of a Noongar boy who opted for the career of a boxer, not for money, not for sport but as a way of earning self-respect. Towards the end, when Geoff is informed that a young boy is going to replace him, he sees fear in his eyes, reflecting his own fear as a young boy just as the boy sees a lifetime of anger reflected in Geoff's eyes. The play also in a sense symbolizes the triumph of human spirit in a hostile world as Geoff finally finds peace in his cathartic moments with his sisters, when he meets them after years. Though the final speech of the play poignantly underscores the deep scars of the spirit that refuse to heal even after years, the Clayton Road Reserve is now history and to be able to talk about the past is a triumph of human spirit:

GEOFF:[*to the audience*]: Just before Mum passed away we were able to talk about what had happened to myself and my sisters. We cried more than we talked. As the cocketoos disappeared into the gum trees I think of old man Abram and all the old Noongars who spent their last days fenced in by a rubbish tip, a farmer's barbed-wire fence and a big white sign. From up on the Granite Ridge, as I look towards the town of Narrogin, a cold wind blows through the scrub that was once Clayton Road Reserve. (KH 115)

Rainbow's End is another moving play by the celebrated author of *Stolen*, Jane Harrison. A powerful rendering of the lives of the "unsung" heroes, and in particular the women who fought the good fight in their daily struggles to keep their families together, house, feed, cloth[e], educate and, above all, love and protect their children", the play conveys the "emotional truth" (Author's Note, 121). Set in the fifties, the play has a wistful beginning, as the haunting melody of the song 'Que Sera Sera' is heard in the background. The melody dips in and out of the rest of the play, bringing in the note of romance, sadness and bonding

between generations of mothers and daughters, which is one of the key themes of the play.

However, the sense of anger and resignation that the song conveys in *King Hit* is replaced by a sense of affirmation in spite of the shades of submission in *Rainbow's End*. Jane Harrison in the Author's Note to the play refers to women who fought the good fight to keep their families together. She acknowledges that she was drawn to writing bittersweet plays—bitter because of the deep sadness for what the Elders had to suffer and sweet because of the poignant emotional bonding shared by them. Nan Dear, Gladys and Dolly represent three generations of women. Their closeness and sensitivity is portrayed tenderly. All the themes that set apart the Aboriginal experience are there—the pain of abject poverty, the trauma of having a dark skin, abysmal living conditions, and yet the play is uplifting and inspiring. It underscores the immense power of love to heal devastated lives; it highlights the enormous strength of optimism and resilience. More than any other play in the collection, *Rainbow's End* shows how redeeming humour can be in the darkest of times. Perhaps the most reassuring feature of the play is the way the encyclopaedia salesman Errol, a white man remains absolutely steadfast in his love for Dolly till the end. The play sensitively traces Dolly's as well as her mother's and grandmother's shifting response towards him despite their initial apprehensions. In the person of Gladys, who intends to make what her mother calls her daydreams come true, Harrison has portrayed a die-hard optimist, who has the power to sensitize the younger generations. In the beginning, after a flood has devastated the humble dwellings of the family, the reassuring words of Gladys to her daughter set the tone of the play:

GLADYS: It'll be all right.

DOLLY: You always say that. (RE 123)

Just as the verses of *Que Sera Sera* typify hope in this play as opposed to the loss of the sense of belonging in *King Hit*, similarly the dream sequences too spell hope for a better future as opposed to the horrors of the bitter past recounted through flashback in the other play. The dream sequences are invariably suggestive of the vision of happiness

as the characters hope for regaining all that has been lost to the inevitable march of time. For instance in a dream sequence, when Gladys presents a bouquet to the queen, curtsying before her, the latter "[i]nstead of being formal pulls her into a hug" (*Rainbow's End* 126). In yet another dream sequence, Gladys is shown winning all the prizes in the radio quiz, which in fact the Aboriginals were forbidden to take part in. In the dreamsequence, Gladys is able to answer all the quiz questions in sharp contrast to the white contestant actually taking part in the show. And Dolly dreams: "Mum'll be on the radio, she'll win all those wonderful prizes, she'll be a hero" (*RE* 130), just before the lights fade back to reality.

What she says towards the end typifies the courage that generations of Aboriginals have longed to possess. In her supposed reading of the charter of demands in the presence of Queen Elizabeth, she asserts: "Your Majesty, Queen Elizabeth the Second. We humbly present this ... [*To herself*] Why Humbly? We've been humble too long. Anyway ... [*She continues confidently*] We request... [*To herself*] No, we don't, sorry Papa [*Continuing*] We demand to be heard" (*RE* 196). The play lends voice to the dream of the fifties that has begun to be realized now: "And I want townsfolk to say, 'Hello, lovely day'. Not cross the road to avoid us like we're lepers. [*To her audience*] We can get along with each other, can't we?" (*RE* 198).

At many places in the play, Gladys is on the verge of losing her calm in moments of crises but she is portrayed as a woman of extraordinary courage. Once she has to walk a long distance in borrowed shoes because of hessian they have lined the road with, so that the queen does not see the humpies of the poor on the occasion of her Royal Tour of Australia. Expressing her distress, Gladys exclaims: "If they'd given us better houses... But hessian! Like a band-aid over a sore—" (*RE* 127). But on another occasion, she imagines Dolly in "a robe and clapboard hat", exclaiming to herself soon after: "My girl, a graduate..." (*RE* 134). It is this capacity to dream that sustains her in the toughest of times.

The play is deeply ironical too. When Nan Dear sees Dolly mixing with the white boy who sells encyclopaedias, she warns her:

You watch who you're mixing with. Hard to tell a good

man from a bad. Bad one will promise you everything, then do the straight opposite, just like that.

NAN *snaps her fingers and* DOLLY *repeats the gesture.*
GLADYS *just rolls her eyes.* (RE 138)

The tragic irony that hits us hard in the play is that Nan and Dolly approach Errol with some caution, while they trust those they are related to. As Dolly puts it: "...And besides, them goomies are harmless"(RE 139). And Nan dear observes: "...They might be drinkers, but they are still our people"(RE 139). Errol, however, is steadfast in his love for Dolly. When Dolly decides to take part in a Ball, he encourages her. He genuinely believes in her goodness and beauty. Dolly participates in the Ball, looking beautiful in a dress her grandmother makes for her. In a dream sequence, a cruel joke is played on her with the announcement that the winner of the Ball is "Miss Dolores Banks", which is Dolly's full name. However, lights snap back to reality with the repeat announcement that "Miss Mooroopna-Shepparton Ball is Miss Nancy Woolthorpe"(RE 166). Jeering at Dolly, Nancy says:

NANCY: [*voice-over*] Why, if it isn't Miss Dolores Banks herself. Love your dress, Dolly. Love the fabric. [*with a giggle*] My mother liked it too. When it was our sunroom curtains. But, you know, I thought we took them to the tip. (RE 166)

Shock and horror follows. A stunned Dolly cries out: "My ball gown? Courtesy of the town bloody tip?"(RE 166). Acutely humiliated and traumatised, she runs away. A voice is heard from the shadows: "...Think you're too good for us....I reckon you need to be taught a lesson—" (RE 167). A scuffle follows in the dark, hinting at something sinister. Leon pushes and punches Errol overpowering Dolly, who appears later with a tear in her dress and sobbing. The floods devastate everything all over again including the encyclopaedias. When Errol comes again, Gladys and Nan Dear ward him off thinking it was him who had violated Dolly. Dolly thereafter reveals it wasn't him.

The most heart-warming situation is heavily ironic too. One of

their own had perpetrated a sexual assault on Dolly. In course of time she gives birth to a baby girl. Errol knows it all and still loves her after so many months have passed. Nan Dear, who has always shown resistance to Errol and Dolly coming together knows now that he does not belong to that Fischer family, a man who had cheated on her. The dream sequence has wedding bells and confetti as "Dolly and Errol—*pram in the middle—get hitched*" (RE 198).

Rainbow's End is a play about assertion, courage and hope—a play that bears out that in order to be heard, to quote Gladys, "You have to learn not to let them shame you" and that one has to have the right to control one's destiny. Finally she exclaims, "I'm not an interloper—I belong here—this is my land" (RE 181).

Both the plays succeed in bringing alive the Aboriginal experience in uniquely different ways, yet there are shared spaces of pain and joy. As Larissa Behrendt, the editor of the anthology *Contemporary Indigenous Plays* observes that these plays are a tribute to the power of oral cultures, as "...the tradition of storytelling is powerfully alive and potently well in Indigenous Australia" (Behrendt x). Literary masterpieces in their own right, these plays owe their richness and flavour to the tales that remain alive in societies which have a magnificent collective heritage.

If Australia claims to be a multicultural society, it is pertinent that the powers that be ask themselves as to "[w]hat might the oldest people on earth, in the oldest continent on earth have to teach others?" (Zubrick SR, et al. xxxiv). The complicity of the state in decimating a culture is borne out by the fact that not only the indigenous children but the white Australians are also deprived of knowledge about the rich and glorious cultural heritage of the Aborigines. A truly multicultural society cannot afford to put stumbling blocks in the way of amalgamation of cultures. Similarly, a vibrant culture cannot be annihilated. The patterns of resistance in the Aboriginal drama unmistakably carry these political undertones. In such a scenario, a reassessment of the concept of multiculturalism itself becomes an absolute prerequisite.

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Speaking for Generations: Writer's Responsibility as a Conduit of Community Stories

Jane Harrison in conversation with Ishmeet Kaur

(Interviewed on 23rd November 2016 in Melbourne at 1:00 p.m.)

IK: I am with Jane Harrison at her residence in Melbourne. Welcome Jane, it is a pleasure interviewing you. We could begin by you introducing yourself first.

JH: Hello my name is Jane Harrison and my heritage...Aboriginal heritage is Muruwari, which is from Northern East South Wales around the Queensland border, places like Burke, there is a lot of Muruwari people look around Brewarrina which we call Bree, is easier to say, but I grew up in Melbourne, in outer regions of Melbourne Dandenong ranges. I started writing about my Aboriginal heritage around 1991. I was commissioned to write a play around stolen generations by an Aboriginal company called Ilbjerri, it is perhaps the longest Aboriginal run company in Australia. It took almost about six years to get the production on the stage. Ilbjerri at that time was an unfunded theatre company so people worked for nothing, and obviously people worked on their jobs and divided themselves to time and spent time at Ilbjerri after hours. It took quite a few submissions for funding before we had money to workshop a play over a period of time but they stuck with me and I stuck with them and eventually we had a script. And that was sent to a theatre company and it was decided that the play will be co-produced the following year which was 1998. 1997 "Bringing them Home" report came out about the inquiry on the stolen generations. It was fascinating to read the report to see that many real stories had been reflected in the play "Stolen" though the play was written before the report was released. "Stolen" had its premiere in 1998 and then went on to have repeat seasons for about seven or eight years in Victoria and toured to many places in Australia and to overseas to U.K., Ireland, Hong Kong, Japan and more recently has been on the syllabus, here in Victoria and more recently it had a new production in Sydney early this

year. So that was my first production.

IK: How did you get into writing, was it because of the play being commissioned or you thought you should write for the Aboriginal people or your own people, what was it?

JH: OK! So, it was Ilbjerri had an idea for a play around the lost children, so they put a very advertisement in the newspaper "Writer producer for Aboriginal production, no experience necessary" I otherwise working in creative areas, had been working in advertising as a copy-editor, but had lost my job and was looking in the paper and saw the advertisement and thought that was an opportunity for me to write a play that I hadn't done before, I'd written a novella already. To write a play, to be paid for it, though it was much was an opportunity for me to connect back to my Aboriginal heritage, knowing that I was Aboriginal, my mother was Aboriginal but I didn't grow up around an extended family. My mother's family was in Canberra and New South Wales and we were brought up here in Melbourne so I didn't have the extended community networks but my connections to my heritage were very important to me and so I guess I was on a journey through writing plays and my subsequent writing connecting to my heritage.

IK: Since you have come over so many year and when you are able to connect back, how do you look at the past, as probably in 1960s things would be been very different and 2016, you people have come a long way despite the fact that there are a lot of complicated issues still and challenges still to go, but what could writing do to you both as an Aboriginal Woman writer and a Woman writer? Do you place yourself in these definitions of Aboriginal Women Writer and Women Writer?

JH: I Suppose, I do...really because a lot of themes, not exclusively but belonging and identity are important themes that come through in my writing and with my second play *Rainbow's End* that was very much a female centered play and I was asked to write about decade of Aboriginal history and heroes of that era and there were many. Pastor Douglas Nicholls, William Cooper and people of that era but I chose actually writing about the women who were kind of left to bring up the family, work and deal with the day to day racism. I chose the 1950s as my decade

and often the men were away doing good work in terms of the community at large but the women were left behind to keep the families together...and work in canneries or fruit picking and those kind of things, living in dire circumstance. To me they were the heroes. I guess in a way it is feminist viewpoint.

IK: Yes, in a way "Rainbow's End" does bring in three generations of women coming together and one can track that transition of time. Was that the same reason for you to write that play or were there other reasons as well?

JH: Well, that was a commission and that was my brief and I think I probably varied a little bit from the brief in terms of maybe the traditional heroes were not seen to be three generations of women. Aboriginal people, we had been othered for so many years and people were writing about us. I buy books from the second-hand book sellers and the books that have Aboriginal characters, themes or stories... until 1960's non-Aboriginal people have written about Aboriginal people but I think there has been a blossoming of Aboriginal writers particularly for the last 20 year and all of them are new writers, which is fantastic.

IK: Could you share your experiences when you were collecting material for the book *Stolen*. I am sure you came in touch with a lot of people of stolen generations, it was their stories and I am definitely sure they would be very moving stories too, and while you were collecting them did they impact you, like were you somewhat disturbed, inspired....?

JH: I don't know why...probably, I don't know why, may be due to my own circumstances growing up though I wasn't of the stolen generations, we had a fairly tough time and my mother certainly had a tough time growing up. I think I was fairly resilient listening to those stories and of course they do impact you but the bigger impact for me was having a responsibility to be the conduit for those stories, have the members of the stolen generation feel that I honoured those stories. The play was very successful, to have it performed even 19 years later, but for me the most significant kind of feedback I'd had was after a performance when an Aboriginal woman I didn't know came to me, she didn't look in my eyes and looked down, which signified shame, and said "you got it right sis" and I felt, I could tell by the emotion she was expressing, that

she had that story and she felt I told that story on behalf of the her and others. It is that sense of responsibility that has impacted me most.

IK: So, the people were open to telling their stories or they didn't want to share their stories...

JH: Well that's funny, because some members of the Aboriginal community we visited and said we had set out to write a play on the stolen generations said, "we don't wanna talk of that, we know all of that" but a wider population didn't really know about the stolen generations until the "Bringing them Home" report was published. I remember thinking at a point in time that my play will be a failure as no one seems to be interested in that theme but actually the momentum has just grown in terms of people understanding the impact of stolen generations on our society today...the physical and emotional suffering...due to racial motives...removing children...for example often the lighter skinned children of the family, if there were different skinned colored children, the lighter skinned children will be removed.....some went to one, childrens home, because they had lighter skin, but the darker one went to another home. But you know, I did collect a lot of stories, I read a lot and I did speak to people in person who were from the stolen generations...but even then, I have had friends I have known for 20 years who haven't really talked to me about their experience, I think it's still painful, and some of them are writers who kind of write their stories, which I think is important to share and perhaps to heal.

IK: While interviewing other writers I felt that this is still a phase of recovery from the trauma particularly for people who were stolen and they are still there, therefore it is not a thing of the past. As Ali Cobby mentions that in 2016 the number of children being removed is maximum...

JH: I teach at a University, according to the course notes the stolen generations went from 1905 to 1970's but in fact, as you say, it is under different guise now, it is child protection. Most of the reasons for being removed are not the things that John Harvard said at the time of Northern Territory intervention, one of the lowest categories of removal

is around Aboriginal children being sexually abused. The major reason is neglect and neglect comes from all lot of other social determinants, it's about poverty, it's about housing, education, and unemployment and all about those social determinants that effects neglect and generations of children who are being removed who don't have perhaps, the skills to parent their own children, and that generation gets removed and I have heard, from some research I did, five generations removed from a particular family, one single family. That is intergenerational trauma. So of course, it takes time to heal, it'll take generations and generations. It's great we got an apology from Kevin Rudd, the then Prime Minister of Australia but still more work needs to be done.

IK: What are your future projects and what are you planning to look at? Is there something ongoing right now which will be coming up in a couple of years?

JH: Yes, I am working on a number of projects actually. Earlier this year, I ran an Indigenous Literary festival called Blak & Bright, it was the first Victorian Indigenous Literary Festival and around 60 story-tellers and writers participated in that and it was a great success and people really loved it and I'm hoping that I'll do that again, not next year but a year after that. As well as doing that, I am doing my writing projects, I've got a commission from a theatre company to write a play set in 1908, a real story of a murder, during a time where Aboriginal people were again moved from their family and community, were put into service as stockmen and servants without any pay and wouldn't get to see their family and it was quite shocking. That is referred to as stolen wages; their wages were supposedly put in a bank account and their family never was able to access those wages. I am writing a play about that particular scenario, I am also working on some T.V. ideas, I think there has been a great flourishing of Aboriginal stories happening on the T.V. screens of late. I am working on some ideas with some colleagues and pitching them to T.V. stations. Last year my book *Becoming Kirrali Lewis* was published and that won the Black&Write award, Ellen van Neerven was the editor with Black&Write. This award was won in 2014 and the book was published last year and just last week, the book was shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Literary Awards in the young adult category and I

am writing a follow up to *Kirrali*. The first one was set in 1985 and '67; '67 being a significant year and it has two voices - Kirrali Lewis and her biological mother and the sequel is set in 2005 and Kirrali now is an adult herself and is a mother to a young man, so it is a family epic really and I am having a lot of fun. I do like to touch upon important significant historical events, and also themes that resonate now, in this one I talk about things like domestic violence, that's again a huge issue for both the non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal communities. I like to make the books accessible to a young adult audience because they are our future. If Aboriginal young people can see their urban stories on the page, on the stage, I think that's fantastic. If you don't see those images in popular culture that's not great for your identity. Also, I think that for non-Aboriginal people to read that book it makes the Aboriginal people known, that they have relationship issues, they have love interests, they have school issues, all this makes it very accessible.

IK: Indian scholarship and Indian students have a lot of interest in the Aboriginal literatures and they do relate to it because we have our problems of suffering in the marginalized sections and there are several concerns of minorities, Dalit, Tribal issues and those of the de-notified criminal tribes, to name a few. Our students and our scholars are very distant to Australia, they may not have anything common, except the experience of suffering and the experience of Trauma. How does Australian scholarship receive the International students working on these issues? Are they open to it, or do they consider that there is no need for it?

JH: It has been interesting that over the twenty years of our work with *Stolen*, I have been interviewed by a number of scholars, people doing their Ph.D. not one of them being an Australian scholar, all are International. So I wonder about our country in that case.... I think I've been interviewed by a German scholar, I've been to Japan and been interviewed there and by an Indian scholar in the past and I can't think of others but never by an Australian and I wonder why in our own backyard and I think probably, there is a bit of shame there, because people from other countries can ask openly about the stolen generations without having being expected to know it well. But I think that the

people from Australia feel that they should know and yet they don't know and they don't know how to ask and they are afraid of offending and so what they do is, they don't ask.

IK: When I was looking for a collaborator for this project, I was wanting to collaborate with somebody in Australia so that I didn't have to travel and that person could collect the interviews from Australia, I got in touch with a few non-Aboriginal scholars here who said they were not interested primarily because they felt that Indigenous writers would question them as to why they worked on Indigenous concerns. I felt it was not good because when it comes to translations, one has to move out of their isolated boxes and only then would one be translated. A Russian or maybe an Indigenous scholar may not know Russian to translate her own book in it. As I translated Jeanine Leanne's book in Punjabi, I think that was a fabulous experience as it brought a lot of things to the forefront, not just in personal issues. I had a specific reason to do that, when I translated her book I felt that our people needed to speak; they had their sense of lost histories and they were exploited though in a totally different context but here there was a subject which was being addressed and therefore this translation had to be brought out, which was finally dedicated to "Those who Speak out". I don't have any shame in accepting that that may not be a great Punjabi translation as I am not a writer trained in Punjabi but I wrote it with my own experience as I learned the language as a mother-tongue. But the translation is very passionate and very sentimental. I do look forward to doing many such projects without caring about the standardized language and such things. Something very interesting in the translation was that the oral tone of the poem was retained. I had initially thought that I won't be able to retain the orality that the original poems offered, to the contrary that the poems became pretty oral when it was done in Punjabi, rather more than what was available in English. It was possible only because Punjabi has its roots in oral tradition, so it became an extremely beautiful experience where we now use that poem in workshops that we do on translation studies. That was actually very amazing. Apart from binding us on together on basis of contexts and cultural themes we moved forward to togetherness in the process of translation. So, when I

look at the point that whenever there is collaborative research and as I was always in touch with Jeanine asking her meanings while I was translating, I did keep the protocol. So many a times, such collaborative efforts become more fruitful.

JH: There are some academics who are working that way, I can name quite a few, Allison Ravenscroftso there are many writers who are working in a positive way and I think it's about not having non-Indigenous people speak on their behalf, there has to be quality and reciprocity in the process; Process is really important for Aboriginal people if it is respectful and a lot of Aboriginal people - without generalizing - would be happy to participate. Perhaps, in the past non-Aboriginal people have taken the story or taken the knowledge and turned it into their Ph.D. and the Aboriginal people don't get anything back and the person doesn't even come back and share their own project with them. I think trust needs to be earned for Aboriginal people to participate while on the other hand the non-Aboriginal people need to say that, well I am not an expert on this, they are the experts on their Aboriginality but I sort-of have the skills that I can bring to the process and share. So, it is a two-way learning. These are my personal thoughts on it and often it is also about who is in control of the story. In Australia, there have been a number Aboriginal playwrights in the last twenty-years or so, but there are still many non-Aboriginal people writing stories, for example Kate Grenville *The Secret River* was a book and then it was turned into a play and Kate Grenville felt that she didn't have the authority to write the Aboriginal voice in the original book, which means that in a way we are silenced in that process. To me it is not an Aboriginal story, definitely not an Aboriginal story, it is a White story with Aboriginal characters in that story. Many people are very interested in Aboriginal culture and they go along to that play yet a huge part of the story is missing, that is the Aboriginal experience. For example, having a narrator, in the play, who is Aboriginal, that does not fix the problem. For non-Aboriginal people to not to write Aboriginal characters is to continue to write us out of the story but it's the way you go about it. People need to be asking themselves, why they are doing this? Is it because it is a popular theme at the moment, I am not saying it in a

derogatory way, I think people are passionate and they have something to tell, but they can't just do it in a vacuum.

IK: Maybe the last question now. Would like to give a message through this medium of interview? Probably, you could also talk about how do you perceive this kind of a project? Do you feel it is helpful getting these voices collected in one and voices coming out from different worlds where there are hardly any similarities...?

JH: We say that, ...we say that...but I was with a couple of Dalit writers and Aboriginal writers who went over to India, including Ali CobbyEckermann and met with them and I felt that there are a lot of parallels.

IK: Yes, there are parallels but the contexts are totally different. I think where we come together are some of the experiences of exploitation and suffering, maybe these are the commons but on a deeper scale and serious studies, I feel all these subjects are different from one another and I take this very positively, because it is these differences that enable us to understand these contexts better.

JH: Yes, but even in Australia, people think there is a pan Aboriginality, yet people from Victoria would be quite different from people from Western Australia....

IK: All these interviews that I am doing..., I began with an understanding these differences well and took up this project primarily with this in mind. That was the very reason that these contexts are different that I opted for this project. In India too, when it comes to interviewing the Adivasi communities we have serious problems or concerns with language for example. These groups have dialects and they are oral cultures. It is not possible to know all these dialects. So, we need to work with interpreters, unfortunately we don't have official interpreters, so we go with local interpreters and we need to keep our approach extremely focused. Perhaps, working on Australian Aboriginal writers is a little more....a little more accessible because they write in English...

JH: Yes, but that leaves out a huge pool of storytellers, the traditional storytellers....

IK:Those writing in English, when they use the Aboriginal words in English, they provide a glossary of words, so it makes it a little more easier [the emphasis is on the word “little” to suggest that working on this subject is not at all easy but in comparison to complexities and limitations working on other traditional groups, Aboriginal Literatures in English are accessible] For Indian scholar themselves, it is not at all easy to work on Aboriginal concerns. Also, another important question, that I keep asking is Who represents whom? So, since there are difference and few similarities, what do you say about it, would you encourage such projects coming up?

JH: In the end itself, it is the human experience that we share, albeit in different circumstances. I think the cross-cultural collaborations are very important. In some ways in Australia, it hasn't blossomed as much as it could. For example, we have a new African diaspora here, we do not see many Aboriginal and African authors working together as much as you may expect but initiatives like this and Mridula's work in Monash these collaborations have proved very useful in sharing these stories and cross fertilization that happens.

Endnote:

Refers to MridulaNath Chakraborty's project on “Literary Commons: Writing Australia-India in the Asian Century with Dalits, Indigenous and the Multilingual Tongues” 2016.

<https://future.arts.monash.edu/literary-commons/>

Spiritualism and Landscape in Select Aboriginal Women's Autobiographies

Rekha Sharma & Suneel Kumar

Spiritualism is the philosophy, doctrine, or religion pertaining to the spiritual aspect of existence. Spirituality is one of the strengthening forces in the Aboriginal society. It is essentially a historio-religious concept of the world which ascertains that one can lead a spiritual life if one withdraws oneself from family, society or the materialistic world towards the solitude of forest or desert. In case of the Aboriginals, the idea of quitting the tribal community in order to pursue a sacred life is absolutely unimaginable as their spiritual and family life goes side by side. "The realm of spiritual existence is not divorced from the material world but is embedded in it" (Bourke, et al 82). There is a constant flow of life in the sacred world of Aboriginals so they established an independent religious belief of their own without borrowing any prevailing religious philosophy. The life of these nomadic people was disrupted by the vested materialistic motives and policies of the British colonizers. In the beginning of colonization, the invaders were not aware of the natives' spiritual ties with the land, and they were too ambitious to occupy the land. The European colonizers called the land "beyond good bye" or "wide open spaces" (Cowan 24). In fact, "the forms of spiritual expression in communities were so different and subtle that their very existence was denied" (Bourke, et al 70). The natives were considered hunter-gatherers and nomads and the land was later officially termed as "New Country" (Cowan 24). The Rule of Law reconstituted the landscape into an industrial place of "dark satanic mills" (Cowan 24), townships, bush roads, mines or pastoral holdings. Thus, the colonizers did not perceive the Aboriginal land as sacred but they manipulated to use it for their vested motives.

During the colonial era the Aboriginal women and girls were the victims of settlers' gaze; the life stories of older Aboriginal women "illuminate much about what it was like to live in earlier days and how

people experienced the world they knew" (Huggins 10), and they bring this ugly facet of colonizers' abuse of the native girls and women to light. The unjust, unfair laws and practices of the colonizers were exposed by Aboriginal women in their autobiographies. This mode of powerful expression articulates the truth of their existence and experiences. One can understand the sadness and urgency of Aboriginal women in autobiographies where "erased and marginalized human step out of the zone of silence into speaking" (Singh 53).

The Aboriginal autobiographies inform the newer generation how the self of Aboriginal people suffered under white rule and "this trauma of suffering and deprivation is cross-generational and reflected in the taking away of children from families" (Bansal 71). These autobiographies especially strive to convey the message that "till about two hundred and twenty five years ago, the island continent was the home to mainly the Aboriginals" (Dulta 92). Recently, Aboriginal autobiographies have become an effective supplement to the ancient oral tradition of the Aboriginals who had their own oral history. Jackie Huggins asserts, "Aboriginal studies are now concerned with the transformation of an oral literature in to written literature" (10). The autobiographies revisit the past, generally the colonial era, and witness the history of colonialism. The history has "the power to revivify the wasted self-esteem" (qtd. In Boehmer 116). The autobiographies share the stories of earlier alienation, elimination and extermination. In this context Chinua Achebe asserts, "stories define us" (Boehmer 5), and Cox explicates, "Black memories are scared" (74).

The present paper explores Winnie Larsen's *The Dusty Road* (2005), Ruby Langford Ginibi's *Don't Take Your Love to Town* (1988) and Sally Morgan's *My Place* (1987) to underline the key aspects of spiritualism and landscape in the select texts. The paper proposes to study the nature and simplicity of Aboriginal communities which combine their physical origins and cultural vitality as well as its abundance as narrated by the authors in their respective autobiographies.

Sally Morgan is one of Australia's best known Aboriginal writers and artists. Her first book, *My Place*, is recognized as a milestone in

Aboriginal writing. Born in Perth, Western Australia, the eldest of five children, she was fifteen when she learnt that she and her sister were Aboriginal descendants of Palku people of the Pilbara. *My Place* is a powerful autobiography of three generations of Aboriginals who had buried the past for three generations. In 1982, Sally Morgan travelled to her grandmother's birth place; it was as a tentative search for information about her family which turned into an overwhelming emotional and spiritual pilgrimage. Sally Morgan and her family were confronted with their suppressed history, and the fundamental questions about their identity. It narrates the story of her self discovery through reconnection with her Aboriginal culture and community.

Ruby Langford Ginibi, known by her tribal name Ginibi (black swan), was born at New South Wales town of Coraki's Mission Station. Her autobiography *Don't Take Your Love to Town* is a true life story of an Aboriginal woman's struggle to raise her family of nine children in a white society. The core of the story comprises of her moving from place to place in search of work and shelter as a mother. The story focuses on racism, identity crisis, survival, depression, poverty, physical and emotional violence, sexual harassment and dispossession through white government's policies.

Irene Winnie Larsen's *The Dusty Road* recalls the harsh and painful memories of her *Noongar* childhood. It narrates colonial policies which resulted in the dispossession of Aboriginal people in multiple ways. It is the life story of survival and struggle; the recovery of the Aboriginal heritage to seek reconciliation with an unacknowledged past of Aboriginal genocide. *The Dusty Road* is a narrative of displacement, removal and recovery that sought to interrogate the colonial policies of the white government.

The selected autobiographies are by Aboriginal women writers. The colonial violence has silenced them; they have been discriminated at different levels, namely, as Aboriginal, as women and as Aboriginal women; still they survived and gave out their minds. The one pertinent similarity in these autobiographies is the delineation of landscape and spirituality while sharing the painful colonial experiences.

In the Aboriginal world, land is the primary source of economic

riches and spiritual energy. The land has mainly two landscapes, “one physical, which all human beings can view, the other spiritual which only Aboriginal can see” (Paul 48). They worship land as mother and “the land and the Aborigines are tied by invisible ties which the ages of colonialism have been unable to destroy” (51). The land is not a “wide open space for Aborigines”, they call it ‘Kurunba’, or ‘life essence,” capable of expressing their deepest “spiritual yearnings” (Cowan 30). Their deepest spiritual beliefs are reflected in the totality of landscape – that is the earth, rock forms, trees, plains, mountains, insects, animals, spirits, ancestors etc. and finally in man himself. These nomadic communities of oral cultures maintained a spiritual and physical link with their land since the Dreaming. The physical contact with the sacred objects of nature equipped them with unselfishness, courage, strength and vitality. Silas Robert maintains in this context, “Our connection to all things natural is spiritual” (qtd. in Bourke, et al 77). The land and the people are bound together by unique traditional concepts of spirituality. People derive their spiritual essence from ecology, bush songs, rituals, landscapes, animals, birds, tribal-dance, arts and story-telling tradition, which also “contain the essence of their ancestors” (Shivadas 170), and discipline their life style. Kevin Gilbert describes, “The Aboriginal way is that everything is equal and sacred, that the soil, the clay, the rocks all are sacred” (qtd. in Bourke, et al 96). This realm of spiritual existence is not detached from the contemporary world of surviving Indigenous people but is entrenched in it. According to Aboriginal narratives, human and non human world originated from ‘Mother Nature’ since the Dreaming, a phenomena that took place some fifty thousand years ago. The Dreaming doesn't indicate the reflection of the real world, “Rather, Aboriginal people see the world of The Dreaming as the fundamental reality” (Bourke, et al 79). It was their understanding of space and ability to establish a place in nature that in the course of life they received a unique spiritual power and rhythm to establish their own religious patterns and beliefs. They believed in the existence of the God and the power of spirits in all spheres of life and nature. The spirits of their ancestors are not harmful but they have positive energy for the living as well as for the unborn. In *The Dusty Road*, the author shows a

deep reverence for spirituality which echoes in her narratives, "I knew the house was full of spirits... we used to hear the gate click shut, and footsteps on the veranda and down the hall ... it was our home and they looked after us" (Larsen 63). Similarly, Sally Morgan's grandmother, Nan, has a firm belief in spirits, "Our people were very strong in spirits" (Morgan 340). The author in *My Place* describes that her mother Gladys and grandmother, Nan, were capable of feeling people and these spiritual gifts sustained them through life. Gladys, author's mother in *My Place*, is also one of the victims of stolen generations who narrates, "Blackfellas know all about spirits. We brought up with them... the White man's stupid. He only believes what he can see. He needs to get educated" (Morgan 335). The Aboriginals realize that the spirits of their ancestors are living around them to bless and look after them, so their spirituality originates naturally and spontaneously. The Aboriginals have the conviction that "dead ancestors are present amidst the living and a constant source of guidance" (Pandiarajan 175) to bless them everywhere in space.

II

The analysis of three autobiographies reveals the fact that the land is a sacred site and a source of energy and strength which demeanors the domestic activities of Aboriginal people. The names of natural objects like trees, birds and animals are identical with the names of Aboriginal children. Langford in *Don't Take Your Love to Town* shares that her tribal name is 'Ginibi,' which she adopted after her trip to her home country, meaning 'Black Swan,' and with this name she facilitates her Aboriginal identity. This kind of naming reinforces their attachment to the land and develops a strong sense of brotherhood and bonding between the human and non human world. During her stay in the city, suffering under the cruel colonial policies, she feels a natural sense of bonding with her ancestral land. She makes several attempts to move back to her Aboriginal origin in bush, "My mind...always turned back to home" (Ginibi 83). The spiritual blessings of Mother Nature burgeoned in her courage and strength to demonstrate her actual roots in city. The Aboriginal culture and land empower her to demonstrate her actual roots like Nora, the first Aboriginal athlete of Australia, who

avers, "I draw inspiration from culture" (Pandiarajan 175).

The Aboriginal people were eco-friendly, they never exploited land and nature beyond its capacity for renewal, and nature bestowed them with immense spiritual power to grow and lead a secure life. A 'Megiker,' in Aboriginal race mysteriously gives the information of rain, as they had managed to gather information from nature itself by way of their esoteric training. Nan's daughter, in *My Place*, is recovered miraculously from polio after the use of spiritual healing. Gladys, the mother of Sally Morgan, also possessed the same healing powers derived from her Aboriginal family, she shares with Sally Morgan, "I used to do healing with the hands. Sometimes a person would be healed mentally, sometimes spiritually, sometimes physically. I would feel a power come into me, it would build up in my hands and then flow from me to whoever I touched" (Morgan 296).

III

Winne Larsen in *The Dusty Road* presents the same belief in the sacred world of Aboriginals. Aboriginal spirituality is natural and they have a firm belief and reverence for God. Each and every object of creation is the manifestation of God. For them the mother earth is a part of the miracles produced by God. She asserts, "We kids had a bush life...there were lots of bush flowers, wild flowers...birds and fresh water soaks...we believed in these things in a spiritual way" (Larsen 6). The author feels attachment and love for her land. She recalls the damaged water hole 'Night Well' that was a natural and spiritual pilgrimage for people and wild life, destroyed by the colonial rule, during the First World War, "I was devastated to see the water hole...mother earth" (40). It is due to spirituality in Aboriginal culture that they have sympathy for the oppressed people of the world. They are surviving under the blessings of Mother Nature, spirits of ancestors and the supreme power of the God despite the moments of hardships. "Our story is in the land...in those sacred places....The Dreaming Place you cannot change, no matter you rich man, no matter you king. You cannot change it" (Pandiarajan 175).

Thus, the Aboriginals' religious philosophy is very effective, they believe in the supernatural power of God, who nurtures the

creation on the earth. A man sows seeds in the earth and God nurtures them with rain, sun and wind. It's the power of God that grows the plants, trees, flowers and vegetation on the land. The researchers like Tonkinson, Rose and Morphy have emphasized "the centrality of beliefs in spiritual powers in Aboriginal cosmology" (Bourke, et al 78).

The traditional Aboriginal Law allows digging or making the land only for spiritual activities or for rituals and for gathering food. Hurting the land for agriculture is tolerable to some extent and, "Aboriginal relationship to the land links them to ecosystems rather than giving them power to exploit. The spiritual contact of Arthur in *My Place* with land has been evident, while digging the soil he feels naturally that something appalling has occurred in the family. His connection with the land reflects a spiritual power through a mysterious event, when Arthur has temporary blindness during digging the soil. His loss of sight signifies the loss of mother at home in a symbolic way, and the land functions as a medium between Arthur and his motherly love. Arthur states:

If they want in Gibson Desert, they do a rain song and fill up the place they want, if it's cold, they bring the warm weather like wind....They don't have to hunt too hard, the spirits can bring birds to them....They don't kill, unless they hungry, the white man's the one who kills for sport. Aaah, there's so much they don't understand. (Morgan 209)

In Aboriginal culture when an Aboriginal dances a 'Wantji Wantji' or travel dance, he is immediately transported into a state where all earth has the power to converse with him. The natives "who give themselves the name Noongar, are particularly delighted by music...they more often spoke through songs"(Shivadas 172),and "they were painted with the symbols of the stories, sang the songs and dance the steps, they entered into the very being of those ancestors" (Bourke, et al 86).The dancer produces the rhythm beating on the ground, a drum like response. The 'eco' produced from the earth symbolizes a spiritual and physical bond. Similarly, when he sings a 'Tulku' song, he finds himself entering a condition where certain

mystic information is imparted to him by the environment. It is interesting to know that among the Pintupi people of central Australia the melody of a song is known as the 'Scent' (Mayu) or 'Taste' (Negurru). The instrument of music is made of wood and they produce a very low pitch of sound. The range of spiritual peace and emotion is best expressed by them. They do not strive after cacophony. The melody and rhythm of tribal songs provide them with peace, comfort and satisfaction. Gladys, Sally Morgan's mother, also exhibits her love for Aboriginal music, "It was Aboriginal music...it was beautiful...I only heard it at night when I was feeling depressed.... It was that some feeling of protection" (Morgan 240). Thus, singing, dancing and playing music, are the products of spiritual expression through which they communicate with nature in mysterious words, and show deep reverence to space and God. It is the spirituality in their culture and life which touches the mystery of God and creation, influencing their life so strongly that even after the continuing cruelty of white people they manage to survive and flourish in the world.

The narratives of autobiographies substantiate the fact that Aborigines spiritual traditions are profoundly linked to the events of Dreaming and landscape. Larsen, Langford and Morgan illuminate the fact that the natives have been very strong and tough in the face of suffering and it is this aspect of their strength and spirituality which has sustained them in an otherwise white dominated hostile world. Whatever be the destructive effects of colonialism, the Aboriginal women are embracing their cultural heritage and spirituality, and asserting their identity in an emphatic manner.

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The Poetry of Judith Wright: Representation of the Aboriginals

Anita Sharma

Kevin Gilbert (1933-1993), in his book *Living Black* (1977), says, "White people's devaluation of Aboriginal life, religion, culture and personality caused the thinking about self and race that I believe is the key to modern Aboriginal thinking" (Gilbert 2). Judith Wright empathetically has taken the cause of the Aboriginals in her poetry. As a voice of the Aboriginals she has written about the violence of long-term colonialism plaguing the land of Australia and not being reconciled by just and proper means. She goes forth and strikes like a warrior at the mightiest white egos, reminding them of the atrocities committed in the continent. It has been the struggles of the Aboriginal people that inspired her to write. Wright's first collection of poetry, *The Moving Image*, depicts the horrors faced by Aboriginal people during the war years and celebrates the New England table land of her childhood. The mystical quality of her land never leaves her. The work exhibits the importance of history, place and environment in Aboriginal culture. She has celebrated Aboriginal survival in the face of adversity, lamented prejudice and oppression, and offers an optimistic view of the potential for interracial harmony in the country. She has been committed to fight for the land and the Aboriginal people and has used her writing as a weapon on behalf of the Aboriginals. Wright is the first white Australian poet to publically name and explore the experiences of the indigenous people. Her work is provocative and emotional that sought justice for Aboriginal people. In the post-war era Wright stands as the most insightful poet, who conveys the pain and agony of Indigenous Australians. She has authored quite a few collections of poetry that include *The Moving Image* (1946), *Woman to Man* (1949), *The Gateway* (1953), *The Two Fires* (1955), *Birds* (1962), *Five Senses* (1963), *The Other Half* (1966), *Alive* (1973), *Train Journey* (1978), etc.

Dispossession of Aboriginals

The oppression of the Aboriginals and their displacement in their own land was a major concern for Wright. The realization of her forefathers' participation leading to their deplorable condition created guilt in her which is depicted and portrayed in her oeuvre. Judith Wright emphasized in clear terms the fundamental disjunction between white and black Australians, a gulf which was described as being nearly impossible to bridge as the whites were "born of fire, possessed by darkness" (*Collected Poems* 426). Wright brought out the pain of the Aboriginals that would disturb the peace of whites. She questions "how shall mind be sober, / since blood's red thread still binds us fast in history?" (12) She wondered whether the whites realize the impact of the invasion on the lives of the Aboriginals and "Does each repent the thing the last has done/ though claiming he rejects it?" (241) Assessing the impact of the encounter with a primitive culture, she wrote in *The Generations of Men*:

Why should the blacks, with that soft obstinacy that was almost gaiety, thus invite their own murder? They refused the conditions his people had imposed; they preferred their own stubbornness. It was unfair, unfair, that such a choice should be given, such an invitation made. "Kill us, for we can never accept you" the blacks said; "Kill us, or forget your own ambitions". (156)

The dispossession of the Aboriginals by the white men induces introspection in her poetry as she unveils the shadow over the dark truth full of terrible wrongs inflicted upon the Aboriginals. In the poem *Homecoming* she addresses the whites to take the blame and make amends:

Brother, we dare not fail our load. Now brace
your skeleton's height, and hold. Danger and power
is ours; control and measure. Did we flower
our flowers would kill: but that is not our place,
winter's perpetual gale we know, no more.
Shoulder the weight. Stride on. Open the door. (*CP*
228)

In the poem *For the Loved and the Unloved* Wright blames the whites completely for their ill-doings. She also makes them recognize their darker aspects which is eventually ruining their lives:

The roads unwind within us.
It is not time's undone us,
but we ourselves, who ravel
the thread by which we travel. (126)

The White Guilt

In one of her interviews with Ramona Koval, Wright mentioned that she always wants to make up to the people for the ills they suffered: "What we've done to the Aborigines is definitely the worst thing we have done since we came here, and we've done plenty of bad things" (web). She believes that by simply ignoring the fate of the natives, white Australians will never be able to rid themselves of an uneasy guilt for what they did to the former inhabitants of Australia. In the poem *Envy* she deals with the notion of "heaven or hell" tied to the actions of the whites:

What heaven or hell could be
our proper justice, envy's retribution
or the reward of hopeless long devotion,
but reaching the highest power of what we've been? (*CP*
383)

Judith Wright had an imperishable bond with the word "Aboriginal". She shared a poetic, symbolic and metaphysical appreciation of Aboriginal culture. She realized the fact that after their arrival in January 1788, the Whites tended to find a new society which excluded the Aborigines and marginalized them in such a way that they lost their right to live properly. Theme of colonial throes, masculine orientation and consciousness towards Aboriginal vexation got reflected in number of her poems, where these humble tribes became objects of wonder and contempt. The theme of unjust treatment of Aborigines by early settlers and their sense of isolation and discrimination is depicted in the poem *Nigger's Leap: New England*. It is a unique piece for articulating a sharper sense of guilt and for offering a new perspective about the European adventure that had thrived at the expense of the

primitive tribes of the land. Based on a particular incident of European reprisal, in 1844, in New South Wales, the poem recalls how the hapless Niggers pursued to the top of the "lipped cliff", "screamed falling in flesh" from those heights and then were "silent".

Swallow the spine of range; be dark, O lonely air.
Make a cold quilt across the bones and skull
that screamed falling in flesh from the lipped cliff
and then were silent, waiting for the flies.
Did we not know their blood channelled our rivers
and the black dust our crops ate was their dust?
O all men are one man at last. We should have known
the night that tided up the cliffs and hid them
had the same question on its tongue for us.
And there they lie that were ourselves writ strange. (15-16)

In the poem *Drought* she tries to make the whites realize their evil doings. She makes them aware of the working of fate which will ultimately bring darkness in their life. She says that "the strength that brandished" will eventually drain "like water" and their life will be powered by the 'dark of the world' (109). She states that "Pride, greed, and ignorance- that world's three veils- " (199) have casted their spell on the whites. In the poem *Myth* Wright shuns the behavior of whites who "Sunk in his brittle prison-cell of mud" is now becoming "a god" (77).

'We Phenomenon'

Wright has commented that the story of *Nigger's Leap* became deeply symbolic for her. Brady proposes that although this story is one that most people would rather forget or "shuffle back into a violent and miserable past" (94), but for Wright "that dark cliff head, with the depth of shadows below it in the gulfs, is still a potent place." (Brady 94) There is also a haunting sense that the spirits of the traditional owners are still alive in the land, that the land itself is taking revenge. The sentiments recorded in these lines are a good example of what J.J. Heal has termed as the "we-phenomenon", an expanded consciousness that

acknowledges collective responsibility for a particular event of history that sees the victim as a segment of the self- inflicted wound. Her poem *Bora Ring* is a splendid expression about the vanishing as well as the vanished race. It deals with the annihilation of Aboriginal culture by White settlement.

The song is gone; the dance
is secret with dancers in the earth,
the ritual useless, and the tribal story
lost in an alien tale. (CP8)

The traditions of Aboriginals were “breathed sleeping and forgot”. (8) These are the powerful words Judith Wright uses to show how the Aboriginals were quickly invaded by the white brothers and “forgotten”. The description of an empty landscape full of memories of the Aboriginals increases the sense of usurpation and the feeling of guilt is also intensified. She says in *Country Town*

Where is it we have lost and left behind?
Where do the roads lead? It is not where we expected.
The gold is mined and safe, and where is the profit?
The Church is built, the bishop is ordained,
and this is where we live: where do we live? (14)

Wright's indication of interference and suppression of her white ancestors express the savageness that has made the aboriginals' “Haunted and alone” (135) Cross-culturally speaking the feeling of arrogant guilt of the white's inhuman attacks in contrast the Aboriginal's love for a peaceful life is depicted in *At Cooloolah*:

being unloved by all my eyes delight in,
and made uneasy, for an old murder's sake.
Those dark-skinned people who once named
Cooloolah
knew that no land is lost or won by wars,
for earth is spirit; the invader's feet will tangle
in nests there and his blood be thinned by fears. (

140)

Judith Wright articulates her sympathy while depicting the plight of the Aboriginals. She expresses concern at the marginalization of the indigenous and demands respect and equal rights for them. She brings forward a dignified way of looking at the Aboriginals. She criticizes and disdains the white race for creating chaos in the lives of the original inhabitants. Their hiding bushes become “dark ranges” where hunter spears witness blood-streams running violently all over, as portrayed in the poetic collection *The Moving Image*. In the poem *Trapped Dingo* she writes:

So here, twisted in steel, and spoiled with red
your sunlight hide, smelling of death and fear,
they crushed out your throat the terrible song
you sang in the dark ranges. (9)

Those “dark” tribes after being dragged out of their land took refuge from the squatters and the mounted native police, in the great scrubs and ranges of Dawson, Mackenzie and Isaac rivers. Left to wander, lost and alone in the annals of Australian history, their escapes sprang up into mythical stories. The bushes in the forest seem to become a place of escape, a place to find peace, a place to find work and pride in oneself. In *The Cedars* Wright goes beyond the specific and regrets the elementary violence of human nature presenting the shadow side of colonization. She has profound respect for the sacred dimensions of ordinary life and ordinary Australians and upholds the ethical and gracious sense of human dignity:

For it is anguish to be reborn and reborn:
at every return of the overmastering season
to shed our lives in pain, to waken into cold,
to become naked, while with unbearable effort
we make way for the new sap that burns along old
channels- (74)

Judith Wright makes cognizant efforts to bridge the existing gap between the whites and blacks. She hopes for integration of both the

paces for a harmonious co-existence. Wright makes a statement that the natives are human beings who deserve respect and humane treatment. Critics like H.P. Heseltine support her vision of life depicted in her later poetry and assert that 'she has made the harder choice of seeking, through private struggle, to wring from poetry a new vision of the world.' (Wilde 829) In the poem *Carnarvon Range* she transforms her guilt and anger into a flourishing, loving and committed relationship and resolves to sing for the tribes who have now become silent: "Carnarvon Creek / and cliffs of Carnarvon, / your tribes are silent;" but "I will sing for you" (CP 134). Comforting the tribal fellows, she says:

I hold your hand,

...

I cannot mend-

your time's not mine, your place strange to my
place.(124)

Wright feels sad to see "The maze we travelled has indeed its centre. / there is a source to which all time's returned." (263) She appeals to the whites to "forget awhile / that we create the night" (49) and states that the present demands to "Draw from the flying dark its breath of dew/ till the unloving come to life in you." (75) In the poem *Letter to a Friend* she shares her feelings with the Aborigines.

the mourner speaks to the mourned,
the murderer speaks to the murdered.

To you whom I have killed,

You whom I have seen die

(and my tears were useless),

you with whom I have died-

to you at least I should speak the truth.

With you at least I should share my heart. (56)

In the poem *Walker in Darkness* she depicts the query in the heart of the Aborigines: "where shall I look for my light, and how shall I find/ my heart in your dark land?" (110) Wright also depicts the state of

mind of the Aboriginals and reflects the darkness that empowers them. In the poem *The Forest Path* she states what the Aboriginals feel:

And if we had not been afraid- if terror had not
taken over our minds and cruelty our hearts-
would we have found perhaps in the bewildering dark
not the death we thought of at first and almost hoped to
find,
but the birth we never expected or desired? (112)

The poem *To a Child* states her concern for the Aboriginals who are losing faith: "I think of this for you. / I would not have you believe / the world is empty of truth / or that men must grieve." (107) Her advice to them is to live fearlessly: "Walk your dark streets alone but without fear" (85), even though you "go by the darkest road." (100) In the poem *Old Man* she builds up the strength of the Aboriginals to oppose the whites:

Before coming of that arrogant and ancient kingdom
Something is waiting to be done, something should be
said. (84)

Judith Wright also portrays the attitude of the Aboriginals to adapt to the situation. In the poem *The Marks* Wright describes the wisdom learnt by the Aboriginals in this "enlightening life":

I have learned not to tumble down;
I can dodge and parry and hide;
I can handle kettle and knife.
It has been an enlightening life. (374)

Australia 1970 displays the weight of denunciation in a venomous society of conquerors. "For we are conquerors and self-prisoners / more than scorpion or snake / and dying of the venoms that we make/ even while you die of us." (288). Wright's ironical remarks over the shameful acts of her ancestors in *Victims* reveal her anguished soul:

They are ageing now, some dead.
 In the third-class suburbs of exile
 their foreign accents
 continue to condemn them. They should
 not have expected more.
 Their faces, common to human kind,
 had eyes, lips, noses.
 That in itself was grave
 seen through such a flame. (402)

“They” are the doomed society which remains buried in the dust and “They were already/ a coat of ash seared in” (224). Aboriginals' peaceful living is ironically reflected in *To My Brothers*. The irony depicts the barbarous nature of whites who believed in merciless killings and endless fights :

Our people who gnawed at the fringe
 of the edible leaf of this country
 left you a margin of action, (406)

The guilt of living on a land filled with the ghosts of those who had been murdered is evident in the poem *Walker in Darkness*:

The sea he swims in is the sea where other men drown;
 the shore he walks is the white sand of their bones.
 The forest is full of monsters and mad ferns,
 and no man comes there but those who die, who
 mourn,
 or who desire to be bore. (110)

Her poem *Double Image* is about the recognition of the darkest aspects of the human nature, feelings and impulses that are in common with the ancestors and presumably all humanity. It is a visceral poem that recounts the speaker's vicarious participation in the most brutal, almost bestial fight to the death with another when she was within her “kinsman's flesh” and experienced his wounds as if they were her own.

“My kinsman's flesh, my kinsman's skull/ enclosed me, and our wounds were one” (196) she sees the “curve of horror” and comprehends the “speech within the speechless eye”

Till from these centuries I wake,
naked and howling, still unmade,
within the forests of my heart
my dangerous kinsman runs afraid. (196)

Her poem *Eli, Eli* reads as a trans historical lament for the consequences of human acts of violence. It shows the lack of responsibility the whites have for humanity which causes rift between the two cultures and make the indigenous adamant to not accept the whites:

To hold the invisible wand, and not to save them-
to know them turned to death, and yet not to save
them;
only to cry to them and not to save them,
knowing that no one but themselves could save them-
this was the wound, more than the wound they dealt
him. (44)

Racial Discrimination

Judith Wright reveals the miserable plight of the Aboriginals in order to make their survival possible. Wright feels guilty for the wrong-doings of her ancestors on the land of the Aboriginals. She considers Aboriginals to be the real inhabitants of Australia who were treated with contempt and condescension by the whites. She shows respect to the struggle Aboriginals endure for their continued existence and considers the Aboriginals to be superior beings in context to strength and perseverance. She strongly condemns this monster of racial discrimination that differentiates on the colour of the skin and creates “hate between the white skin and the black” (63). In her poem *The Dark Ones* she describes the oppression and racial discrimination of the Aboriginals. The pain and grief brims out from the “dark gutters” of

their eyes:

On the other side of the road
 the dark ones stand
 Something leaks in our blood
 Like the ooze from a wound.
 ...
 Those dark gutters of grief
 their eyes, are gone.
 With a babble of shamed relief
 the bargaining goes on. (354-55)

Another splendid description of the unacknowledged historical past of the blacks and prevailing hatred between the whites and black people due to their color get a historical projection in *The Dust in the Township*:

and now with the tribes he is gone down in death.
 ...
 to us who forget the sweat of Dick Delaney,
 and the humpy and scalding sunlight and the black
 hate between the white skin and the black. (63)

Wright considers racial discrimination as “Our enemy” (292) because it creates the feeling of superiority. She realizes the pain suffered due to colour discrimination. In the poem *Half Caste Girl* she depicts how the girl longs to enjoy her life but the “wallaby skin” stands as a hindrance:

Little Josie buried under the bright sun
 would like to open her eyes and dance in the light.
 Who is it has covered the sun and the beautiful moon
 with a wallaby skin, and left her alone in the night?
 (19)

In the poem *Two Dreamtimes* she shares her emotions of “not allowed to play with” “one of the dark children”. She depicts the cruel beliefs of the society that discriminates a child:

You were one of the dark children
I wasn't allowed to play with-
River bank campers, the wrong colour,
(I couldn't turn you white). (315)

Judith Wright powerfully reacts against the discrimination based on colour. She strongly censures the whites for indulging in hate for the black race. She shows her deep concern for the Aboriginals and wishes to change the attitude of the white race. She emerges as impassioned advocate for Aboriginal land rights movement and stands up in the situations that demanded justice for the real inhabitants of the land. To show their concern for the Aboriginals Wright in 1991 resigned as a patron of the Wildlife Preservation Society because of its failure to support Aboriginal land rights. Strong in her denunciation of mistreatment of the Aboriginals undermining the social fabric of Australian life Wright attended a march in Canberra for reconciliation between white Australian and the Aboriginal people shortly before her death at the age of eighty-five. She tried to kick-start a movement for reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians in the 1980s which gathered strength in the 1990s. However, with her experiences she learnt that reconciliation is not a matter of charity for the oppressed but rather a realization.

Conclusion

Upholding the ethical and gracious sense of human dignity, Judith Wright advises the whites to be like a tree that “leaps up and makes a world / to reconcile the night and day, / to feed the bird and the shining fly”. (87) The duty of the whites is to make the Aboriginals believe in life. Wright gives a message to both the races to unite and forget the wrong doings. She states her point: “Perhaps nothing exists but our faults?/ At least they can be demonstrated.” She further writes: “we invent both light and dark: that is man's fate”. (251) In *The Builders* she

salutes to the surviving spirit of life: "This is life's promise and accomplishment- /... / Seeds falls there now, birds build, and life takes over." (45) She asserts that time has come "to be out of this dream" (276) and "to learn and to unlearn,/ absorb and fight" .(327) In the poem *To Hafiz Of Shiraz* she writes the philosophy of life as understood by her:

Every path and life leads one way only,
 out of continual miracle, through creation's fable,
 over and over repeated but never yet understood,
 as every word leads back to the blinding original word.
 (216)

Wright gives enlightening message to humanity. She declares that "we create the selves we must destroy / before we find the pattern of our joy." (218) She asserts that as humanity we are all "connected with each other" (290) and should live in harmony. In the poem *The Body* Wright hopes for harmonious co-existence of whites and blacks as they both appreciate their inter-dependence:

I am your blundering kind companion.
 I am your home that keeps out bitter weather.
 I am the perilous slow deposit of time's wisdom.
 You are my threat, my murder. And yet, remember.
 I am yourself. Come, let us live together. (146)

As true humanists, she fought adamantly for the rights of the Aboriginals and strived for the integration of both the cultures .The poetry of Judith Wright depicts the urgency and exigency to bring the whites and Aboriginals on the same platform where there is no ban and bias. She expects from the whites to value the traditions of the Aboriginals and respect their living. The Aboriginals are also expected to view the culture of the whites with veneration. This shall bring in a new phase of cultural communication and help to build a majestic life. Wright states that her purpose in reintroducing the Aboriginals into the mind of Australians was not so much to recall the violence of the European take over but to make white Australians realize that "You must

go by the way he went” (113). With such fear in their hearts the whites will become more responsible towards other races. She has provided a new perspective to live life meaningfully as life is interlinked so it becomes imperial for man to respect each other's culture for a harmonious co-existence. She has made an outstanding contribution to bridge the existing gap in the life of the whites and the Aboriginals. Her breathtaking imaginativeness and her astounding equanimity provide immense energy to integrate both the cultures to bring essence to life. Her poetic oeuvre conveys strong modes of cultural communication to unite the two ends ushering a new spirit of reawakening and resurgence.

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Writing beyond Canons: Australian Indigenous Writing in/for India

Supala Pandiarajan

Traditionally, literary studies operated on certain standard assumptions of what could be considered as a 'text'. An ideal 'text', worthy of being a part of the mainstream literary tradition of any nation, was the one which was published and consequently archived or kept in circulation with reprints. A literary text is preoccupied hard-and-fast with the concepts of 'writing', 'authorship' and 'chronology'. On the other hand, the theory-revolution post in the late twentieth century brought about drastic changes in the methodology of literary studies like any other field. Contemporary literary studies are multidisciplinary and accommodate a paradigm shift in revaluating the significance of non-canonical writings.

This paper is a reading of certain non-canonical indigenous Australian texts, which can be used effectively to introduce Australian Indigenous Writing to Indian learners of English Studies. The texts discussed here are non-canonical in the sense of not being generally prescribed as part of Australian Studies in Indian Curriculums.

“What counts as 'writing'? What counts as authorship?” (Toorn 2).

When Australian literature is 'contentualized' for the consumption of Indian learners, the standard assumptions of 'writing' and 'authorship' stereotypes the choice of texts. On the other hand, “by adjusting the theoretical lens through which... writing is perceived, a new history of ...writing comes into view” (2). This paper is one such 'adjustment' of the “theoretical lens” to see beyond standard perceptions in the choice of texts in introducing Australian indigenous writing to Indian learners.

Conventionally, an ideal text for discussion in a literary studies

classroom would have been the work published by an award-winning, internationally acclaimed author who had crafted her/his work with great 'literary sensibility' and 'technicality'. In the contemporary, post theory era, literary studies have embraced multidisciplinary dimensions, as a result of which concepts such as 'literature' and 'writing' get re-defined. A broader perspective to 'what can be defined as literature' leads to the reading of non-canonical indigenous texts which create new frameworks of understanding the native cultures of Australia. Postcolonial and Cultural Studies supplement this methodology of reading non-cans, and this enables the inclusion of different genres of literature apart from the mainstream ones like poetry, fiction and drama.

Indigenous Australian writing to the Indian learners has most often been centred on acclaimed writers like Kath Walker or Sally Morgan, whose works are standardised in print. The works of these stalwarts are integral components in all Australian anthologies, and hence, are ideal texts in English curriculums in India. Moreover, these writers effectively convey the essence of indigenous cultures of Australia – their past glory, present predicament and future dilemma – thereby making them passionate choices for critical examination. Kath Walker makes learners understand the relationship between the land and the indigenous people by writing, "We are the corroboree and the bora ground.../ We are the wonder tales of Dream Time and the tribal legends told" ("We are Going" 10 & 12).

The cultures of the indigenous people before colonization are generally introduced to the Indian learners through works of post colonial writers who re-image the past. But this reading of the past through subsequently-published, famous texts creates an impression that no literary activity, worthy of mention, must have happened in indigenous cultures before colonization and the advent of the print form. Though there is an empathetic understanding of the indigenous people's loss, the integrity of 'what actually existed' in one of the worlds' antique, complex civilizations remains out of focus.

A de-colonial, chronological perspective in pedagogy identifies the 'starting point' of Australian Aboriginal literature as the time before the advent of White settlement in Australia, during which literature

existed primarily as oral and in art forms. The oral literature of the Aboriginal people constituted song cycles and stories. The intrusion of white settlers had ruptured the oral and artistic traditions of these natives. Reconciliation efforts at various stages had attempted to restore what was left of the disrupted Aboriginal oral tradition. The reminiscences of these stories and song cycles find their place in Australian Literature anthologies in their English versions.

A reading of a few Song Cycles from the oral traditions of indigenous Australians provides the context to appreciate the concept of the a-chronological 'Dreamtime'. The Dreamtime, in indigenous belief was the time when ancestral spirits sprung-up from the land, water or sky and lived on the earth like human beings and went about their activity of creating the world – the landscapes, flora, fauna and humans. During this period, they 'externalized' from their bodies tools or equipment they needed for various activities, which became a natural form in the landscape, like a mound, hill or rock. As the ancestral spirits travelled from one place to another, they left the 'imprinting' of their bodies while they sat or touched on landscapes, thereby making such sites sacred. The most significant belief to understand Aboriginal relationship to the land is that after their life on earth, the ancestral spirits 'metamorphosed' into natural forms like land, river, seas, hills, mounds, mountains, plant, animals, planets and stars. The ancestral spirits, according to the indigenous belief, continued to live on the earth in the form of landscapes. Hence, the indigenous share a kinship to their lands.

The ancestral spirits set down the rules of living for their progenies from their personal experiences on earth while they undertook the activity of creation. This knowledge existed in the form of songs and stories, in other words literature. All Aboriginal literature was believed to be derived from the ancestral spirits. These songs and stories were memorized and passed on from one generation to another by the word of mouth. They had duties to the land and their ancestors – they had to take part in ceremonies in order to keep the world, plants and animals thriving. The indigenous people repeated the song cycles during religious ceremonies and educated the younger generation through the

stories told by the ancestors. Teaching this spiritual-ancestral relationship between the Aboriginal people and their land to a group of learners who are brought-up on the Western attitudes of materialism, needs pedagogic care. The discussion of the traditional Aboriginal songs and stories helps to build a theoretical framework to Aboriginal cultures, which enables learners to look beyond land rights and appreciate the 'land rites' of the indigenous peoples.

In this context, the song cycles of pre-colonial, indigenous Australia “are representatives of the kind of oral culture that extended back for thousands – perhaps tens of thousands – of years” (Goodwin and Lawson 76) before the white settlement. The traditional Aboriginal songs, “The Djanggawul Song Cycle”, “The Golburn Island Song Cycle” “A Wonguri-Mandjigai Song Cycle of the Moon Bone”, which were sung during ceremonies, were recorded during the twentieth century and their English translations are available in *The Macmillan Anthology of Australian Literature*. These song cycles provide the ground for discussing the “legendary, the totemic, the erotic and the local” (76) ways of the indigenous people. These songs and stories were believed to have been 'authored' by the ancestral beings during their life on earth to shape the earth, landscape and other natural forms. The songs were the experiences of the ancestral spirits during their time on earth and thereby dictated the rules and mantras of 'how to live' to the progeny of their own tribes. Each individual in the tribe would memorize these songs, perform and pass them on to the next generation by the word-of-mouth. There were strict laws regarding the internalization and passing-on of these oral documents. These songs were generally accompaniments for ceremonial gatherings, which stated the rules for how to perform the religious rites. They were sung as prayers that guided the indigenous people to their destinations in their search for food.

An Indian teacher would realize how a mere reference to these songs in a classroom makes learners relate more to the spiritual nature of the Aboriginal customs, often 'reducing' the essence of Aboriginal cultures to their mythological beliefs. But the actual reading of these songs helps learners discover that they are not simple-worded statements, as they are generally understood. There exists a mosaic of

complex meanings that have been coded into these songs. They are replete with imageries and symbolisms that challenge the readers' prowess of comprehension and emphasise on the literary value of Aboriginal oratures. The images presented in these songs require an interpretative analytical exercise in order to understand their meanings.

The "The Djanggawul Song Cycle" is sung by the three ancestral spirits – two sisters and one brother, on their way to populate Arhem Land (an aboriginal territory in Northern Australia). The introduction to the song in *The Macmillan Anthology of Australian Literature* (1990) explains how the sisters are pregnant, and they are following the 'Morning Star' in reaching their destinations. The morning star is described as a "feathered ball" with a tail, by which the learner realizes the intricate scientific knowledge of the indigenous peoples who knew, like their European counterparts, that stars had tails. The conically shaped 'Morning Star' becomes a symbol of the sisters' uterus – the source of female productivity. The learners understand that this importance to 'motherhood' and the assertion of female sexuality, phenomena of the recent Western temperaments, have been part and parcel of Aboriginal cultures. During discussions of this song, the teacher's catalytic role makes learners to identify this archetype of following stars, as oracles and guiding lights to destinations, with similar patterns in their own religious mythologies. Here, the comparative methodology enables Indian learners to respond to Aboriginal literatures and cultures of all times with genuine empathy rather than a sympathetic acceptance.

The song is a cultural record in presenting the skill of the Djanggawul clan in hunting turtles with heavy "dilly bags". It is also a lesson in paddling through the waters, "All the way we have paddled, I rest my paddles now, as we glide" (Goodwin and Lawson 11). When the indigenous people memorized this song and passed it down to generations, they were actually passing down the knowledge of how to paddle through the currents and where to locate food in the waters. Hence, these songs become multidisciplinary where literature carries 'down' with it social sciences like history, art, technology, religion, law and philosophy, thereby encompassing the entire gamut of Aboriginal

cultures within them. The study of these oral literatures inevitably becomes the study of a Aboriginal cultures.

Song Three from “The Golburn Island Song Cycle”, from the north-east of Arhem Land, describes the passionate singing and dancing of the indigenous peoples, accompanied by the musical instruments of the didgeridoos and clap-sticks, that invokes “the Western rain clouds” (7). Their joyous singing and dancing has the power to initiate showers.

Song Four from “The Golburn Island Song Cycle” introduces the learners to the Aboriginal traditions of painting and colouring the bodies for ceremonies and war-fares:

Take clay and coloured ochres, and put them on!
They paint chests, breasts with clay, in water-designs,
Hang round their necks the padded fighting bags.
They paint themselves the Goulburn Island people, and
clans
from the Woolen River
They are always there at the wide expanse of water...
They take more clay for painting the fighting-sticks...
Paint on their chests designs of water snakes...
And paint the boomerangs with coloured ochres...
Painting the small boomerangs...
Calling the invocations...all over the country...

.....
At the place of the Western Clouds, at the place of
Coloured Reflections...

-10, 11)

A variety of artistic designs were used in body painting, weapon-painting, story-telling and mapping the land to mark the sacred sites and directions to food resources. The indigenous peoples painted eagles, kangaroos, weapons, boomerangs, water-snakes and also symbols of their ancestors on their bodies. The context of this Song provides the

room for the elaboration of Aboriginal art to the Indian learners through photographs and paintings. The Song makes the learners understand the existence of art, its origins and purpose in the Aboriginal cultures, and the contemporary global market value of Aboriginal artefacts. The phrase, “Coloured Reflections”, is a sample of the literary scholarship of this Aboriginal oral literature as it involves a great deal of critical interpretation on the part of the Indian learners to fix the meaning of the phrase in its context. While Kath Walker's “We are Going” ‘voices’ the loss of the Aboriginal warriors’ corroboree, it is the Song from the oral traditions, such as this song from the Goulburn Island, that presents to the Indian learners what actually the indigenous people did before going to fight or performing religious rites.

The discussions on this Song of the Goulburn Island people orient the Indian learners to the intricacies of Aboriginal culture, wherein a subsequent reading of white works emphasizing Australia's ‘newness’ does not make the learners reduce the indigenous lifestyle to ‘nomadic gathering’. When Australian literature is begun from Aboriginal ‘oral literatures’, the cyclic structure in which the white ‘centre’ and Aboriginal ‘margins’ have created meanings so far in the Indian academy is ‘de-structured’. This ‘de-centring’ gives a linear framework to the history of Australian literature in the Indian academia.

“The Wonguri-Mandjigai Song Cycle of the Moon-Bone” tells the story of the ancestral Moon man, who lived in Dugong. As the Moon-man travelled from one part of the sky to another, he sees from the skies the Wonguri-Mandjigai people sitting behind the trees. At the end of his journey, the Moon-man goes into the sea to be re-born when the night begins. Another Song from this cycle tells the story of the Moon-man who lived with his sister Dugong in the Dreamtime. He travels to the sea to throw his bones and climbs up to the sky. This becomes a monthly activity when the Moon vanishes into the sea and climbs up again. The song emphasises the cyclic nature of life and death. They enabled the indigenous peoples to stay close to the natural elements like Moon, water, fire, mountains, valleys, plains, plants and animals. The natives of Australia derived their spiritual and thereby physical energy from natural elements. In Matthew Arnold's words, “the

line of spray/ Where the sea meets the moon-blached land” (“Dover Beach” 7-8) is a place of epiphany. Nature has been imaged as a solace-giver for the spiritual regeneration of humans in all cultures including Indian cultures. These songs impinge on the learner how western materialism has made them alien not only to Aboriginal customs but also their own. The Aboriginal cultures were not mere superstitions but they practiced a 'more rational' belief system than other religions of the world in adhering to nature, especially land, and ancestors as their 'deities'. The contemporary 'go-green' campaigns and stress on the preservation of nature to keep world safe for inhabitation, makes learners understand the rationality of Aboriginal cultures.

Despite being grounded in spirituality, the songs express the 'scientifically rationale' indigenous lifestyle to the Indian learners. The emotional bonding with the land, personification of the land as a 'mother' existed in many native cultures in India. In the due course of time this emotional bonding has been lost. In India, political leaders and activists are now trying to re-instil this kinship – the mother child relationship of humans to land, and re-install the image of the land as 'the mother' in order to regain farming lands being consumed for commercial and residential purposes. The song cycles 'humanize' the land and establish a kinship with human beings. But generally, these song cycles are misinterpreted as essentially spiritual and preferred for a poem or autobiography by a well-known Aboriginal writer in the Indian curriculum. This misinterpretation of the songs' literary calibre is reflected in *The Literature of Australia: An Anthology* published in 2009, which does not include Song Cycles from Aboriginal oral traditions. The reading of a few song cycles in class breaks many stereotypes in the Indian understanding of Indigenous Australia.

An apt pedagogical methodology would make Indian learners discover the cultural and literary scholarship of the indigenous songs. Though oral in nature and retraced post colonization, these songs form important episodes in Australian indigenous literary history. These oratures evolve as significant 'texts' in Indian cultural studies classrooms. The Indian pedagogic approach must go beyond its conventional notions of literature in order to appreciate a whole gamut of non-

canonical Australian texts, especially those of indigenous Australians.

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'Learning from the land, Listening to the land, Respecting the land': Exploring Possibilities of Dialogue

Malathy A.

During the centuries following colonial occupation, the voice of the Aboriginal people of Australia, has been gradually silenced, and in the current narrative of development, this voice is hardly heard at all. In contemporary Australia, environmentalist discourse offers some of the few sites where the Aboriginal voice, which is marginalised by mainstream intellectual activity, is heard, respected and valued. Ecologically oriented scholars are beginning to recognise that white settlers in Australia had, as Mulligan and Hill point out, not only made the Aboriginal people invisible in their own land, through the fiction of *terra nullius*, but also

turned their backs on the profound ecological wisdom that these people had accumulated through their long associations with the land. Consequently, many of the mistakes that have been made can be traced to arrogance based on ecological ignorance and a false sense of control. White Australians have taken the long route to acknowledging that valuable things can be learnt from the Aboriginal people (4).

This paper focuses on the rich possibilities of dialogue offered by such conversations between the traditional knowledge of the Aboriginal people and modern environmentalist scholarship, that could bring indigenous and non-indigenous Australians closer together.

The Australian terrain is, as Freya Mathews says, “richly inscribed by one of the oldest, most spiritually-minded, yet at the same time, most thoroughly earthed of peoples” (254). Aboriginal culture in Australia, like other indigenous cultures, is deeply bound up with places, locations, particular sites and territories. The anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose expresses this aspect of locatedness in Aboriginal culture well: “To be located is to have a ground from which to know, to act, to invite and deny, to share and ask, to speak and to be heard. Old Jimmy

Mannngayarri, a Bilinara emu man, expressed this groundedness through an analogy with trees. Both people and trees he said, have their roots in the ground" (*Dingo Makes us Human* 106). This brief but suggestive statement by an Aboriginal elder, speaks volumes about how the Aboriginal sense of identity derives from their bonding with the earth. All aspects of Aboriginal life, which are defined by Dreaming Law, are closely bound up with particular places, plant and animal species.

Colonialism, with its clear ideological agendas, inscribed new meanings on the ancient continent, with total disregard for the values ascribed to it by its original inhabitants. New ways of viewing the Australian land, new mapping schemes and new methods of land use and land management were introduced, which justified and supported the colonial project, and totally obliterated the Aboriginal traditions of relating to the land. For the Aboriginal people, loss of land has meant loss of control over valuable food sources, as well as loss of tribal, family and personal identity, loss of language and kinship networks. It has also meant the loss of their "nourishing terrains" (as Deborah Bird Rose puts it) – their most significant source of spiritual sustenance and provider of meaning.

Thrust out of their lands, Aboriginal people find themselves thrown into a society and way of life governed by the priorities of the dominant settler community. Unable to negotiate the demands of this secular setup, they have been pushed to the fringes and continue to have only a peripheral role in the functioning of contemporary Australia, a "modern nation that exists within a global economy" (Mulligan and Hill 1). If we accept the formulation of Harvard professor and ecocritic, Lawrence Buell, that the cultural landscape is "a tangled ideological palimpsest" (5), we see that very few traces of the Aboriginal cultures survive in the contemporary landscape of Australia, which clearly reflects the marginalization of the Aboriginal communities and their subaltern status in twenty-first century Australia.

One crucial difference brought about by the settlers was in land management: Aboriginal people have a long tradition of skilfully managing the Australian land, which could not be appreciated by the white settlers who brought with them European methods of land use

and management. While Aboriginals see themselves as custodians of the land responsible for preserving it, the

...Eurocentric work ethic held by the settlers dictated that the 'land must be toiled with your own sweat' and the environment possessed, changed and exploited to its fullest extent. ... They were programmed to change, improve, dominate, exploit. ... The Aboriginal population were perceived as savages who did not exploit the land to its potential (according to European agricultural expectations), thus Aboriginal people were considered to have no right of property ownership. The entire continent was perceived to be empty of meaningful human occupation, bringing about the term 'terra nullius': unoccupied wasteland. (Bayet-Charlton 173-74)

Aboriginal management of natural resources was based on traditional knowledge of plant and animal species and the kinds of non-exploitative methods required to preserve their species. Deborah Bird Rose explains how land and natural resources were managed by Aboriginal peoples on the basis of their understandings of the "workings of the food chain both from their own perspective and from the perspective of many other species within the system; they apply this knowledge systematically as part of their own food quest and as part of their responsibility as living beings" (*Dingo Makes us Human* 99-100); this did not mean that the land was not managed at all or that it was mere wasteland.

Even before the colonial advent, the land had been shaped at the hands of its original inhabitants, and to consider it unmanaged and therefore not owned by them (*terra nullius*) was merely a fictitious construct that justified colonial appropriation. One reason why it appeared that the Aboriginals were not managing the land was that Aboriginal approaches to the shaping of the cultural landscape were so gentle and respectful towards the land that they were hardly noticeable. As Bill Gammage points out,

The Aborigines made and managed Australia by shaping and

distributing its vegetation. Plants and therefore animals were where Aborigines put them or let them be. Aboriginal Law required every inch of ground to be cared for. ... Aborigines inherited a regime of attentive and integrated management. Land care was a fundamental duty of life linking the beginning of creation to the immediate future. It followed that all land must be maintained. Even the harshest country was cared for not simply for its productivity, but because it was alive with ancestors and descendants. (1-2)

Of course, this was unlike anything that the settlers had been practising in their European homelands, where land was seen as a 'factor of production' whose productivity had to be maximized, a view that reflects a basic dichotomy between the human and non-human orders. Val Plumwood explains how in this view which gained strength in post-Enlightenment Western thought, the human represents a higher order of reason, while the non-human represents the lower, animal form of life. Here the human

... is not the ecologically embodied 'animal' side of self, which is best neglected, but the higher disembodied element of mind, reason, culture and soul or spirit.... On the one side we get the concept of nature as dead matter, all elements of mind and intelligence having been contracted to the human.... This framework identifies mind with consciousness, solidarises the human species as uniquely conscious agents, and reduces non-human forms to 'mere matter' emptied of agency, spirit and intelligence. Reductive concepts that restrict even the vocabulary of mindfulness and moral sensibility to humans naturalise the treatment of non-humans as slaves or mere tools – making it seem natural that they are available for our unconstrained use and are reduced to that use (are 'resources'). ("Nature in the Active Voice" 3-4)

The Aboriginal traditions of land management assume a non-

hierarchical natural world, where humans do not form the apex of creation, but are merely one among the numerous species with rights to survive on earth. Deborah Bird Rose explains how in Dreaming ecology, there is “a political economy of intersubjectivity embedded in a system that has no centre. ... parts are interconnected; there is no hierarchy, no central agency” (*Dingo Makes us Human* 220). Rose emphasizes the non-hierarchical aspect of this perspective when she points out how it contrasts with anthropocentric perspectives: “They place no species at the centre of creation. Their understanding contrasts forcibly with human-centred cosmologies and with the nihilism of despair. In a human-centred cosmos, non-human life is thought to serve, or to be susceptible of being made to serve, human interests” (218-9).

The loss of connectedness with the nurturing soils of traditional homelands and sacred sites is seen to be a major reason for the disorientation of contemporary Aboriginal communities, while it is clear that the disconnect with traditional ecological wisdom has totally deranged the natural life of the continent and its delicate balances. Deprived of the careful attention that the Aboriginal peoples have been giving it for centuries, the land shows serious signs of mismanagement and over-exploitation. George Seddon, one of the early environmentalists of Western Australia, puts it well in a lecture given in 2004:

We are still trying to learn this land, and it is almost too late. The cost of inappropriate land-uses are only now becoming fully apparent, although there have been warnings and lonely prophets for many years.... Australia is by far the most fragile of the continents. The origins of that fragility are not fully understood, although latitude and tectonics have clearly played a part. What is well established is the immense damage of the last two centuries. (quoted in Newman and Hogan 13-14)

Seddon's lecture awakens us to several realities - that the Australian land is unusually fragile and that it cannot withstand the kind of massive and ruthless exploitation that industrial capitalism has

been inflicting on it. Assessing the damage done to the natural environment in Australia and the significance of this loss especially for Aboriginal peoples, Rose says:

In addition to loss of life, there is also drastic loss in life-support systems. ... Those who know the country well see a more complex and serious process. ... Local disappearances are all around them all the time, and for the most part, they are powerless to stop them. The topsoil is being eroded, river banks are badly degraded, the rivers are silting up. Many springs and small billabongs have dried out; the plants that once grew there are gone, and the animals that depended on them have had to seek water elsewhere, putting more pressure on surviving systems. Changes in plant communities suggest early signs of desertification, and a number of plant and animal species are locally either extinct or in severe decline. People's physical and spiritual being is bound up with many of the species, plant and animal, which are lost or threatened, and many apprehend loss in a very immediate way. (*Dingo Makes us Human* 99-102)

Such minute changes to the environment are perhaps most visible to the discerning eyes of the Aboriginal people, who are pained by these changes and, as Rose says, feel these losses personally, since these plants and animals are often Dreaming species with which the lives of their ancestors as well as those of future generations are intertwined.

Much of the blame for the serious damages done to the continent, which the Aboriginal peoples had been carefully managing for centuries, has been attributed to the wrongheaded priorities of the settler community and their ideas about progress and development. Fabienne Bayet-Charlton says: "Non-Aboriginal society has exploited the land beyond sustainability. This has led to an environmental awakening" (174). Such exploitation, it is now acknowledged, was mainly born of the ignorance of the white settlers about the nature of the land and their refusal to listen to the wisdom of the Aboriginal peoples.

Deborah Bird Rose points this out, “People frequently say the world is dying because of the way Europeans have grasped and managed both country and people. ... they have never taken the trouble to learn from the people who know this place” (*Dingo Makes us Human* 68).

It is increasingly acknowledged, at least by a small minority of environmentalists that, by paying heed to the wisdom of the Aboriginal peoples of Australia, several ecological disasters and serious damage to the natural environment of the country could have been averted as Mulligan and Hill point out, the Aboriginal land rights movement coincided with the emergence in white Australia of an environmental movement. More people began to see that “indigenous Australian philosophies regarding 'right relations' between people and the land stood in sharp contrast to the exploitative attitudes of the white settler society that were held responsible for widespread degradation of the environment” and that there was potential for an alliance of environmentalists and the indigenous people. Though this alliance has been problematic because of deep philosophical differences, the dialogue has moved along, with non-indigenous people “becoming more sympathetic to ecological critiques of western 'civilisation' and its 'development' practices” (Mulligan and Hill 217-18).

In her book *Reports from a Wild Country: Ethics for Decolonisation* Deborah Bird Rose suggests the possibilities of a dialogue between white Australians and the Aboriginal peoples in helping all Australians to see themselves as the new custodians of this ancient land and realize their duties and obligations to the land. Aboriginal community leaders could have a prominent role in carrying these dialogues along; Val Plumwood pays an eloquent tribute to the work done in this direction by Aboriginal elder Bill Neidjie, who:

weaves his people beautifully in the ecological fabric of the world as connected beings, held by the land and its places of special sacrality, where the big narratives are centred. His dialogue is directed towards instructing the west not only about his own people's wisdom, but what is radically maladaptive in theirs. Neidjie locates the problem in our disregard for the land, our belief in our

own individual immortality, and our resistance to recycling ourselves back into the land and its communities of earth others. The world around Bill Neidjie is never the unconsidered background for human life – the land is in the foreground, as 'country' – a giver of meaning, a communicative source to be read as a book. (225-226)

The next section of this paper is an interrogation of a project that attempts such a dialogue between the Elders of Aboriginal communities, and environmentalist groups. In an outstanding piece of environmental scholarship (*Murray River Country: an Ecological Dialogue with Traditional Owners*), Jessica Weir demonstrates how Indigenous knowledge can be actually brought into dialogue with 'modern' scientific knowledge to practically evolve solutions for environmental issues. This book is significant in many ways – for focusing on the health of the great Murray River, perceived, as Weir says, “by governments and others as central to the economic potential of the nation”(31), and the well-being of this river's basin, which forms Australia's agricultural heartland, and is thought of as the continent's 'breadbasket'(26). Weir's study is also significant for focusing on the devastation of the riverine ecology, which as the author says, “has been so severe and far-reaching that it is now the 'crisis' of the Murray river that has captured the imagination of the nation”(37). Adopting an approach that combines anthropological, legal and environmentalist perspectives, Weir looks at the possibilities of addressing this burning issue, through an ecological dialogue between the people of the Indigenous nations of the region and scientific experts, particularly environmentalists.

What makes Weir's book interesting for the present paper, is the documentation of the voices of the Aboriginal owners of the territories of the Murray basin, which critique the scientific mainstream water management practices and sound the voice of indigenous wisdom in tackling the severe crises in the riverine ecology. Aboriginal participation in governance and policy making is minimal in contemporary Australia,

and Weir's attempts to initiate a dialogue with Aboriginal Elders, in a process which directly impacts water management in the Murray basin, is truly significant for Aboriginal Studies and for environmentalist understandings of riverine ecologies and their degradation.

As Monica Morgan of the Yorta Yorta people puts it in her Foreword to this book, what Weir attempts to do is to establish in today's world marked by human interventionism and control, that the voice of traditional owners is still relevant. "What the First Nations, the Traditional Owners and their Elders have been saying over the last 70 years, is that the white man's actions in the damming and usage of our rivers and waters, is having a devastating effect and is in fact destroying our rivers and wetlands. We want to stop this continuing in the future. We want to be part of the solution (xi)." How the Aboriginal voice becomes relevant, is clear from the author's exhortation to the reader: "Listen carefully to the traditional owners' voices; they have inherited a knowledge tradition that emphasises connections with ecological life" (xi).

Weir narrates the story of the Murray and Darling rivers, which is a story of 'ecological disorder' (37). During the past 60 years, huge projects and dams have come up on these rivers. "Throughout the Basin, canals, channels, weirs and channels strap the rivers into a vast and complex engineering system. ... this regulation has restricted natural variability and the flooding patterns on which biodiversity has depended." (34). Over the years, extensive management of river water according to the demands of agricultural seasons rather than natural flows, has destroyed the river ecology : the quantity of water has diminished, its quality deteriorated, the salinity of the rivers increased, leading to loss of river life and biodiversity (26-37). Weir attributes the degradation of the river to the belief of western science that nature can be manipulated and controlled to serve human needs and its vision of the natural world as inert and mechanistic.

The highlight of Weir's book is its focus on the participation of the Indigenous nations on the Murray river in evolving solutions to this crisis. Weir explains how by the early twenty-first century, Indigenous people and their water issues began to figure in government water

management programmes. What is most remarkable about this is the proactive response of the Indigenous peoples of the region, they “mobilised as an alliance in the southern part of the Murray–Darling Basin: the Murray Lower Darling Rivers Indigenous Nations (MILDRIN). MILDRIN is a specific intervention by the traditional owners in water law, policy and management... The formation of MILDRIN developed out of political action by the Yorta Yorta.” (Weir 91). Not only was this a victory for the Aboriginal struggle for self determination, it was also, as Weir points out later in the book, made possible by Native title, and “a deliberate counter to the assumed political uniformity of national citizenship” (96).

This was a political victory as well as an implicit acceptance of the traditional owners' intimate inter-generational knowledge of the river, and was welcomed by the traditional owners as an acceptance of their deep knowledge of country; Robert Charles, Wamba Wamba Elder put it well: “Years ago they didn't give two hoots about what we said, but now they ask for our input ” (91). The words of the traditional owners as recorded by Weir, form a text that represents an approach to the problems affecting the health of the river, that is radically different from the water management policy of the government that emphasises control, regulation and manipulation of the entire river system. Firstly, these communities who traditionally occupied the river basin, defined themselves and their identities, in terms of the river, and therefore feel its degradation personally. Ngarrindjeri Elder Agnes Rigney explains how the the Murray river nations are connected: “... it doesn't matter what language group or group you belong to, there is ... a common thread along the river, the river people” (97). Weir notes how Agnes, “places her life within her relationship with the river,” when she says: “I don't think I can be far away from the river, I believe it is in my blood. It is a part of me. I was born on the river. I have lived on the river all of my life and I am now an elder. I wouldn't be happy too far away from the river ...” (52).

Yorta Yorta man Lee Joachim sees the river as a living entity, and understands, as Weir says, his relationship with the Murray river as a relationship held between sentient beings. Quoting Lee's words that the “importance of the river is to ensure that it is seen as a continuing living

being. It has got the ability to cleanse itself. It has got the ability to nurture itself, ” Weir explains how Lee brings the river into the foreground, which marks a perspective where humans do not transcend nature. (53) From her dialogues with the traditional owners, Weir learns that connectivity and a communicative relationship with country, is central to the perspectives of the Aboriginal people's relations with the river. Lee says how it is important to “see that there is a connection to everyone's life through the rivers and through the environment attached, that is an ongoing care and recycling of themselves and a continuation of life within that”(53).

The traditional leaders assert their authority to “speak for country”, (112-113) as people who for generations, had deep bondings with the river and its environs. They also developed the concept of 'cultural flows' “as a way to return fresh water to the parched river ecologies. This water is described as rejuvenating life-sustaining connectivities” (119-20). Ngarrindjerri Elder Matt Rigney points out how cultural flows take care of the swamps and wetlands, generally seen by white people as waste areas, since they cannot be put to productive uses. For Matt, they are extremely important parts of the river ecosystem, as they are the “nurseries are where young lives are nurtured in the richly complex wetlands” (121).

The approaches of the MILDRIIN leaders to reviving the Murray river, are not aimed at piecemeal solutions, but target the well-being of the entire riverine ecology – the river, the human and non-human life in and around it. There is a language that emphasises interconnectedness and a holistic view of the entire river eco-system. As Jessica Weir repeats throughout her study, they do not acknowledge the nature / culture binary that is basic to modern, western approaches to water management. Clearly, thousands of years of intimate knowledge of their traditional country qualifies them to provide ecological guidance regarding the health of the river to modern scientists. Weir notes, how in the 2007 agreement between MILDRIIN and the environmental non-government organisations “both the traditional owners and the environmental groups explicitly acknowledge the transformative element of working together to produce 'new

knowledge'(116). Here we have a situation where environmentalists reached out to the Aboriginal Elders, when they themselves were frustrated by a seemingly impossible ecological issue. Such possibilities of dialogue between Aboriginal knowledge and modern science should be encouraged and developed, as they provide excellent opportunities to bring Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians closer together.

As Deborah Bird Rose points out, "There is so much to be learned from Aboriginal people – about land management with fire, about the species of the continent, about relationships among living things and between living things and the seasonal forces, about how to understand human society as a part of living systems, taking humanity seriously without making of it the centre of creation" (*Nourishing Terrains*). Aboriginal people can impart lessons drawn from their experience, to other communities whose history on the continent is much shorter than theirs, not only about how to practically manage this fragile land, but also, as Rose says in the above passage, by learning to understand human society without "making it the centre of creation." By listening to and respecting the wisdom of its Aboriginal people, Australia can as Freya Mathews says, play a key role in helping humanity, especially in the Western world, to redefine its approach to the natural world: "... it is perhaps not too much to hope that Australia might, to the extent that it can free itself from the blinkers of colonialism, have a special role to play in the current world-wide renegotiation of the human relationship with nature" (254).

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Dispossessed of Humanity: Colonialism, Stolen Generations and Human Rights Violations

Virender Pal

Over the centuries, literature has been believed to serve many purposes. Some critics have “appetites for exploiting the literature as historical document” (Posco 374), while others believe that literature is capable of doing “certain things ethical that moral philosophy would fall short of” (Eskin 574). In other words, the views regarding utility of literature are extremely elastic and change with the change in times:

Art is an open concept, which critics and other can decide at a given point to apply in ways that were not implicit in the concept as it previously existed, and that in fact, extend it. (Farber10)

The last decades of the twentieth century were marked by the publication of literary works that focus on the violation of human rights. One of the biggest events of the twentieth century was the decolonisation of Asian and African countries from the colonial rule. Colonialism, as an enterprise, was the biggest abuser of human rights. The newly independent nations played an important role in the United Nations: “Between 1950 and 1979 the process of decolonization transformed the UN and the Shape of human rights discourse” (Burke 1). If the diplomats of these newly independent countries played an important role inside the United Nations and helped in framing the International Covenants of the human rights; the writers of these countries made the world aware of human right abuses that took place in the hands of the colonial masters.

The narratives not only made the world aware of the human rights violations, but also enlightened the world by giving peep into their history, culture and lifestyle. These narratives were written as a reply to the colonial narratives where the Natives were reduced to uncivilized brutes. After reading these literatures, the esoteric and arcane customs interpreted as barbarian and cannibalistic by the colonial

writers suddenly started making sense to the readers. Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith rightly point out:

Many of these narratives tell of human rights violations. Victims of abuse around the world have testified to their experience in an outpouring of oral and written narratives. These stories demand readers attend to histories, lives, and experiences often vastly different from their own. As people meet together and tell stories, or read stories across cultures, they begin to voice, recognise, and bear witness to diversity of values, experiences and ways of imagining a just social world and of responding to injustice, inequality and human suffering. Indeed, over the last twenty years, life narratives have become one of the most potent vehicles for advancing human rights claims. (1)

These narratives teach the readers to become tolerant. Many people have associated tolerance with “respecting and learning from other, valuing differences, bridging cultural gaps, rejecting unfair stereotypes, discovering common grounds, and creating new bonds” (‘Kids Health for Parents’ 2007). Tolerance, according to E.M. Forster, is an important virtue for building a civilized and better world:

If you don't like people, put up with them as well as you can. Don't try to love them: You can't, you'll only strain yourself. But try to tolerate them. On the basis of that tolerance a civilised future may be built. (3)

However, it must be understood that literature not only teaches tolerance; but also forces the readers to empathize. Tolerance and empathy are the two important virtues that bond the literature with the human rights.

Most of the violations of human rights occurred because of ethnocentrism, a Eurocentric view of culture where the European culture was taken as an ideal. If any culture did not conform to the European culture, then it was considered deviant. The people living in other cultures were declared as “barbarians who might be trampled

upon with impunity” (Parkman 141). The culture of people of other continents were not judged on the basis of their climatic or geographical conditions; rather their appearance and colour became central to their estimation. Consider the description of the Australian Aboriginals by William Dampier:

The inhabitants of this Country are the miserablest People in the world. The Hodmadods of Monomatapa, though a nasty People, yet for Wealth are Gentlemen to these; who have no Houses or skin Garments, Sheep, Poultry and Fruits of the Earth, Ostrich Eggs, etc. as the Hodmadods have: and setting aside their Humane Shape, they differ but little from Brutes. (qtd. in Strong 177)

This description of the Aboriginals robbed them of their humanity. Scientific racism was also used to debase them:

Australia is the present home and refuge of creatures, often crude and quaint, that have elsewhere passed away and given place to higher forms. This applies equally to the Aborigines as to the platypus and Kangaroo. Just as the platypus, laying its eggs and feebly suckling its young, reveals a mammal in the making, so does the aboriginal shows us, at least in broad outlines, what early man must have been like before he learned to read and write, domesticate animals, cultivate crops and use a metal tool. It has been possible to study in Australia human beings that still remain on the culture level of men of the Stone Age. (Spencer and Gillen VII)

All these definitions were enough for the colonisers to prove that the Aboriginals were not human beings; rather they were somewhat less than human beings and more than ape. Once the people back home were convinced that the Natives were not human beings, the invaders got a free hand to deal with them because nobody was worried about the treatment meted out to the animals. The branding of Natives as animals was important because of the world view of the white man who

considered “Man as the ruler of the natural world”:

The book of Genesis gave humans dominance over the land, seas and animals of the Universe. God did not dwell in nature but ruled over it and he gave to man, his creation, the power to do with it whatever man wished. (Cushner, 14)

Now the whites who were “man” could do anything they wished to do with the Native/ Aboriginal who was an “Animal.”

Human rights are the rights reserved only for the human beings. These rights are not given by any law, rather they are natural and acquired when one is born as a human being. Consider the following definition of human rights by the United Nations:

Human rights are the rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education and many more. Everyone is entitled to these rights, without discrimination. (“Human Rights”)

Another definition by H.O. Agarwal also stresses the same thing:

The rights that all people have by virtue of being human are human rights. These are the rights which no one can be deprived. Without gave affront to justice. There are certain deeds which should never be done, certain freedoms which should never be invaded, something which are supremely sacred. (368)

According to above definitions, no human being “can be deprived” of the human rights, but the Natives were deprived of their humanity itself. They were dehumanized by the colonial machinery. If they have to report any human right violations and more importantly claim any human rights then they have to get their human status back. This is where literature steps in. By writing their side of stories Natives not only reclaim their humanity; but also start the process of reclamation of

humanity of the colonizers.

The narratives written by the oppressed people show that in the process of dehumanizing the Natives, the invaders also got dehumanized. Cesaire says:

Colonization dehumanizes even the most civilized man; the colonial activity, colonial enterprise, colonial conquest, which is based on contempt for the native and justified by that contempt, enviably tends to change him who undertakes it; that the colonizer, who in order to ease in his conscience gets into the habit of seeing the other man as an animal, accustoms himself to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform himself into an animal. (41)

Thus, the act of dehumanization is linked, if the colonized gets dehumanized then the coloniser also loses his humanity. If the Native gets dehumanized; the invaders also become dehumanized. Literature written by the natives redeems humanity for the both. The invaders while inflicting violence on the Native, usurping his land, trampling his rights could not observe the humanity of the Native; at that time, he thinks that Native deserves this treatment because of his backwardness; because of being a Native. The invaders think that the Native does not have feelings; does not feel any pain; but when he reads the narratives; he realises that the Native also is a human being; he also feels pain. After reading these narratives the invaders start empathizing with the Natives and start feeling the vicarious pain of his own actions. Once he starts empathizing with the victim, the oppressed, his humanity is restored. The job of literature is complete. The re-humanized human is more sensitive and starts respecting the human rights of others and in fact restores the human rights. This is what Archbishop Desmond Tutu says about link between literature and human rights:

They [Novels, poems and picture books] are all bound up with this wonderful talent we human have: empathise with others. If, by reading... we are enabled to step, for one moment, into another person's shoes, to

get right under skin, then that is already a great achievement.

Through empathy we overcome prejudice, develop tolerance and ultimately understand love. Stories can bring understanding, healing, reconciliation and unity. ("Literature and Human Rights")

However, the process of redeeming humanity for the perpetrator and oppressor and the restoration of human rights for the both is only one aspect of literature. Literature brings out the incidences of violations of human rights edited out by the history book sanctioned by the oppressor. The sympathetic community of the oppressor that was oblivious to these violations also comes to know about these and this knowledge stops the repetition of such violations. H.O. Agarwal cites two kinds of human rights (1) Civil and political rights (first generation rights). The rights include right to life, liberty and security of persons, right to privacy, home and correspondence, right to own property, freedom from torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, freedom of thought, conscience and religion and freedom of movement. (2) Economic, Social and cultural Rights (Second generation Rights). These rights include right to adequate food, clothing, housing and adequate standard of living and freedom from hunger, right to work, right to social security, right to physical and mental health and right to education are included in this. (369-70)

Colonialism trampled upon all these rights. Native cultures were crushed and obliterated due to the cultural myopia of the whites. Australian Aboriginal writers, for instance, take pen in their hands to make world aware of their situation. The main aim of the writers is to tell the people about their grievances and plight through their writings. Aboriginal writer Davis explains:

We used to speak in those days when we were talking about politics-black politics of how we were going to make ourselves heard within the white Australian society. And even in those days when we went back to our little dingy rooms, we said (referring to, among

other Kath Walker, Faith Bandler and Ken Colbung),
Well we've got to write about this, we have got to tell the
people. (qtd. In Watego 11)

The writings of the Aboriginal writers are fulfilling “the task of taking the Aboriginal side of story into the homes of white Australia” (11) and representing “a rape of soul so profound that the blight continues in the minds of the most blacks today” (21). Thus, literature penetrates the impenetrable castle of the whites to make the general people aware of the violations of human rights and genocides that occurred in Aboriginal Australia.

The important thing in this regard is the decision of writing literature instead of writing history books. The decision is guided by the need to penetrate the white readership circles. The history books would have been conveniently ignored by the whites because of 'I already know the history' attitude of the whites. No persuasion could have won white readers, but the Aboriginal literature not only gained readers; but also so many sympathetic advocates for their cause. The white public came to know about what crimes were committed by the government in their name.

Australian Aboriginal literature concentrates on two issues that have put their culture in jeopardy. The two issues that find mention in almost all the literary works are: Stolen Generations and land rights. Aboriginal literature shows how these diabolic policies were pursued by the whites to obliterate Australian Aboriginals and their culture. These two policies were the worst assault on the human rights of the Aboriginals.

Interesting thing to notice is that during all this time the Australian people were assured that the policy was for the benefit of the Aboriginals:

The So-called “Stolen Children” were not stolen at all. The welfare authorities of the day (and the church group of the day were – in the main – responsible for welfare) made a decision on compassionate ground and with a Christian outlook, to ensure that children of the

Aboriginal people were given proper sustenance. Decisions were made on compassionate and welfare grounds. What was done at the time was for the welfare and betterment of what were seen to be deprived children. Children who were in circumstances which might have caused them ill health. (qtd. in Lecouteur and Augoustinos 59)

Aboriginal literature and *Bringing Them Home* (1997) report, however, have uncovered the lies behind all these policies. Noted Aboriginal writer Alexis Wright has termed the policy as “cultural genocide” (Wright, Grog 35). She refers to the Article-12 of International Covenant on economic, social and cultural Rights which concentrates on the “right of everyone to enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health” (qtd. in Wright, Grog 61). Alexis Wright feels that by taking the children away from their parents, the government violated the human rights of the ‘stolen children.’ Human rights also include right to education and the education should be according to the culture of the community: “Everyone has the right of education which should be embedded in the culture. Also everyone has the right to take part in cultural life” (61). The Aboriginal writers assert that by taking the children away from their parents, their human rights were denied and the right of growing up in psychologically healthy way was denied to them.

It is important to note that policy of taking away the children was followed in all three major ‘settler’ countries - Australia, Canada and United States. The outcome of the policy was same everywhere: obliteration of Natives and Native culture. Andrea Smith, a Native American comments on the policy:

That is, U.S. Colonists, in their attempt to end Native control over their land bases, generally came up with two policies to address the “Indian Problem.” Some sectors advocated outright physical extermination of Native peoples. Meanwhile, the “friends of Indians, such as Pratt advocated cultural rather than physical genocide. (89-90)

The Boarding schools were in clear violation of human rights including:

1. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights;
2. The Draft declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples;
3. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
4. The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide; and
5. The Convention on the Rights of Child. (Smith 92)

It is clear that the policies were followed to obliterate the Native culture of the people. But due to these ill-conceived diabolical policies of the governments, the children had to undergo severe physical and mental trauma. The impact of the policy and the scale of human right abuse can be guessed from the statement of Australian Aboriginal activist who wrote: "I haven't met one Indigenous Australian who hasn't been affected by the policies of protection that lead to what we commonly refer to as stolen generation" (Heiss, Review)

Literature and human right are linked because literature allows the readers to empathize with the characters of the narratives, though the torture described by the Australian Aboriginals is so inhuman that a reader fails to empathize with them. Sometimes, while reading an autobiography a reader might feel that the writer is indulging in self-pity; but reader has to believe because all these things have been confirmed in government sponsored reports like *Bringing Them Home*. One of the most poignant autobiography is that of Margret Tucker. Her autobiography *If Everyone Cared* (1977) tells about how she was treated as an animal by her white mistress:

Beatrice Buggs and I got belted up that first time (in the kitchen) for not remembering things such as essence of vanilla and essence of this and that. It was the first time we had been introduced to the bewildering array of canisters and things in cupboards in that kitchen. I remember my mate Beatrice's bleeding lips and bruised

cheeks. She was slightly bigger than I was. I cawed in the corner terrified as I watched Miss Wood, her face red and awful looking. (Tucker100)

She was a child when she was beaten like an animal; however physical punishment was one aspect of the torture. There were other things that were done to permanently damage the psyche of the boys and girls. Many were sexually molested by their 'protectors':

There was tampering with the boys...the people who would come into work with children, they would grab the boys' penises, play around with them and kiss them and things like this. These were the things that were done... It was seen to be the white man's way, of looking after you. (*Bringing Them Home* 141).

In the policy, the children who were taken away from their parents were either kept in the missions run by Churches and government, or they were given to the white families for adoption. The children were placed under the absolute control of the priests and nuns or the foster families. In the Aboriginal Australian literature, the priests and the nuns were portrayed as devils who are merciless people (Wright 31). It seems that these priests who were considered paragons of virtue in their society broke down when they were given absolute power. The outer covering of the civilization on their bodies withered away and their devilish selves propped out. The people who were considered best of human beings became the worst violators of human rights of the children who were placed under their control. The children who were placed under the care of white families also underwent same trauma. One of the important memoir in this case is of Rosalie Fraser, who was placed at a very young age under the care of a white family. She was taken away from love and care of her family and was placed under the care of a sadistic lady who not only tortured her physically, but also bruised her psychologically. What her foster mother did to her will put even devil to shame:

She laid me over her knee, ripped my pants off, forced my legs apart and pushed something long and sharp

inside me, moving it around inside me, oh my God the pain I felt was shaking when she had finished she pushed me to the floor as she were brushing a crumb from her knee. Instead it was me, a child. I was screaming in pain and shock I lay on the floor, curled up, holding myself. (Fraser 19)

Fraser at the time was only three-and-a-half-year-old and she was punished because she was playing with the mud cakes. Most of the whites who were living in the metropolitan centres were unaware of all these things. They were under the impression that these children were in safe hands. The policy stopped the transmission of cultures; another important ingredient of the human rights. The following steps were taken to de-culture the Aboriginal children living in the mission houses:

- Once children were removed, all further attempts at linking are systematically attacked in the name of assimilation.
- Visits from relatives were usually forbidden.
- The speaking of aboriginal languages was forbidden.
- Expressions of Aboriginal culture were mocked and punished. (Petchkovsy and San Roque 362)

The impact of such policies was complete alienation from their cultural back ground, which resulted in the psychic disintegration of these “stolen” children in the future. The loss of culture features in the testimonies of many people in the report *Bringing Them Home* which “sits like a stone in the consciousness of many Australians” (Toorn 24). One of the affected persons testifies:

I realized later how much I'd missed of my culture and how much I'd been devastated. Up until this point I can't communicate with my family, can't hold a conversation. I can't go to my uncle and ask him anything because we don't have that language. (*Bringing Them Home* 112)

The lament become even louder in literature. For instance, the poem by Errol West brings out the pain:

There is no one to teach me the songs that bring the
Moon

Bird, the fish or any other thing that makes me what I
am.

No old woman to mend my spirit by preaching my
culture to me –

No old man with the knowledge to paint my being.

The spectre of the past is what dwells within-

I search my memory of early days to make my
presence real,

Significant, whole.

I use my childhood memories of places, people and
words to recreate

My identity. (37)

The subject became the theme of musician Archie Roach's hit "Took the Children Away", a song that established him as a singer:

This story's right, this story's true

I would not tell lies to you

Like the promises they did not keep

And how they fenced us in like sheep.

Said to us come take our hand

Sent us off to mission land.

Taught us to read, to write and pray.

Then they took the children away.

There is no doubt that literature written by the Aboriginals has acted as the conscience keeper of the white Australian. That is why the report published on the testimonies of the "Stolen Generation became a national best seller" (Toorn 15). The Aboriginals who were oppressed and powerless were empowered by the literature. One of the biggest

problems was that the majority of the whites did not know about the plight of the Aborigines. Living in the metropolitan centres of the country they were insulated from the Aborigines who were concentrated in the rural areas. The irony of the situation was that in their own country they were not considered citizens. The policy makers of the white government had shorn them of their cultural and political rights. The success of the referendum of the 1967 shows the power of literature, which helped the Aborigines in getting citizenship rights in Australia. The major newspapers of the country carried out a campaign; the people became aware of the plight of Aborigines and more than ninety percent of the people voted for the better lives of the Aborigines. *The Age*, a major newspaper of the country proclaimed: "A Yes vote will pave the way for improving their health, education and housing. It will give them opportunities to live normal lives" (*The Age* 24 May, 1976). It further appealed to the people:

Voting Yes to these proposals is a simple matter of humanity. It is also a test of our standing in the world. If no wins, Australia will be labelled as a country addicted to racist policies. In spite of our increasing involvement with Asia, in spite of our protestations of goodwill towards all men of all colours and creeds, this label would have a milestone's weight around the neck of Australia's international reputation (*The Age* 22 May, 1967).

The Campaigns and the literature allowed the people to empathize with the Aborigines. Even Australian Prime Minister Paul Keating acknowledged the wrongs that were done to the Aborigines because the whites could not empathize with the same things done to them. In this famous Redfern Speech, delivered on 10 December 1992, Paul Keating, the then Prime Minister of Australia admitted: "In Redfern, it might be tempting to think that the reality Aboriginal Australians face is somehow contained here, and the rest of us are insulated from" (Keating, Paul). He stressed that the solution to the problem lies in the "recognition" of the problem. He further said:

It begins, I think, with that act of recognition. Recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing.

We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the traditional way of life. We brought the diseases. The Alcohol. We committed the murder.

We took children from their mothers. We practiced discrimination and exclusion. It was our ignorance and prejudice and our failure to imagine these things being done to us. (Keating, Paul)

The empathy led to the admission of guilt by the Prime Minister. Once a person whole heartedly accepts the guilt and apologises then it insulates the oppressed from such crimes and assures them that the crime will not be repeated. Thus, apology becomes a cornerstone for better relations between the two communities.

The publication of *Bringing Them Home* appealed to the conscience of the Australians and a National Sorry Day was organised by the people to “remember and commemorate” the mistreatment of country's Aboriginal people (“National Sorry Day”). The first sorry day was organised in 1998, one year after the report was tabled in the parliament. The “Best Seller” report indeed helped the Aborigines in their cause. The Sorry Day was followed by a walk in which 250,000 people participated in the Bridge Walk across Sydney Harbour Bridge. (“Australia Marks 20-year anniversary of Sorry Day”)

The effect of this awakening was not restricted to the public show of “sorry” only. When the Howard Government enacted “Northern Territory Intervention” in 2007, people from all walks of life rose in opposition. The Howard Government eventually lost the election in November 2007. The awakened and enlightened public voted in favour of the Aborigines and rejected the government that had enacted a racist piece like Northern Territory Intervention. The response of public servants involved in the enactment of Act shows how aware they were. Fejo-King writes:

There are a number of public servants running scared about how they will be viewed by history, as they did not want to be placed in the same category as those public servants who were involved in the “Stolen Generations Fallout” The public servants and other involved in this situations were fully aware of the history of the Stolen Generations issues and the generational loss and trauma that has followed those policies and practices. (138)

The literature written by the Aboriginal writers and the report *Bringing Them Home* has restored the humanity of these public servants. These people can empathize with the survivors of “Stolen Generations” and this empathy, this knowledge of the past actions stops them from becoming human rights abusers. The Prime Minister of the country may feel otherwise, but these enlightened people have become aware that Aboriginals are also human beings and their rights must not be trampled upon.

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Redefining the Differences : Markers of Distinctiveness in the Select Works of Kim Scott and Kate Grenville's *The Secret River*

Shiwani Khatri

According to the Victorian Aboriginal legal system in Australia “the politics of difference has been employed to maintain social, physical and economic marginalization of Aboriginal people since colonization” (The Politics of Difference- Construction of Race 1). In Aboriginal Australia, differences have been created based on customs, values, languages, religion and so on. When attempts are not made to narrow down the differences between groups, it leads to division, discrimination and oppression. The Indigenous people of Australia had no idea about politics of difference or positions of division until the arrival of the Whites. Domination, distinction, categorization, stratification, politics of differences were introduced and legitimized by the Whites.

Based on Kim Scott's *That Deadman Dance*, *True Country*, *Benang: From The Heart* and *Kayang and Me* along with Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* the thought is to expose how differences between the settlers and Aboriginals have been employed for promoting politics of difference. The above texts also highlight how these differences are indicators of uniqueness as well.

The Whites declared the Indigenous people as being subjacent and created politics of difference and positional distinctions. The Whites failed to grasp that the Aboriginal socio-cultural/economic and spiritual systems were equally competent as theirs and that their nakedness was not a sign of them being primitive. The Aboriginals were civilized in their own way- appropriately adapted to their environment. Arthur Killam a character in *That Deadman Dance* praises the Aboriginals for their adaptation to the environment. “...the way they hunted showed no shortage of skill- not just in tracking and using the spear or club, but also in teamwork and their use of fire” (Scott 105). The

settlers ignored such survival skills of the Aboriginals and categorized them as the “out-group” and gradually pushed them to the fringes. The Aboriginals were devalued in their own land and their culture was debased.

The settlers declared Australia to be a *terra nullis* according to which the land was unoccupied, unowned and belonged to none. According to Pateman “the doctrine of *Terra Nullis* which was deployed by the British from 1620s onwards provided the settlers with the alibi that in colonizing Australia they were transforming the 'empty' country –which existed prior to their arrival in a 'state of nature' –into a civil society” (qdt in Brewster 63). Britain's whole plan of shipping the unacceptable members of their society was based on a political plan of indifference towards its immoral citizens. Australia became an expanse to house Britain's miscreants. The very first act of political difference and indifference adopted by the Whites in Australia was to declare Australia to be empty, denying the very existence of the Aboriginals. The settlers were aware of the existence of the Aboriginals but the Aboriginals did not exist according to White socio-cultural norms and requirements.

The felon settlers had also not forgotten about their own social and political stratification in England. The difference in the socio-economic station between the rich and the poor had spawned and generated a hierarchical system. A stratified scheme where “man was ranged on top of each other, all the way from the [poor] at the bottom to the King or God, at the top, each man higher than one, lower than another” (Grenville 26). In England, they were categorized as a subservient crowd and in Australia they were consigned to oblivion left to fight their own battle. Their personal experience of class/group difference led them to create a similar division and politics of differences in Australia. Since they were non-existent back home, they exercised a similar behaviorism with the Aboriginals.

Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* interestingly points out how the newly arrived felons were exposed to discrimination and hierarchy established by their partners in crime who had arrived earlier. Thornhill, the main protagonist and his wife derived pleasure in bossing over the

convict servants assigned to them. The servants were asked to address them as Mr and Mrs Thornhill. A certain amount of propriety was suddenly expected from those people with whom the Thornhills had indulged in thievery back home. Positions of difference were created by the settlers even among themselves. However, the discrimination between the new convict settlers and the Aboriginals varied in intensity and duration. For the new convicts it was only a matter of time before they would acquire a position of prominence, but for the Aboriginals not only was the discrimination severe, the divisions and positions of difference lasted for generations.

The Indigenous population was “interpreted [by the Whites] through ideological filters or ways of seeing provided by their own culture” (qtd in Kehinde 35). The Aboriginal way of life was interpreted as being boorish and unsophisticated. The differences in social structure also resulted in binary constructs of the “self” and “other” along with the division into the in-group (dominant group) and out-group (dominated group). The use of binary opposites also established the relationship of the domineering and the suppressed. The supremacy of the settlers existed and thrived in the inferiority of the “other”. The settler perceived himself to be more civilized as compared to the Aboriginals with their “their parrots and jabber and nakedness. (Scott, *That Deadman Dance* 96). Therefore, group divisions consisting of the dominant “us” and “them”; “in-group” and “out-group”; “self” and “other” were created. The following differences (between the Whites and the Aboriginals/Other) were outlined –

European/Self/Us	Non European/Other/Them
Superior	Inferior
White	Black
Civilized	Primitive
Advanced	Retarded
Good	Bad
Beautiful	Ugly...

(Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin 19)

These differences portrayed the Aboriginals as being inherently inferior possessing negative attributes.

The Aboriginals presently are seeking to redefine these differences which have devalued them for generations. They are working towards purging negative differences. The socio-cultural differences of the Aboriginals give them an identity of their own, which sets them apart from others and it is these differences that they seek to redefine.

The reason the settlers employed and encouraged the politics of difference was because they looked down upon the hunter –gatherer lifestyle of the Aboriginals. It was an archaic and primal form of subsistence to the Whites. They felt the need to expulse the Aboriginals from the lands because the Aboriginals were not making productive use of the vast expanse of lands. “The more civilized folk (Whites) set themselves up on their pieces of land, the more those other ones (Aboriginals) could be squeezed out” (Grenville 121).

Politics of difference was created when the settlers came to view themselves as pioneers, as ones who were transforming an inhospitable land into a hospitable one. Nomadic by nature, the Indigenous people found no need to possess land and use it for agricultural purpose. Theirs was a sustainable existence. Aware of their dependency on the natural resources, the Indigenous population adapted to their environment without undermining and compromising the balance of the natural eco system.

In Kate Grenville's *The Secret River*, the Indigenous people were amused with the way the convicts settlers were involved in backbreaking labour of corn cultivation. The settlers “knew that the blacks did not plant things. They wandered about, taking food as it came under their hand. They might grab things out of the dirt ...or pick something off the bush as they pass by” (Grenville 141). The Aboriginals did not understand why the Whites “sweated away under the broiling sun, chopping and digging, and still had nothing to eat but salt pork and damper” when they could get fresh and healthy products from the land and water (Grenville 202).

In *The Secret River*, the Indigenous people were taken

bewildered when they were offered stale salted pork as a gesture of friendship by Thornhill. It looked and smelled unappetizing to the Aboriginals. The Aboriginals accepted the victuals but despite Thornhill's effort to make them consume it, the Aboriginals placed the smelly victual down on the sand. It was incomprehensible for the Aboriginals to consume "pork that had gone a [smelly] grey colour" (Grenville 145) when they had plenty of fresh game available. In Kim Scott's *That Deadman Dance*, "Wunyeran returned at day's end with fresh meat for Cross, and for the soldiers and prisoners too. Rum-fed...salt beef and ship's biscuits damned them in a land of abundant" (100). The Aboriginals had no reason to preserve food till it got bad enough to be consumed because they "strolled into the forest and came back with [fresh] dinner hanging from their belts" (Grenville 202).

The Aboriginals did not practice agriculture because their value system did not include ownership of land, possessing nor claiming it by fencing land. They also did not have the fear of land being snatched till they came up against the settlers. However, for the Whites agriculture was a means to possess land especially for the emancipists who had been displaced from their own lands and had no future back home. For the Aboriginals, "land was a collective resource which was essential to sustenance, identity and religion" (Armitage 224). The Aboriginals had/have a soulful connection to land. Land for them still has spiritual significance because it is inhabited by the spirit of their ancestors. However, with the introduction of agriculture and possession of lands, the Aboriginals were reduced to the status of trespassers and landless labourers.

The Whites had an acquisitive capitalistic connection to land. Not only did the settlers take over the Aboriginal lands, it was also misused. Hazel Brown in *Kayang and Me* remarks how ecological balance of the land has been destroyed. The fresh water springs are no more to be found. "And now since they did the clearing, you can see salt,... All around the creeks that used to be fresh water, they're all salt now (Scott 224).

Power relations were established by infantilizing the Aboriginals during colonization. The Indigenous people were regarded to be

childlike. The Whites adopted the role of a guardian, a parent and “if these childlike people were incapable of exploiting their own resources, European countries were justified in governing and developing these places themselves” (Finn and Cheryl McEwan 115-116). The colonizers looked down upon the Aboriginals as a race of people perpetually in need of a father figure. Sergeant Hall in Kim Scott's *Benang: From the Heart* plays the role of a foster parent to part Aboriginal children. Kathleen lives with Sergeant Hall and receives training in white mannerisms. She has to be properly taught...the niceties of etiquette” of the White society. (Scott 91).

The Aboriginals were treated like people with childlike nature prone to commit misdeeds which would be corrected and set right by the Whites. The excessive paternalistic behavior of the Whites decimated the whole socio-cultural system of the Aboriginals. Kim Scott's *True Country* depicts the constant interference of the missionaries. In the novel, Father Paul is tired of being paternalistic towards the locals of Karnama. In his conversation with Billy he expresses his deep concern for the Aboriginals. “But see, I am being paternalistic again...look what we wanted to give these people and now...what can you do, eh?” (Scott 183). Their paternalistic attitude stunted the intellectual growth of the Aboriginals. In the same novel, Gabriel claims “...all the wide world want to see the Aboriginal people like this. But wanting to be helped, wanting to better themselves” (Scott 166). People have still not changed their perception about the Indigenous population. “It's how people would like to think about Aboriginal people. Still hunting, still bush tucker, dancing, some art” and still in need of parental care (166).

The Whites found the Indigenous close knit family extended family system to be complex and old fashioned. There was a vast difference in the family organization of the two. The close family structures of the Indigenous people set them apart from the Colonizers. Family and kinship were (still are) of paramount importance because it provided economic, social and psychological support. For the Aboriginals, family did not necessarily mean blood relations. A sense of belonging bound the whole community together.

Kim Scott's *Kayang and Me* displays "...the principal of connectedness through caring and responsibilities that underpines Aboriginal life..." (Randall 16). Hazel Brown reaches out to all and spreads her web of connectedness far and wide. She ignores her personal ailment to care for her grandchildren. "An adult nephew, Buddy, injured in collision between a truck and a motorcycle was in her care for the last twenty four years of his life" (Scott, *Kayang and Me* 20). The vast network of relations acted as a safety devise for the Aboriginals. The Aboriginals made time for each other after a day of hunting and gathering and "afterwards they seem to have plenty of time left for sitting by their fires talking and laughing and stroking the chubby limbs of their babies" (Grenville 229). While in the Thornhill family "no one seemed to have energy to spare for making a baby laugh" (229). However, the intricate extended family structure was decimated by the various acts and policies introduced by the Whites. The policy of assimilation used socially, culturally and biologically resulted in the removal of children, especially that of half-caste children from their families. Relocation to reserves and settlements under the protection acts segregated and separated families and thus ruined the Aboriginal web of connectedness. The various government policies of removal, relocation, protection and assimilation fragmented their intricate family system.

The settlers failed to understand the reciprocal socio-economic organization of the Aboriginals. The Aboriginals were also befuddled how the Whites did not possess reciprocal standards. Old Bobby Wabalanginy in *That Deadman Dance* realizes that the Indigenous overtures of friendship were not reciprocated in a similar manner. Old Bobby oscillated between the White and the Aboriginal world. However, his belief regarding mutual co-operation was belied. Indigenous generosity and hospitality were simply used by the settlers to gain a stronghold in Australia. The initial courtesy showed by the Whites was withdrawn, the promises of cross cultural bond was put in jeopardy and finally put to an end. The White hospitality was also offered to make the Aboriginals more dependent on them. "We thought making friends was the best thing, and never knew that when we took

your flour and sugar and tea and blankets that we'd lose everything of ours. We learned your words and songs and stories, and never knew you didn't want to hear ours..." (Scott 109).

Initially when a relationship of assistance and co-operation was established between the early settlers and the Aboriginals, the Aboriginals believed that the relationship would be mutually beneficial. The Aboriginals assumed that if they helped the Whites settle in their country, "they would receive in return rights, which were expected in their own societies in return for the granting of such privileges, based on the basic value of reciprocity" (Edwards 112). Conversely, the Whites paid very less attention to the values of sharing and reciprocity. Though the settlers were guided by need "to build strategic relationships" (Scott, *Kayang and Me* 89) with the Aboriginals, they were also driven by a hunger "to say mine" (Grenville 106). Hazel Brown in *Kayang and Me* explained to Kim Scott how Aboriginal values of sharing and reciprocity worked, "...we never ever took what didn't belong to us. If we needed anything we always asked. And if the elders said no, we couldn't have it, you accepted that, and you didn't go and steal it" (Scott 260). This Aboriginal virtue was just the opposite of what the Whites had displayed by appropriating things which did not belong to them. What they had done was akin to stealing. The Whites too accused the Aboriginals of stealing, but the Aboriginals took things the way the Whites had taken, without asking, without permission. Blackwood, one of the emancipists in *The Secret River* provided the best mantra of living in coexistence and accord with the Aboriginal people which was "give a little, take little" (Grenville 205). However, this mantra was never followed by the Whites. *That Deadman Dance* exhibits that without cross cultural exchange it would be impossible to comprehend the land and its people "Because you need to be inside the sound and spirit of it, to live here properly. And how can that be, without we people who have been here for all time?" (Scott 394)

Differences and distinctions based on languages were created by the settlers. Whites boasted about "accomplished vernaculars and sophisticated written literatures while the [Indigenous people] had merely crude languages and rudimentary oral cultures" (Acheraiou 58)

The Aboriginal languages were considered inferior. Consequently, the Whites imposed their own language over the Indigenous languages. Language of the colonizers was used to control and command the native population. The loss of languages was the loss of Indigenous identity, culture and its transmission to future generations. The diversity, intricacy and exclusivity of Aboriginal language and oral literature were overlooked by the settlers. The Aboriginals preserved and passed down their knowledge orally, they had no recorded information. Their languages and oral form of transmission were considered to be primitive and out dated. A battle between the supremacy of the written versus oral ensued. The settlers “chose to denigrate Aboriginal languages as being gibberish” (Heiss 57). The oral diffusion of knowledge was “often relegated to the status of children's stories...” (31). The Whites could not grasp that the Indigenous people were primarily story tellers. Laws, rules, information, knowledge of all kinds were transmitted in form of stories which could be memorized and remembered for ages. Therefore, language and oral communication was of utmost importance.

It is likely that “since the basic foundation of any culture or community is its language the colonizers began hacking away at the roots of Aboriginal culture by targeting their languages” (Scott, *Kayang and Me* 77). Language is more than expression for the Indigenous people. Reviving Indigenous languages and redefining self through ones language has become imperative. Indigenous language is not all about words. Their language and oral literature binds “the individual and the tribal, the past, present and future and it encompasses the teller and the listener, the tribe and the land and the universe” (Petroni 1). In *Kayang and Me*, Kim Scott struggles to capture the oral narration and authentically represent it in the written form. He finds it difficult to translate the oral words into written form without losing its true essence. He becomes aware that English alphabets do not do justice to Indigenous languages. Much consideration has to be paid to “how accurate- how authentic-are the sounds being produced” during transcription (Scott 236).

In *Kayang and Me*, Hazel Brown narrates the Aboriginal histories in her own words and language. She refuses to be “relegated to

the voiceless periphery” (Scott 65). When Hazel Brown agrees to teach Kim Scott the Aboriginal language, the writer takes a step closer to realization of his Noongar identity. In *True Country*, Billy decides to transcribe the Aboriginal stories told by Fatima, an Aboriginal elderly. The children “looked at the page and recognized the syntax of the voice that Billy read” (Scott 169). By transcribing Fatima's narratives and reading out some of the anecdotes, Billy educates the children in their “...Indigenous languages and culture contain[ed in] the accumulated knowledge of ancestors” (qtd. In Iseke-Barnes 215).

The Indigenous languages are also expressed through diversity of rock/cave paintings, through hand and face signs, dance and body gestures. The endangered Indigenous languages are being redefined and revived. The role of languages is being redefined because “...Aboriginal languages [have the power to] construct both gender and kinship, or relationship, in particular ways that are central to identity and cultural survival” (Kelly 164)

“Assimilationist's policies were premised on denial of the validity and legitimacy of Aboriginal differences. These differences were held to be incommensurable to non-Aboriginal society's vision of how society should function” (The Politics of Difference- Construction of race 3). Distinctions were made and differences created. The Whites assumed a superior position as the ruling race. The settlers endeavoured to strengthen their own socio-political position by creating a White Australia. The empowerment of one race by the complete absence of the other was discernible in Australia. As Kim Scott mentions in *Benang: From the Heart* that “the power of one community is increased by the feebleness of the other; or still the complete absence of an indigenous community” (Scott 209). The people who settled in Australia “did not “see” the Aborigines. All they saw was the countryside, the land. The people were invisible” (Berg 47-48). When they did “see” the Aboriginals, they discovered a society and culture entirely different to theirs.

The Whites felt that it was their duty to “uplift a despised race” through miscegenation and forced assimilation (Scott, *Benang: From the Heart* 29). Therefore, the policy of assimilation was adopted which

aimed at assimilating half-castes by breeding out colour. Assimilation would remove differences of all kinds. Biological absorption followed by social absorption would help the Aboriginals merge into the White population.

Removal of children from their families and communities was a part of forced assimilation. It was viewed as a civilizing and educating process by the Whites. At the same time the primacy of nuclear family as opposed to Aboriginal extended family system was also established. The policy of assimilation was not created and applied to make Aboriginals their equals but to suppress and subjugate. Politics and positions of difference continued to exist. The “logic behind assimilation was contradictory [Indigenous people] were always being told to be more 'White' but they were never given freedom to change....When some did try to assimilate they were told they were not 'ready' yet to enter the white society” (Boorie). The postulation behind the policy of assimilation was to deny and erase the Aboriginal culture. Just as the policy of assimilation was misleading; the removal of children was traumatic and left behind inter-generational psychological scars which could not be healed easily.

The education provided to the children was not career oriented. The policy of removal did not prepare the children to prosper in any kind of society instead both the children and the parents suffered inter-generational emotional and psychological scars. Kim Scott's *Benang: From the Heart* talks about the scheme of breeding out colour by removing part Aboriginal children. These children bore “no signs of native origin... . The repetition of the boarding school process and careful breeding...after two or three generations” would dilute the Aboriginal strain totally (Scott 28). Kim Scott's protagonist Harley describes the experiences of his father and other children who were placed in institutions like Sister Kate's Home. Social conditioning was the purpose of the institution where the part Aboriginal children were brain washed to be mentally White.

True Country highlights the new problems begotten by the policies. The educational system introduced by the Whites failed to uplift the Aboriginals. The policy of assimilation and removal of

children all aimed at educating and uplifting the Aboriginals to the level of the Whites. However, *True Country* exhibits just the opposite. The interference of the missionaries, the introduction of Christianity and biased education system created culturally starved individuals suffering from identity crisis.

Devaluation and misconception regarding Aboriginals and their culture have not changed but percolated over the years. Forced absorption and assimilation worsened the conditions of the Aboriginals. They were coerced to forget their culture and adopt and assimilate White values and standards. The non-Indigenous systems enforced upon the Indigenous population caused soul sickness.

Denied the Aboriginal lifestyle, it is through the interaction and accounts of the Aboriginal elderly that the younger generation connect with their culture and heritage. Through Hazel Brown in *Kayang and Me*, Fatima in *True Country*, Bobby Wabalanginy in *That Deadman Dance*, Kim Scott connects the deprived ones to their culture and customs by sharing their past. Kim Scott in his novels often undertakes a journey with the elders not only to search for his identity but also to seek out the differences which make the Aboriginals unlike the settlers. The Noongar history Kim Scott is introduced to is about confident Aboriginals and cross cultural exchanges. Hazel Brown in *Kayang and Me* relates to him tales of Aboriginal inclusiveness. Hazel Brown helps Kim Scott to dispel the misconception that there was only "‘oppressive culture’ in Noongar country" (Scott 17). She introduces him to the 'high culture' of the Aboriginals (Scott 17). In *True Country* several characters help to redefine Indigenous identity by reviving ancient art forms. The novel tries to show that cultural tourism can be used to preserve, promote and conserve Indigenous culture and at the same time can be used for economic advancement too. *That Deadman Dance* speaks of cross cultural/transcultural ties. According to Sue Kossew the novel can be seen as a step towards "...a process of national recovery that can be read as a pathway to potential healing...a national project... for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians" (Kossew 172).

Over the years, the Aboriginals have worked towards reviving and redefining the differences which has provided them a distinctiveness

of their own. Their social and cultural divergence gives them their uniqueness. The Aboriginals no longer feel the need to adorn the white mask, adopt or follow the White man's way. However, given the opportunity, the Aboriginals can be white as well as Indigenous. The Aboriginals are saving and preserving the unlikeness, the divergence which once they had been coerced to forego. It is through these socio-cultural differences that the Aboriginals now derive their sense of power and identity. An acceptance and appreciation of variances is required to eliminate positional differences.

Redefining the differences, reviving the Aboriginal value system and reminding the rest of the world regarding their distinctiveness has gathered momentum with the Aboriginals. The differences had existed in the past when the Whites first landed in Australia but had been misinterpreted. Earlier, the differences had been utilized to segregate, categorize and suppress. However, in the present, the very differences in culture are being pointed out to express their uniqueness. The Indigenous people are deeply involved in the renaissance of their value system. W H Edwards in his book *An Introduction to Aboriginal Societies* highlights the differences in the value system of the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous societies. He also mentions that the differences may not be applicable to all the Whites and all the Indigenous people. Some of the differences he cites are that for the Whites possessions are to be acquired and accumulated but for the Aboriginals it is to share /use. The Whites have a stratified status system, the Aboriginals have an egalitarian society and it is not stratified. Environment for the White is to accumulate and to exploit but for the Aboriginals it is to use and adapt to. For the Whites land is secular and can be owned, the Aboriginals are related to land and is sacred. Regarding rights and obligations, W H Edwards mentions that the Whites uphold individual rights, the Aboriginals have kin obligations. While relationships are limited for the Whites, the Aboriginal relationships are extensive including humans, plants and animals. These are some of the differences that the Aboriginals are proudly reclaiming, redefining and readjusting to changing times. It also proves how culturally distinctive they are.

The unhealed wounds of the past, the intergenerational trauma accompanied with varied socio-economic problems of the present, have forced the Aboriginals to redefine their position. The Aboriginals have moved from forced absorption to assimilation to self-determination era but they are yet to bridge the gap existing between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous. The Aboriginals are culturally different and distinct from the rest and once these essential cultural differences are recognized and redefined, adequate remedies can be provided to ameliorate their position.

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Healing the Fractured Self: A Reading into the Select Life Writings of the Stolen Generation

Nisha Misra

"Please mistado'n take me chilen, please mistado'n" Errol West

History of the 'first' people of Australia has been that of oppression, marginalization, subjugation and misrepresentation. The exploitation of the indigenous population constitutes a black chapter in Australian colonial history and one that still haunts and scars not just the body, but the soul and psyche of the 'noble bushman'. The Europeans not only usurped their land and plundered their material wealth but also curtailed their social, political, cultural, religious and linguistic freedom. Hence, a sense of exile or alienation defines the life and position of the Aborigines, whether half or full blood, of Australia.

Voices have been raised to address their issues at the political and social level from time to time. But the most potent weapon, as always, has been the written word. In order to reclaim and heal their lost and fractured self, people of the Aboriginal community have made their foray into the literary canon with their literature of identity. Having a shared history of memory, pain and suffering, (auto) biographical strain runs through their works irrespective of the genre or theme. The present paper seeks to examine the quest for self and space of those belonging to the 'stolen generation' through the two poems of Irene Calgaret and an extract from Alf Taylor's autobiography *God, the Devil and Me*. The two writers belong to the Stolen Generation and voice their lived experience through the Aboriginal point of view. The texts under study are taken from the anthology *Those who Remain will Always Remember: An Anthology of Aboriginal Writing*. This collection is a welcome effort made by its editors to give a platform of re-presentation to the indigenous voices that have mostly found themselves caricatured or stereotyped through the spectatorial mouth pieces. Dr Anita Heiss in *Dhuuluu-Yala, To Talk Straight, Publishing Indigenous Literature* quotes Sandra Philips,

the in house editor at Magbala and UQP, in this context:

For a non-indigenous author to achieve a true feel to their representation on Indigenous subject matter and character they would need to be very encultured within Indigenous culture. And if they are not, they are writing as outsiders to that culture and their representation would be vastly different to the representation defined, developed and refined by an Indigenous writer. (10)

Refusing to become someone else's idea of who they are the Aboriginal voices have finally found a voice. There are as many voices as the sufferers waiting to be excavated and made known to the world, as is evident when the editors of the anthology comment, "When we first started soliciting and advertising for work, we were astonished at the amount of material submitted. Clearly there are many Aboriginal people with something to say who are choosing literary genres to do it" (Brewster, et al 9). It will not be wrong to assert that this is period of a kind of Renaissance in the Aboriginal writing.

Life writings play a pivotal role in the Aboriginal literature due to the sheer uniqueness of their autobiographical character. Both personal and political in character, it is the literature of 'we' rather than 'me' making it a little difficult to define them as autobiographies in strict sense of the term. Armand Garnet Ruffo says in this context:

...this expression is of an experience of such magnitude that it has moved beyond an individual response and into the realm of the collective psyche of a people. Where new experiences come into play, the individual translates these into the context of this communal experience, which has never been forgotten but passed from one generation to the next....Native writers while writing from their individual perspectives are in a sense adjuncts of the collective experience, of what we may call "community". This is no doubt a very different frame of reference to that of non-Native writers, who traditionally place great emphasis on individuality and

hence personal isolation. (667)

Each Aboriginal voice is the voice of the entire community. The genre of life writing has thus become a platform for the historically silenced indigenous voices to be heard by re-presenting their versions of colonial histories. To quote Armand Garnet Ruffo again:

As an expression of voice, or, more correctly, a community of voices, Native writers are attempting to find expression in a society that does not share their values and concerns. The form of these voices, like content itself, varies according to individual author, but as community, theirs is a collective voice that addresses the relationship between colonizer and colonized, the impact of colonialism, and, moreover, functions on a practical level by striving to bring about positive change. (664)

This personal and political, individual and collective character of indigenous life writing is reflected in the works of Irene Calgaret and Alfred Taylor as well. Both have been the victims of and witness to the most crippling, traumatic and shameful part of the Australian colonial history—the Stolen Generation. This phenomenon was a part of the policy of assimilation under which young Aboriginal children, particularly those with some Aboriginal ancestry, were removed from their families and communities and brought up in institutions run by non-indigenous people or were adopted by non-indigenous families, often very cruel. They were made to believe themselves to be orphans or unwanted by their families. The phrase 'stolen generation' has been used for them because approximately 40,000 children, that is, ten per cent of the population were removed from their parents and in majority cases government used compulsion, duress or undue pressure to remove these children. This practice which began in early nineteenth century continued up to 1970s. It had devastating effect on the psyche of the children. Some could cope with the trauma of losing their families while most of them could never recover from the loss of their parents, family and culture.

Irene Calgaret in her poems “No Time for Laughter” and “My

Daughters, My Girls, My Life, My Everythings”, mourns her mother and portrays with heart rending poignancy the pain and the irreversible damage that she suffered as one of the Stolen Generations. Born in Bunbury in 1945 she was stolen and taken to Roelands Mission at the age of six. Irene left the mission at the age of sixteen, married three years later, and worked, mainly in nursing, for many years. She later continued her education at Edith Cowan University. By the time this anthology was published she passed away.

In the poem “No Time for Laughter”, written for her mother after her death, Irene very poignantly talks about the void left in her life due to the separation from her mother. Of her adult years she hardly remembers anything about her relationship with her mother except for the fact that “I never heard her laugh but I did see her cry twice” (60). She reflects upon the 'loss' and 'pain' that both have suffered over the years. Nothing in the world can make up for:

The lost years, lost chances

To love each other

... ..

Together but apart we lost the chance

But never the love we should have shared.

Her simple words present a powerful and lucid image of a child yearning for her mother's love and care as well as of an adult trying to put together the pieces of a shattered childhood. “I never heard her laugh/If she did, did she sound like me/And did she think of me/As often as I would think and yearn for her?” From the second stanza the poem gradually moves from the personal to the political level. Irene tries to imagine how her life would have been had she been with her mother and then gradually delves into the predicament of the entire stolen generation:

And what would my life have been like with

A Mum, my mum to

Love me

Just me

For me, Irene Calgaret,
 Little Aboriginal girl, born in the forties
 Taken in the fifties
 To a mission made just for us.
 We deserved better
 Why didn't we get a little better
 Or just a little of what were
 Our rights as Aboriginal children
 Black Australians? (60-61)

These last two stanzas beautifully sum up the plight of Irene Calgaret in particular and the Stolen Generation in general. Through the interrogation mark at the end Calgaret raises the question of identity crisis that her entire community faces. She also at the same time reaffirms and asserts her right to the land nomenclature as Australia and in doing so touches upon the issue of 'naming' which was the White attempt to remove the traces of Aboriginal existence as well as experience (Uluru or Ayer's Rock controversy being a testimony).

Calgaret's second poem "My daughters, My Girls, My Life, My Everythings", is another poignant expression coming from an Aboriginal mother and daughter. A dedication to her daughters and her mother Calgaret's insecurity, pain and fears come to the forefront as she ruminates over the fact that her and her mother's lot will not be that of her daughters. Two parallel strains run in the poem one emphasizing how her daughters will not know the pain of separation from their mother like she did and second that Calgaret herself will not suffer the pain of being away from her daughters like her mother did. Remembering her mother she laments:

I don't know how,
 But our lives will be shared

 They will never get any one of you

My history will never be repeated

.....

no one really cared how she or we felt

And the pain that kept us apart

Will not reunite us in our lifetime.

I love you, my mother—my three daughters

My girls, my life, my everything. (59)

The repetition of the possessive pronoun 'My' seeks to emphasise a desperate effort to hang on to, at any cost, all that is left of the Aboriginal spirit, in the present case of her daughters. Shorn of everything including their own flesh and blood the two poems render the account of the First people of the Australian land in their desperate bid to hold on and own all that and those they could.

One may not find a Coleridge or a Wordsworth or a Browning in the poems discussed but what is truly present is the inner spirit of those who have suffered and survived. In the plain English, prosaic verse some may term it a propagandist literature, but that exactly is the beauty of Aboriginal writing. It comes straight from the wounds inflicted to their very essence. Irene Calgaret, like many others, has dared to adopt the white word and write back to them and make known to the world the Aboriginal anguish and agony as the bearer rather than a spectator. The likes of her who were missioned or fostered through their writings in English have in the same way adopted the colonial language and made it Black.

Another Aboriginal writer under study is Alf Taylor. A victim of the Stolen Generations, he and his brother were removed from their family as infants and placed in the New Norcia Mission. Taylor only discovered his heritage when he left the mission at age sixteen and searched for his family. As a young man, Taylor worked in Perth and Geradton as a seasonal farm worker, before joining the armed forces and living in several locations around Australia. He began writing poetry when young and started publishing in the 1990s. After marriage, seven

children and a divorce, Alf found his voice as a writer and poet, although it was a gift he believes he was born with.

In the excerpt taken from Taylor's autobiographical work *God, the Devil and Me* he reflects upon the time that he spent in the mission as a child. He recollects the bitter and painful aspects of the so called welfare institutions established by the whites to civilize and assimilate the 'brutes'. He, unlike the overt poignancy of Calgaret, portrays with a pinch of humour and satire the state of affairs in the welfare missions where the children grew up starved of affection. Taylor vividly remembers the manner in which his father's death was communicated to him, "Taylor, your father has just died; if you don't do those dishes properly you are going to get a belting"(260). He was not allowed to attend his father's funeral. He questions the very existence of these structures and what they did to an innocent race. The main focus of the excerpt is the role that the institutions played in thrusting Christianity upon the children. Lessons of Christianity were forced on them and they were alienated from their indigenous culture, religion, and language. Taylor remembers how he along with the other children was terrified of the Christian God who for them was an "executioner"(250) waiting to punish their smallest of sins in the flames of Hell. He argues the very need of such a premise. However, young Alf loves the baby Christ as he feels the innocent baby would not harm them. Very humorously he remarks, "within a few months Easter came and he was again dying for our sins"(257). Hidden, though, behind these innocent words is a cutting comment on the ethnocentric approach of the colonisers and how it resulted in a fractured sense of identity in every respect, even religion. The following lines from the excerpt are in a tone both humorous and sarcastic, but beautifully express the Aboriginal pain which a dissociated spectator-writer never can:

Did the white people make this God up and us
Aboriginals bow and pray to him...I think now, when I
die and go to their heaven, and see some of the people
who banished us in our own country I'll be asking that
God for a transfer to wherever. (250)

Alf also shares with the readers the insulation not only from their

own Aboriginal culture but also language. In the missions children were punished for not speaking proper English. Taylor recollects how as a nine years old he was told to become an altar boy and his feeling of happiness and pride which soon turned into one of disappointment as, "I said Mass in Latin, but I wasn't allowed to talk in my own Aboriginal language" (251). He in his memoir highlights the shortcomings of the kind of education that was imparted in missions. It was majorly religion that was administered rather than life skills. These children, including Alf, grew up inadequately equipped to face the rigors of life. As a result when he left the mission he ended up doing all sorts of odd jobs. The Aboriginal children whether institutionalized or fostered received a lower standard of education and sometimes no education at all when compared to the standard made available to the white children.

The long term effect of institutionalization on the Stolen Generation can be assessed from the fact that when Taylor's first book, *Singer Songwriter*, was published by the Magbala Books, he felt uncomfortable taking the compliments because "In the mission, never mind how hard we tried, we were never complimented... You are no good little black devils: you people will never amount to anything in your life" (251). In the excerpt he claims he still feels that lack of confidence and is somewhere deep down unsure of himself. He compares this insecure and unsure state of mind with his liberated and peaceful self while in the Bush which only further deepens his anguish.

Alf Taylor's short excerpt reads more like a microcosm of the painful experience of the Stolen Generation and the Generation left behind. The brutal manner in which the whites burnt the bridges between the stolen children and their families finds a heart-rending expression in the autobiography. Taylor narrates the trauma, shock and the horror that he felt when after escaping from the mission his mother fails to recognize him, "'Who are you?' To me it was a smack in the face" (252). Like many other Aboriginal mothers she had been told by the Native Affairs department that Alf had died in the mission. The removals did not just affect the children but also the families of those stolen. Once snatched, the parents were not allowed to meet their children. The authorities did not disclose the whereabouts of the

children and in many cases the parents were told that their child had died. Mothers dreaded the Inspection Day. Taylor articulates his feelings thus:

I promised myself, when I started this project, that it would be Alf Taylor the writer doing this, not the no-good black devil. It's hard going back down that lonely road of childhood. It hurts real bad, never mind how old you are. Sometimes I wish I had no emotion. That's one of the reasons why alcohol plays a very important part in our community.(253)

The above lines not only reflect Taylor's anguish and pain but also refer to a very important aspect of the Aboriginal community—alcohol and drugs. The white contact not only brought with it diseases to which Aboriginals had no immunity but also certain habits that the community became a victim of. Drug and alcohol abuse is one of the many problems being faced by the people. For some it is a habit while for others it has become an escape route from the harsh realities of past as well as present. Taylor, himself a victim of substance abuse, comments upon the harmful effects on the Aboriginal people trying to ape the whites.

The beauty of this narrative lies in the fact that in a mock-humorous tone Taylor is able to raise some very spiteful and serious issues that have affected the life of the likes of him. He makes a passing reference to the acquisition of the Aboriginal land by the whites compelling the Nyoongahs to recede from the towns. The narrative also highlights the theme of 'mis-selfidentification', another devastating facet of the racist and inhuman assimilation policy. Children in the mission were taught to be ashamed of being Aboriginal and their own king. Not accepted by the whites, too ashamed to join the blacks, all too often the stolen generations were left in the middle—unsure, unwanted, not belonging anywhere, and confused about their identity. Taylor reminisces how he considered the natives as 'bad people' who were resisting the attempts of the gallant Captain Cook to take over their land. He realizes very late that those natives were his own people. The concept of 'Mother England' was another fascination for him and others

in the mission. They identified with her. The painful irony of this piece becomes hilarious comedy where young Alf mis-identifies himself not only with the Australian post-colonials but with the English colonisers as well. The episode relates to the cricket match series, The Ashes, between Australia and England. It makes a very interesting read not only in terms of the element of humour but also the issue of mis-selfidentification:

I thought that Australia and England were first cousins, and England was far superior to their cousins. Also they, the white Australians...come from Captain Cook. And we Nyoongah kids were told so much of the great Captain Cook by the nuns, we were a bit confused by the Captain Cook's team of England and the captain Cook's team of Australia. So half of us barracked for England and the other half for Australia; I'm sure we were doing the right thing for the gallant Mr Cook. After I got out of New Norcia in the early '60s, I was working with a group of wadjellas...who asked me where I came from....Without thinking I said England but these wadjellas walked away from me unsure. "I'm sure he's a niggeror right". I mean I was very fair skinned blackfella... the only thing obvious was my blackfella nose and forehead. My skin was white as theirs, if not whiter; And I also had a country I can call my own, Mother England.... I was proud to be associated with Mother England, my home country. (263)

As is obvious from above, mis-selfidentification was that chink in the armour of Christianity and whiteness which made the Aborigines vulnerable pushing them in the in-between space of two worlds, one dead and other powerless to be born. He painfully reflects how the kinship bonds are breaking and black people are getting estranged from one another. To read a non-indigenous writer portraying the indigenous plight will immediately strike as superficial and detached after going through the likes of indigenous writers like Alf Taylor. One is shocked as

one reads the expression of psychological impact of missions and forced Christianity on the Aboriginal children as when Taylor writes of self, "...what I went through as a child and a man, the so-called hell would be a playground for me. Wouldn't it be great pissing on the flames of hell and the devil threatening, 'If you don't stop and behave, I'll send you back to some mission in Australia?' I'd probably say to him. 'Like fuck; I wanna stop here' (255).

Taylor's reminiscence of his childhood experience in the mission and its long term effects on his self makes the reader not simply read but feel as well as live those moments with him. This firsthand account makes the experience more authentic coming from an individual for whom it was a lived-felt reality. Similarly Calgaret's expression in the prosaic verse lays bare the heart of a mother and a daughter both victims of the assimilation policy. Irene and Taylor very poignantly portray the psychological and physical harassment faced by the Aboriginals, in particular those belonging to the stolen generation. Jackie Huggins a prominent author and Human Rights Ambassador is rightly quoted by Dr Heiss as emphasizing the need of Aboriginal voice and Aboriginal point of view for Aboriginal experience:

Much of what has been written about Aboriginals by non-Aboriginals has been patronizing, misconstrued, preconceived and abused. We had so much destructive material written about us that we must hold together the very fabric of the stories that created us. Out of all the material written about, for and by Aboriginal people, this is perhaps the most sensitive genre (10).

There is and can be no compensation for the devastation caused in their lives. These Life writings are just one of the many ways for the Aboriginals to narrate their true story. They need to be heard in a voice that is their own. They need to be read and understood through the words that come from their heart and spirit. Healing is a process and in their case it is going to be a long one. Writing thus provides them the much required cathartic experience, as is evident from Taylor's words in his autobiography, "Even today I am still confused, but like I said, if it wasn't for the pen I would have drunk myself to death....May the pen

lead me on" (257). For the Aboriginals expression in any form is an essential part of Healing and its about time to canonize the Aboriginal writing.

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Debunking Religious Practices and Assimilation: Reading Doris Kartinyeri's *Kick the Tin*

Prakash Kumar Meher

Australian Aboriginal autobiography is a recent phenomenon as Tim Rowse opines and it takes place within “welfare colonialism” (190). The phrase “welfare colonialism” (used by Jeremy Beckett in a protest letter written to Jeremy Long) means that Australian government is no longer anti or “connive[s]” towards Aboriginals, rather it tries for the upliftment of indigenous people. However, having said that, Beckett draws attention that in view of the current policy it is difficult to conclude that it is “unproblematical” (238). By taking into account of both Rowse and Beckett's statements it becomes a starting point to look into the autobiography of Doris Kartinyeri in a particular perspective vis-à-vis the established genre of autobiography and Aboriginal autobiography.

Philippe Lejeune has given a widely used definition of autobiography in 1982 thus: “A retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life in particular on the development of his personality” (qtd. in Anderson 2). The definition points towards autobiography as a story of past life written by an individual with a view to record the past. However, Nadja Zierott in the book *Aboriginal Women's Narratives: Reclaiming Identities* discusses about the difference between western notion of autobiography and Indigenous autobiographical writings. Zierott quotes Gillian Whitlock in this regard and the traditional autobiography is defined as a “single and authoritative life being defined in and through the text, written in splendid isolation and eloquence by the autobiographical subject him/herself” (qtd. in Zierott 33). This notion of autobiography speaks about the work where life is presented as a journey where the author leaves home and discovers the world. On the contrary, the Indigenous or Aboriginal autobiography speaks about the past which is not over; it rather delineates the past which still influences

the present life. Zierott further writes that, “[P]ast events are often still ‘painfully present’ and need to be recalled in order to be able to progress with one’s life” (34). Another aspect which differentiates Aboriginal autobiography from its traditional counterpart is the “presentation” of the narrative. The presentation of Indigenous Autobiography is “dialogic” unlike being a “purely retrospective” account. Furthermore, it is “communal” rather than being “entirely individual” (Haag 6). Thus, Aboriginal self-narratives allow dialogues which Zierott calls “less introspective than white autobiographies” (34).

The historical development of Aboriginal autobiographies and its survey is well-researched by Indigenous Studies scholar Oliver Haag. His critical study offers the view that the tentative beginning of published autobiographies started between 1950s and 1970s. Its proliferation occurred in 1980s and 1990s (5). The survey further provides that from 1950 to 2004, 177 works can be counted as published Aboriginal autobiographies. Considering all the published works, Haag points out that there are more women authors, i.e., 60 per cent of 177 published autobiographies have been written by women between 1950 and 2004 (7). In view of this whole corpus of Aboriginal writings, it is worthwhile to discuss the common thread which is running through them. In this regard Pramod K. Nayar unravels its important characteristics. According to Nayar, resistance constitutes a vital part as Aboriginal writings are meant to resist settler or European colonialism and its culture. Moreover, it undermines the attempt of homogenization in a place like Australia. Other important features include: to draw upon its oral traditions; to fight against injustice and exploitation; to celebrate Aboriginal culture and traditions; and to search for a means of continuity in the tradition. Furthermore, we find the adoption of traditional forms and discovering modes of survival in Aboriginal writings (90).

Kick the Tin is an autobiography of Doris Kartinyeri, published in 2000. Kartinyeri is an Aboriginal woman who belongs to Ngarrindjeri community of South Australia. The plot which revolves around the narrative is twofold. The story line in the first part unfolds about her childhood which is dominated by the sway of Christian

religious orthodoxy over Aboriginal children. The second part deals with the loss of language, culture and its effect on the author. Both the parts are manifestations of atrocities done to Aboriginal people by the Australian government's nefarious policy. She begins the narration by acknowledging how she was protected in her mother's womb. However, the moment she took birth; that event is shocking and shattering for her family as she was stolen from her family. She was born on September 8, 1945 at Raukkan and was stolen from the hospital just one month after her birth. Thereafter, she was placed in Colebrook Home (Colebrook Training Centre) without her father's knowledge and thus became the victim of 'Stolen Generation.' She spent her entire childhood at Colebrook Home till she turned 14 years old. During this time she was never told about her removal from her family and her mother's death.

The term 'Stolen Generation' is used to refer to the forceful removal of indigenous children and placing them in non-indigenous institutions (Sullivan 244) as per Australian government's policy. The term 'Stolen Generation' is coined by historian Peter Read (Auguste 312). His article "A Rape of the Soul So Profound" explains the term thus: "We Stolen Generations are the victims of the Australia wide-policies which aimed to separate us from our parents, our family, our neighbourhood, our community, our country and our rightful inheritance as Aboriginal citizens of Australia" (qtd. in Vries et al 22). According to the policy Australia witnessed the strategic placement of Aboriginal children in government or church organizations and their adoption by white families during 1910-1970. The purpose behind this inhuman treatment to children and their families was to merge or assimilate them into white people's society (Sullivan 246-47).

Kartinyeri was placed in Colebrook Training Centre at Eden Hills. The initial years spent there were good as she appreciates two missionary ladies, Sister Hyde and Sister Rutter, in particular. However, the good old days were short. Soon after the departure of these ladies, the autobiography gives a grim picture of orthodox religious practices and its harshness affecting the Aboriginal children for lifetime. The autobiographer in a short time finds the hollowness of Christianity. The frequent change of staff in Colebrook led to the forceful practice of

religion (Kartinyeri 29). Kartinyeri says that to praise the Lord became important in both inside and outside of the institution. She condemns this as “embarrassing and humiliating” which was thrust upon Aboriginal children. However, even being small kids they resisted it thus: “we all sang in harmony, sometimes mockingly, looking around carefully and making sure that we were not caught” (30).

The second chapter entitled “The Beginning of Grief” castigates the orthodoxy prevalent in the religion of white people in a more delicate manner. She condemns and questions religious practices and thus, the autobiographical narration becomes a resistance voice. It is evident in the narrative when the writer uses the words like “it angers, “I hate”, etc. In this chapter Kartinyeri delineates how a Sunday was being spent by children in the name of religion. For every Colebrook kid Sunday was meant for worship and not for playing. She says that as per the religious norms are concerned; to do anything except Bible reading was considered a sin. Children were duty bound to church services three times. She questions this so-called religious practice when children were deprived of any entertainment on a day like Sunday. She questions thus: “We were brainwashed. Is this called religion?” (31). *The Bringing Them Home* report offers various similar stories vis-à-vis forceful implementation of religion for assimilation. The book *The Stolen Children: Their Stories* edited by Carmel Bird tells about the stories of children under false names to protect the privacy of the authors. A story under the title “Milicent's Story” speaks about the religious terrorism and its hollowness thus:

We had church three times a day, before breakfast, lunch time and after school. If we were naughty or got home from school late we had to kneel at the altar for four hours and polish all the floors and brass in the church. We had religion rammed down our throats from hypocrites who didn't know the meaning of the word. (29)

Every Sunday, kids of Colebrook were supposed to be at church. Though it was a temporary relief to stay away from home, however, the autobiographer calls it as if children return to more religion which is

thrust upon them. She discusses about power in the course of narrating time spent on Sunday. She views the superintendent of Colebrook as a powerful person and the children as powerless. Children were engaged in a Bible quiz and for the right answer they were rewarded with a lolly by the superintendent. It speaks about her complete disapproval of religion. Moreover, lollies were thrown at children from the bus window by the people. Kartinyeri condemns this and writes: "Didn't these people feel shame treating us like animals?" (Kartinyeri 34).

The forceful assimilation of Aboriginal children into white society is manifested in *Kick the Tin*. Kartinyeri talks about her baptism which she felt as "strange." She was absolutely uncomfortable during that time and did not know what was happening to her (32-33). The strictness of Colebrook Training Centre is described by her as physical and mental abuse which has a serious effect on the later stage of children. In the name of religion the bed-wetters were punished physically and mentally. The children were forced to stand for all meals and to eat dry weetbix followed by having cold showers. Since it was the root cause responsible for the problems faced in later stages of life, Kartinyeri debunks religion thus:

The strictness affected many of our brothers and sisters. This is one of the reasons I believe a majority of our sisters and brothers went to either gaol or mental institutions. Others suffered with alcoholism. All in the name of religion! (43)

The author connects the past with present by focusing attention to the effect of strictness. She herself becomes a victim of mental disorder, however, here takes a collective stance to represent entire Aboriginal people as the victims who went through the Colebrook strict rules. The autobiography *Kick the Tin* demonstrates how practice of religion was a key issue prevalent during that time especially in Colebrook. The autobiographer recollects a series of events which reinforce that religion and its principles are to be obeyed. Some children who were chosen for outing had to board train on Saturday nights. In the name of religion children were not permitted to look at the huge screen, i.e., "a drive-in theatre" (41) since it was evil to look. During her stay at

Colebrook due to the “continuous Bible-bashing and brain washing” they know many hymns from Bible. This bible reading seems to be most annoying to Kartinyeri. Her periodic mentioning of the scripture becomes a motif of the first part of the autobiography. She narrates more incidents which justifies this. Thanking the Lord before the lunch and dinner in unison and Bible reading was something “embarrassing” and “humiliating” as Kartinyeri points out. She says that, “We all hung our heads in shame” (48-49) and thus, she condemns this particular religious practice. In another momentous event she recollects how food offered by a social group was rejected because “it was brought from a party” and can't be accepted since it does not come under “God's will” and therefore “evil to accept foods from such functions” (50-51).

Further, the autobiography offers a major concern of Doris Kartinyeri vis-à-vis religion, i.e., sexuality. She debunks the falseness of Christianity as it never taught them the basic things like sexuality. Religion was prioritised in Christian upbringing while sex was considered a taboo. She recollects its dehumanising effect during her stay at Eden Hills as she becomes a victim of sexual abuse. The author writes about the indecent exposure of a white man who used to urinate around the Colebrook Home (53-54). The most frightful part of this was that the association of religious people in it. Moreover, the author remembers one such horrific event of her ungodly behaviour with a senior staff woman. The sexual orientation of the woman is displayed as lesbian. Her sexual behaviour underpins it as she drags little Kartinyeri's hand to place it between her legs. Kartinyeri recalls the “so called religious woman” and thus, sets the tone of questioning the orthodox religious people and practices. The author exposes the hollowness of this and observes powerfully: “Colebrook seemed to be a haven for sexual deviants. It was a terrible place to live for a lot of the children” (54).

After the age of fourteen, Kartinyeri was again removed from Eden Hills and placed in a home of a white family. Her arrival at the white family did not change her fortune. The self-narrative reflects badly on the issue of religion which continued in her life along with sexual abuse. She turned into a domestic labour without any pay. Though she was able to continue with the school, the white family did not encourage

it and eventually stopped her education in the name of religion. The author writes:

I didn't receive any encouragement for my school work from the white family I lived with. Homework wasn't a regular practice. Religion was more important than education. The man and his wife decided it would be better for me to leave school and do house work. (60).

The author's life is again kicked as she was removed again from the white family and placed in another house at Coromandel valley. Kartinyeri calls this as “a traumatic removal” (61) where she again becomes a victim of sexual abuse. A religious person is supposed to be moral in thoughts and behaviour. However, the author continues to be a prey of religion and its preachers. The indecent treatment continued in Coromandel valley by a minister of Church. Being a child she could not leave the place and failed to express her insecurities. Thus, she raises pertinent question about child rights vis-à-vis religion and its preachers. She expresses her resistance through narrating the events and says that, “Can I show my anger as I write this? Fuck! I was alone. . . My God! Are these people God's people?” (62). This is, thus, evident that Kartinyeri is able to expose the hollowness of religious persons and condemns them. She further questions their association with religion in the autobiography.

The second part of the autobiography is devoted to author's mental illness and her desire to need to belong. The mental illness or in medical term “Bi-Polar Affective Disorder” or “manic-depression” was a result of continuous and over religious practices upon children during different childhood period of stay: like Colebrook, white family and church. She writes about the strictness and condemns the missionaries thus:

The religious strictness was phenomenal. It was supposed to be for our own good. I believe these people thought they were called by the Lord to become missionaries and to care for us, the Aboriginal children. The stolen Aboriginal children (30).

Kartinyeri acknowledges the strictness of religion upon

Aboriginal children in the first part of the narrative. Moreover, at the beginning of the chapter "Need to Belong" she takes up the strict rules of Christianity forced to be obeyed in childhood which can be read as her one of the reasons of weak mental health. She writes that, "Being brought up as a strict Christian, I found it hard to express my personal feelings and had a great need to belong to someone" (69). The strict Christian upbringing and the mental illness originated from Australian government's system of removing children and their forceful assimilation to white societies. It led to multiple damages like loss of language and culture, family relationship and the decline of Aboriginal community as a cultural entity. The autobiographer vividly demonstrates these aspects. Kartinyeri was in the urgent need for securities and married twice but both turned out to be a disaster. She tried to catch her own people in a meeting place known as The Carrington Hotel. Then she decided to live in western Australia but moved to Raukkan, where she was stolen from her family (74).

Thereafter, the autobiography reveals that her stay in Raukkan was not comfortable. She tried to fit into her own community but failed as she could not learn the language. She says thus: "I think the lingo was the most difficult part for me to learn" (76). This clearly shows the effect of religion and Australian government's policy that are responsible for her loss of language and culture. The assimilation has been viewed by Bird as "a policy of systematic genocide" and "an attempt to wipeout a race of people" (1). The loss of Aboriginal language is mentioned in her book *The Stolen Children: Their Stories*. She talks about an indigenous person's voice vis-à-vis identity crisis and loss of culture as confidential evidence number 179 thus:

When I come back I could not even speak my own language. And that really bugged my identity up. It took me forty odd years before I became a man in my own people's eyes, through Aboriginal law (115).

Kartinyeri frequently condemns the white Australian policy to subjugate the black people which snatched away their language, culture and family. She wonders how a government can compensate the irreparable loss. She writes that, "What has the government got to say

and who was responsible? How can it compensate all the Aboriginal children who were taken away and had their life destroyed?" (117). In the first part of the autobiography the author mentions about religious torture, loss of dignity and continuous sexual abuse. The later part sticks around on her mental illness and her desperate need to belong to her own people which are the result of her traumatic childhood. Though she does not find herself fit into her own community, yet she reclaims her identity at the end of the book. Her reaffirmation of being an Australian Aboriginal and particularly Ngarrindjeri woman is itself a resistance to the white government's assimilation policy. She writes to claim her identity thus:

I am fifty-four year old Ngarrindjeri *mimini*. I am proud to be a Nunga. The battles and struggles of living in two worlds that endured throughout my life have proven my aboriginality. (135)

Summing it up, it can be said that the Aboriginal writer explores the falseness of religious practices; condemns discrimination and thus resists the integration policy. The autobiography, *Kick the Tin* suggests ways to the readers about the use of religion as a tool to assimilate black Aboriginal people into white Australians. Kartinyeri provides glimpses of religious terrorism right from the childhood of Aboriginal children and its terrible consequences. It tells us about the role of religion as a predominant force in the assimilation process. However, it becomes a voice of dissent when it exposes the evil motives of religion. Furthermore, it also emerges as a text that empowers her fellow indigenous people.

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BOOK REVIEW

Under the Common Sky: Conversing Across the Ocean

Ishmeet Kaur Chaudhry

A Review of *Voices Across the Ocean: Poems from Australia & India*. Edited by: Rob Harle and Jaydeep Sarangi. Cyberwit.net 2014, pages 98

Voices Across the Ocean: Poems from Australia & India is an amazing conglomeration of two far-fetched and distanced cultures yet similar contexts and mood. This volume is a sequel to two previous ingenious publications that brought together the contact between Australian and Indian poets, the previous publications being *Poetic Connections: Poems from Australia and India* and *Building Bridges: Poems from Australia and India*. It is interesting to note that the collection largely focuses on the theme of emancipation in two contexts, both, the inner, where existence and self are central concerns; and the outer, where identity and resistance followed with an aim towards liberation matter most. The volume also addresses how poetry can lead towards emancipation in an attempt to define the purpose of poetry.

The selection of poets, in this volume, creates a space for veteran voices of some well-established poets as well as some young, yet inspiring new poets. From Australia five poets Ali Cobby Eckermann, Brownyn Owen Allen, Hamish Danks Brown, Nathalie Buckland and Peter Nicholson raise their voices ranging from Aboriginal issues to the personal and individual concerns. On the other hand, from India, five poets Archana Sahni, D.C Chambial, Sanjukta Dasgupta, Vinita Agrawal and Vivekanand Jha depict concerns for different issues like Tibetans in exile, matters of love, widowhood and shame. Finally, the Editors contribute one poem each as representatives of Australian and Indian Poets.

Abi Cobby Eckermann is a representative of the Aboriginal people of Australia. Her poems suggest a sense of loss and colonial

oppression along with betrayal by the White. She pitches them as resistance against the White power that dominated Australia for long.

For, the second poet Brownyn Owen Allen, writing is life. Her desire and keenness to write as long as she lives and the pain and pleasure in the process of writing is clearly visible in her poems. On the one hand, she is concerned with the process of writing itself, on the other, racism and resistance are also critical to her.

In Hamish Danks Brown poems themes such as insecurity, loss, isolation and nostalgia are pivotal. He is a performance poet, therefore, his poems have a musical quality of tone and rhythm.

Nathalie Buckland's poems posit body against the hopelessness of man. Two of her poems in this volume are extremely moving "walk in the sunshine" and "Where is your baby?" In "walk in the sunshine" she suggests a small walk being taken by a cancer patient from his ward outside in the sun and back to his ward. The poem posits the helplessness of man against his own body in such a diseased condition. Another poem "Where is your baby?" portrays a mother and her lost baby who is perhaps still born or has died after birth. The mother's silence and ignorance signifies her inability to comprehend the situation.

Finally, in Peter Nicholson's poetry, a sense of celebration of language is quite visible, full of rhythm but at times accompanied with dark humor. Mythical allusions with the contemporary contexts are significant in his poems. Also, a deep impression of death and war seem to cast itself within his poems.

Amongst the Indian poets, the curtain unfolds with Archana Sahni's poems focusing on the Tibetans in exile and the subtle undertones of liberation and emancipation. They also tend to chart national histories knitted with mythical images, for example, the poem "Tibetmata".

While D.C. Chambial paints a picture of Himachal, a place he belongs to, he brings alive images of Dhauladhars, the mountain range of middle Himalayas along with the nature's creation, the fauna and the flora. His choice of a metaphoric depiction of the animals around him is

quite insightful.

In Sanjukta Dasgupta's poems themes related to Womanhood and shame are central. She seems to challenge the traditional outfit that defined women, in a very Bengali or maybe an Indian context. Also, the themes of death are central in her poems. Her elegy to Mallika is more about her immortality in her work, and memories of the poet with her, than her going away. At the same time, re-writing the myth, also seems natural to the poet's creative success.

Vinita Agarwal, a Mumbai based writer and poet centers around the themes related to the socio-political as well as individual issues of emancipation and freedom. At the same time, her poems are full of hope, woven in the creative genius of word power.

Vivekanand Jha's poems are political in context - a harsh representation of the contemporary world, where pain is central to the living as well as the poet. His poems are a stark depiction of an insecure world where no one is safe. The external and internal insecurity are chief concerns of his poems that offer a social examination of the society.

The ten poets in the collection offer varied themes largely centered around emancipation. The book offers a basket of thoughtful words, moments of unforgettable tales and people, beauty of the process of poetry dissemination itself, and a quest for liberation as well as emancipation. The far-fetched connection gels the human concerns anywhere and everywhere in the world offering an assembly of common concerns of happiness and pain, goodness and evil; justice and injustice; life and death; and above all, emancipation and enslavement.

CONTRIBUTORS

Sylvie Haisman born in New Zealand has spent much of her adult life in and around Sydney, and has also lived for several years (collectively) in Bonn, London, Shimla and Bangkok. Currently she lives at Snells Beach, north of Auckland. Sylvie has a BA in Visual Arts from Sydney University, a Graduate Diploma in Communication from the University of Technology, Sydney, and an MA in Creative Writing from Victoria University in Wellington.

Her short fiction has appeared in various Australian and New Zealand publications, and she was a prize-winner in the 2009 Commonwealth Short Story Competition. Sylvie's radio feature *Tell Me A Shipwreck* was produced by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, and her book *This Barren Rock* was published by Harper Collins making #7 on New Zealand's 2010 international non-fiction bestseller list. She has received grants from organizations including the International Institute of Modern Letters, the Antarctic Research Council and the Asialink Foundation.

Jane Harrison (born 1960) is an indigenous Australian playwright, novelist, writer and researcher. A descendant of the Muruwari people of New South Wales, from the area around Bourke and Brewarrina, Harrison grew up in the Victorian Dandenongs with her mother and sister. She began her career as an advertising copywriter, before becoming a playwright, novelist, writer and researcher. Her best-known work is *Stolen*, which received critical claim and has toured nationally and internationally. She is a recipient of “Black & Write” 2014 award for her latest publication *Becoming Kerrali Lewis*. The book was also shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Literary Awards in the young adult's category. She was also a co-winner of the Kate Challis RAKA Award on 2002 for her play *Stolen*. Her play *On a Park Bench* was a finalist in the Lake Macquarie Drama Prize.

Selwyn Vercoe, New Zealand Maori visual artist , grew up near Whakatane in the Bay of Plenty, and has Ngati Awa and Ngati Porou tribal connections. For some years he has lived in the iconic

Karangahape Road area of Auckland. Selwyn was the first self-taught artist to have work selected by the New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts. From 2015-2018 he was curator of the annual People of Karangahape Rd Exhibition, celebrating his incredibly diverse neighbourhood, comprising people from 36 different nationalities and all ages, creeds, socio-economic backgrounds and sexual orientations. In 2016 he curated the Seven Stars of Matariki at Studio One in Auckland. His work has been exhibited widely in forums such as the Auckland City Council's Bin That Butt public art project in 2017, the 2018 Tāmaki Herenga Waka Festival, and the 2019 Once Upon A Time exhibition at the Studio One Toi Tu gallery. Selwyn's art can be viewed and purchased through the Toi Ora Live Art Trust.

Alexander Dales was born in Wellington, New Zealand, where he studied Fine Art and Interior Design at Wellington's Central Institute of Technology, before going on to complete a BA in English Literature at Victoria University of Wellington. In 2006 he left for Sydney to take up a position at an NGO, later returning to Wellington to study Victorian children's literature at Victoria University. A writer, electronic musician, producer and DJ, Alexander has performed in Wellington bands such as Rain Sweat Sea and the Spasmodics, at venues including the Russian Frost Farmers and the Happy Bar and New Plymouth's Garage Bar. His DJ credits include the Aro Street Bar, Wellington's famed outdoor raves Psylent Night and Town Belt Undercover, and the Bangkok bars Tower Mansion and Soi Rambuttri. He currently lives in Berlin and is working on a biography of Wellington personality JP Perham.

Girija Sharma retired from Himachal Pradesh University in June 2018 as Professor of English where she also worked as the Dean of Studies from November 2015 to January 2018. She taught in the Dept. of English for 37 years and remained Dean, Faculty of Languages from March 2013 to February 2015. Prior to that, she completed two terms as the Chairperson of the Department of English. Her research papers and book reviews on Modern and Renaissance Drama, Postcolonial and Commonwealth literatures, Regional Indian literatures and New

Literatures have been published in national and international journals. She has co-edited three academic books published by Oxford University Press and Orient Blackswan. She has been regularly visiting many universities and institutions as a Resource Person. She was also the Editor of the Himachal Pradesh University Newsletter *Himshikhar*, a quarterly publication. Professor Girija Sharma has supervised fifteen Ph.D. theses and more than sixty M.Phil. dissertations. She was also given the Best Teacher award in 2014 during the annual Foundation Day Celebrations and Women Achiever's Award in 2016.

Rekha Sharma is Chairperson, Department of English, Himachal Pradesh University Shimla. She has twenty three years teaching experience; her specialization is in African literature. She has guided nine Ph.D. theses and thirty six M. Phil. dissertations. Her areas of interest are: African, Indian, Postcolonial, Subaltern and New literatures. She has edited *Translation: Theory and Practice* (Authors Press: 2015), she is also the editor of an International Journal *Conifers Call: Shimla Journal of Poetry and Criticism*, has translated Himachal Pradesh University Ordinances in Hindi, and has extensively published in national and international journals.

Anita Sharma has been teaching English to U.G and P.G classes since 1989 in various colleges belonging to Maharashtra and Himachal Pradesh. At present she is teaching at Rajkiya Kanya Mahavidyalaya, (RKMV) Shimla (H.P). She has published two critical books on American and Canadian Poets. She has to her credit more than fifty scholarly articles published in national and international journals of repute. She has participated and presented more than fifty papers in many national, international seminars and conferences. She was awarded IUC Associate ship at Indian Institute of Advanced Studies (IIAS) Shimla from 2012 to 2014 where she presented papers on Australian Poetry, Canadian Poetry and Indian Fiction respectively. In addition to her graduate and post graduate assignments, she has been successfully guiding research scholars pursuing M.Phil. And PhD degrees. So far six M Phil and seven PhD students have been successfully

awarded degrees under her supervision. She is also a member on the editorial board of journals like *Research Digest*, *Ripples*, *Lang lit*, *DJ Journal of English language and Literature* and *Penmanship Personified*. Her field of research includes American, Canadian, Australian, Afro-American and Indian poets and writers.

Supala Pandiarajan has been teaching in the Department of English, University of Madras since 2005. Her areas of teaching, research and interest include Australian Studies, Cultural Studies, Postcolonial Studies, Translation Studies and Communication Skills. Her Doctoral thesis is on teaching Australian Studies in India. She takes care of the Australian Studies Centre at the University of Madras and offers a core course on Australian Literature for the second-year students of the MA English programme at the University of Madras. Dr Supala Pandirajan passionately introduces Australian literature to students and faculty across academic institutions in Tamilnadu through special lectures and during faculty training programmes. She periodically organizes conferences on Australian Studies to network scholars across the country working in this area. She participates in all the Australia-India networking programmes organized by the Australian Consulate in Chennai.

Malathy A. is an Assistant Professor in the School of Humanities, IGNOU, New Delhi. A postgraduate from the University of Kerala, Dr. Malathy A holds an MPhil in D. H. Lawrence studies from the University of Nottingham, UK, and a PhD in Australian fiction from JNU, New Delhi. Her research focuses on possibilities of re-interpreting traditional Indian critical concepts for contemporary critical discourse. Her MPhil research attempted to develop a reading strategy by re-defining the 'Tinai' theory as outlined in the Tamil critical text, the *Tolkappiyam*, in modern terms. She is also interested in eco-critical approaches to literary texts to consider the intersections between the human and the non-human worlds. Her PhD research studied how the tensions between different ways of knowing and using the Australian land, derived from the ancient traditions of the

Aboriginal communities and the Eurocentric settler perspectives, are reflected in fictional writings of Australia. She has presented papers at national and international conferences and published papers on these themes.

Ishmeet Kaur Chaudhry teaches at the Centre for English Studies at Central University of Gujarat, Gandhinagar. Her latest interests have been on issues related to women and violence, its after-effect and their representation. She has been working in diverse areas, such as, Literatures of the Margins; Post-colonial Studies; Sikh Studies and Indian and Australian Literature. She has been continuously translating women's experiences from Punjabi into English and from English into Punjabi. She has translated works of Bushra Ezaj, Pakistani writer and Veena Verma, Punjabi Diasporic writer; and Australian Aboriginal writer Jeanine Leane's book *Dark Secrets: After Dreaming (AD) 1887--1961* from English into Punjabi (2014). She also edited a volume on Patrick White, *Patrick White: Critical Issues*, 2014. Her latest book *Texting the Scripture: Sri Guru Granth Sahib and the Visionary Poetics of Patrick White*, was published in 2016. She is also a creative writer, particularly writing poetry and short stories. She was nominated by her University as an Inspired Teacher for President of India's In-residence Program at Rashtrapati Bhawan, New Delhi in June, 2015. She is also an IUC Associate at IIAS, Shimla since 2016.

Virender Pal teaches English in Institute of Integrated and Honors Studies, Kurukshetra University Kurukshetra. He has done Ph. D. on Alexis Wright, a noted Australian Aboriginal writer. He has published 35 papers in various national and international journals. He has also completed two minor research projects. He has organized three national seminars so far. His research areas include: Native Literatures, Indian literature and Indian literatures in Translation.

Shiwani Khatri is an Assistant Professor of English at Government Degree College Dhami at 16 Mile Shimla, with a teaching experience of twelve years. For her Ph. D she has worked on "Resistance and Reclamation in Native Canadian and Aboriginal Australian Writers: A

Comparative Study of Thomas King and Kim Scott” while her M Phil is on the works of Mahashweta Devi - “Search for Social Identity: A Study of Mahashweta Devi's Select Short Stories”. She has presented several papers on Australian Literature in international seminars and conferences and has also published papers on Kim Scott and Mahashweta Devi.

Nisha Misra is currently working as an Assistant Professor in the Amity Institute of Corporate Communication, Amity University Noida, Uttar Pradesh (India) where she teaches both English Literature as well as Communication Skills. She has done her Ph.D in Australian Short Fiction from Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla. She is actively involved in presenting papers in International seminars. Also she has varied publications to her credit .With a penchant for writing, both critical and creative, her area of interest is fiction as well poetry.

Suneel Kumar is Lecturer in English at GSSS Serlakhadoo (Mandi), H.P. He is also working on his doctoral thesis. He has published research papers in many national and international literary journals like *World Journal of Gender and Literature*, *The Criterion*, *Indian Scholar*, *Conifers Call* etc. He has got appreciation certificate from Human Resource Development, Government of India, for best teaching practice in July, 2015.

Prakash Kumar Meher is a PhD research scholar at Department of English and European Languages, Central University of Himachal Pradesh. His pursuit of research is based on resistance studies in literature particularly in autobiographies and memoirs. He is also an alumnus of Indian Institute of Mass Communication, Dhenkanal.

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