
**AUSTRALIAN
ABORIGINAL: SENSE
OF FEEL AND
INTERPRETATION OF
HAUNTED
HISTORICAL PAST IN
LITERATURE**

S.K. Sathya Priya

*Guest Lecture, Mother Teresa
Women University, Research and
Extension Centere,
Saidapet, Chennai.*

Indigenous Australians are the 'Aboriginal' people of Australia. An Indigenous Australian defined as a person who is of Indigenous Australian descent; they must identify as an Indigenous Australian and been accepted as such by the Indigenous community in which they live. The word "aborigine" (with a little "a") means one of the original native inhabitants of any country. The word "Aborigine" (with a capital "A") used to describe the indigenous people of Australia. This tri-part definition has been upheld by the High Court of Australia in *Commonwealth vs. Tasmania* (1983) and *Gibbs vs. Cape well* (1995). With a population representation of only 2.2% (ABS, 1999) Indigenous Australians are statistically a minority within their own country, at present Aborigines of Australia are 3% (ABS, 2011). Even though they are minority in Australia, their sense of feel in literature and commemorating the history in their writing shows that the writers are longing for their old days to return.

Black Australian views of history are always as non-confrontationist or as polemical. The theme of the pre-contact past may invoke in order to emphasize other factors, such as the longevity and continuity of Aboriginal residence in Australia. In this vein, Oodgeroo Noonuccal writes in her poem "*The past* " :

Let no one say the past is dead.
The past is all about us and within.
Haunted by tribal memories, I know
This little now, this accidental present
Is not the all of me, whose long making
Is so much of the past ...
A thousand thousand camp fires in the forest
Are in my blood.
Let none tell me the past is wholly gone.
Now is so small a part of time, so small a part
of all the rare years that have molded me.

Aboriginal historical novels, poems and plays frequently offer strikingly different interpretations of past events – and do this in a stylistically unique fashion. In addition, oral materials have been incorporated into Aboriginal creative writing at least as effectively as it can be into histories written by Black Australians. Aboriginal authors can thereby tap the huge wellspring of the oral tradition – a source that is as rich as it is foreign to European culture – and the use of such sources renders Aboriginal writing even more culturally independent from White Australian literature. Aboriginal literature breaks truly new ground in terms of both style and content: in a very real sense, this is an expression of the historical in the

AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL: SENSE OF FEEL AND INTERPRETATION OF HAUNTED HISTORICAL PAST IN LITERATURE

contemporary amongst historians that a major transformation occurred in European representations of the 'other' as a result of the secularization of culture and the growth, and increasing hegemony of Western culture'. Lisa (Marie) Bellear was an Indigenous Australian poet, photographer, activist, spokesperson, dramatist, comedian and broadcaster. She was a woman of the Noonuccal people of Queensland. Her poem Message Failed shows the past events of parliament that denied the rights of indigenous people.

Message Failed

INDIGENOUS: Our lands are here to welcome
 PARLIAMENTARIAN: We do not come in peace
 INDIGENOUS: As long, as long ago we offer welcome
 PARLIAMENTARIAN: We do not come in peace
 INDIGENOUS: An offering from within deep within
 PARLIAMENTARIAN: We do not come in peace
 INDIGENOUS: Who are your people?
 PARLIAMENTARIAN: We do not come in peace
 INDIGENOUS: Our custom, begins like this
 PARLIAMENTARIAN: We do not come in peace
 INDIGENOUS: From the tops of the gum trees, too
 PARLIAMENTARIAN: We do not come in peace
 INDIGENOUS: Beneath the earth our mother
 PARLIAMENTARIAN: We do not come in peace
 INDIGENOUS: If you share with our traditions
 PARLIAMENTARIAN: We do not come in peace
 We do not come in peace
 Die just be gone.

The stridency of the refrain of Message Failed, "we do not come in peace", reverberates throughout the human condition and emotions continue to be of concerning the past events of aboriginal Australians who denied even their basic rights by parliament. This poem also commemorate the event of apology did by Parliament of Australia and its respect full request that the apology be received in the spirit in which the parliament offered as part of the healing of the nation in the case of stolen generation. The question of Aboriginal rights and the constitutional powers of the Commonwealth in relation to Aboriginal matters and the legal status of Indigenous peoples was seems to be equally problematic and inconsistent by reading the poem Message failed.

Jack Davis is one of the first published of Australian Aboriginal playwrights and he celebrates the Aboriginal voices of Australia by fusing Aboriginal oral culture and western dramatic forms he deals with current Aboriginal concerns. He uses the elements of oral culture to foreground a largely ignored Aboriginal past and to emphasize the presence and contributions of the Aborigines of Australia. Moreover, as important dimensions of meaning are located in conditions of production, reception and circulation of a work of art. Davis appreciates that black and white histories where inextricably linked.

AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL: SENSE OF FEEL AND INTERPRETATION OF HAUNTED HISTORICAL PAST IN LITERATURE

The opening scene of *No Sugar* seamlessly presents the lived realities of mixed histories in the everyday lives of the Millimurra family. The children play cricket, an imported game of Empire, while Jimmy 'sharpens an axe, bush fashion'. Joe reads the special centenary edition of the *Western Mail*— a written document that will constitute white Australian history. The newspaper text, not unlike the brass band in the march, proclaims proudly how brave and successful the white 'pioneers' have been in overcoming the 'dangers' posed by Aboriginal people. Yet that triumphalism narrative is fragmented and disempowered, initially through Joe's hesitant diction, and then more forcefully by Jimmy's outburst: "You fellas, you know why them wetjalas marchin' down the street, eh? ... 'Cause them bastards took our country and them black fellas dancin' for 'em' (Davis *No Sugar* Act 1, scene 1).

The visual artist and writer Sally Morgan's instance of Indigenous life writing spoke out to a nation which was becoming increasingly aware of the fatal implication of the mainstream in their Destruction and their survivors deplorable state of living conditions, due to growing Aboriginal and international protest and vindications. "My Place" subscribes to Wandering Girl's textual politics in that it takes a mild, almost forgiving stance towards the mainstream for the wrongs committed in the past, and arguably works towards the 1990s mainstream effort to recognize the destructive impact of the colonial past on the Aborigines and their special place in (the definition of) the nation, known as 'Reconciliation'.

In "My Place", Morgan describes a poignant instance of cross-generational trauma, historical facts of stolen generation and displacement—the slow discovery of her own Indigenous descent and the resulting redefinition of herself from whiteness into Indignity in the 1970s and 80s. She does so by recovering a family history spanning three generations that traces back her Aboriginal descent through the matrilineal, a fact that have been completely covered up by her mother and grandmother for fear of child removal in accordance with the stipulations of the 1936 Act. The Morgan's families, consisting of Sally, her sister and brother, mother and grandmother have been passing as non-Aboriginal by pretending to be "Indian" (Morgan 1988: 38) in poor suburban Perth, the capital of Western Australia. The fear of child removal is great due to the poverty this mono-parental household exposed to, especially since the early death of her dysfunctional white father due to war trauma.

The Stolen Generations (also known as Stolen children) were the children of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent who were removed from their families by the Australian Federal and State government agencies and church missions, under acts of their respective parliaments. The removals occurred in the period between approximately 1909 and 1969, although in some places children were been taken until the 1970s.

The history of stolen generation story too reflected in the novel "Benang". It is Indigenous Australian Kim Scott's second novel. *Benang* is about forced assimilation and finding how one can return to their own culture. It is, semi-autobiographical, cross-generational account of Scott's search for Indignity, and mutinously a dissection of the policies of absorption and assimilation inflicted on Western-Australian Aborigines and its genocidal effects. The novel presents how difficult it is to form a working history of a population who had been historically uprooted from their past.. *Benang* follows Harley, a young man who has gone through the process of "breeding out the color", as he pieces together his family history through

AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL: SENSE OF FEEL AND INTERPRETATION OF HAUNTED HISTORICAL PAST IN LITERATURE

documentation, such as photograph and his grandfather's notes, as well as memories and experiences. Harley and his family have undergone a process of colonial scientific experimentation called "breeding of the color" which separated individuals from their indigenous families and origins.

Scott manages to experiment with eugenic language to open it up for critical perusal (Scott quoted in Fielder 2006), which goes hand in hand with a complex narrative structure defying traditional linear story development. Benang, a Western transcription of his Nyoongar family name on his mother's side, is a demanding reading exercise that unravels the complex horizontal and vertical kinship connections across five generations. Western-Australian space, hidden from sight by official mainstream policy and Nyoongar resistance to it as emblematically shown in the elusive wanderings across tribal and alien country of his great-great-grandmother Fanny Benang and her mixed descent. The figure of A.O. Neville looms ominously in the background of this tale through his(fictional) family connection to the protagonist's white grandfather, who carries out an amateur eugenic experiment to father 'the first white man born into the family' (Scott2003 [1999]: 13), parallel to the racial white-washing pursued by official policy.

In its description of Ernest Solomon Scat's abusive racial-sexual politics, Benang denounces the perversion of eugenic thought and the policies of racial segregation and absorption derived from it. This comes emblematically to the fore in the vexed case of Harley's father, Tom Scott, who cannot pass into 'whiteness' due to the broadening of the legal definition of Indignity in the 1936 Act, which fatally excludes him from mainstream advantages and privileges (Scott 2003: 80, 367). His failure to perform 'whiteness' and the harm this causes him eventually bring Harley under his grandfather's control. Harley is only able to shed Ernest's control and recover his Nyoongar roots after a car accident in which his father dies. Taken by his Indigenous uncles on a 'walkabout', a healing journey of reconciliation with tribal culture and country, Harley manages to tap into his Indignity and converts into an uncanny white djanak or shaman for his tribalkin. Aboriginal displacement in this novel is countered by Harley's capacity to levitate and 'sing' tribal people and country into place by building on an unfamiliar hybrid form of the Dreaming—the mystical connection to the ancestral Aboriginal universe which lies beyond time but is anchored in local space. Thus, the novel also becomes a chant towards a hopeful future of cultural resilience and recovery, as the title Benang, besides a family name also denotes Nyoongar for 'tomorrow',

Colin Thomas Johnson, he was better known by hispen name, Mudrooroo. His first novel, *Wild Cat Falling* is an avant-garde as it presents an interventionist discourse for the first time in the literary history of Australia directed towards opening up the space for self-determined representation by an Aboriginal. The novel retells the continuing entrapment of the Indigenous minority in an inequitable network of social, economic and cultural relationship that they have inherited from British conquest. Johnson's writing was haunted by a sense of belonging nowhere a feeling of loss and abandonment, which may well have its genesis in a traumatic childhood and troubled teenage years spent in Australia's welfare institutions.

His work illustrates a profound consciousness of the significance of being, non-white within a racist social structure .wild cat falling was inspired by Johnson's experiences of learning how

AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL: SENSE OF FEEL AND INTERPRETATION OF HAUNTED HISTORICAL PAST IN LITERATURE

to survive Aboriginal identity is differently regarded, but many struggles and issues of indigenous disadvantage and alienation from white society remain, despite changing government policies, interventions and reconciliation ideals. History – national, racial, personal – is impossible to erase, and needs to be faced and redressed consciously and consistently over time. Some questions have arisen round Mudrooroo's indigenous heritage and bona fides, but he has continued to publish prolifically since his striking debut in 1965, fiction and non-fiction, including *Wildcat* (1988) and *Wildcat Screaming* (1992).

History and most historical events are an indivisible part of every country and culture and they have always had an undeniable effect on country's future. Australia is the world's largest island and its history is no exception as the arrival of white man to Australian lands might be considered one of the turning points not only in the history of Australia itself but also in the history of original inhabitants of Australia, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Even though there is not any Aboriginal written evidence for the way of Aboriginal life prior to the arrival of white man, it is a well-known fact that the immediate impact on Aboriginal peoples was enormous.

Australia is the world's largest island and its smallest continent History seen as study of the past is an integral part of many education systems across the world. Many countries spend huge amounts of money and resources to uncover their past. Every year new and new historical sites are uncovered, History, however, is the study of the past. Peter N. Stearns says about history in his essay published in AHA “the past history has been justified for reasons we would no longer accept.” For instance, one of the reasons history holds its place in current education is because earlier leaders believed that knowledge of certain historical facts helped distinguish the educated from the uneducated. In this essay we have seen the aboriginal writers sense of feel in their writings and the historical interpretation of their ancestors and their suffering which haunted aborigines throughout their generation and reflected in their writings since from the writers of the past to the contemporary writers of Australia.

References

1. Australian Bureau of Statistics: “*Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander*”. June (2011): n.p.web.14 Nov 2013.
2. Bellar, Lisa. “*Message Failed*” web.21 April 2015.
3. Brennan, Bernadette.”*Essay: Reading Australia*”, Nosugar.web.25 May 2015.
4. Clark, Maureen. Thesis Collection “*Mudrooroo: a likely story, identity and belonging in postcolonial Australia.*” Wollongong University, (2004):189.
5. Fielder, John. “*Country and Connections: An Overview of the Writing of Kim Scott.*” *Altitude 6* (2005): n. page.web. 10 June 2009.
6. Foley, Dennis. “*Indigenous Australian Entrepreneurs: Not all Community Organizations, Not all in the Outback*” DISCUSSION PAPER No. 279(2006):1-5.web Feb 22, 2009
7. Laurie, Victoria. “*An Interview with Sally Morgan.*” www.unionsverlag.com 23October (1999): n. p. web. June 2005.

AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL: SENSE OF FEEL AND INTERPRETATION OF HAUNTED HISTORICAL PAST IN LITERATURE

8. Midalia, Susan. *Kim Scott novel 'Benang'*. Freemantle Press. May 2005: n. p .web.2 may 2008.
9. Minestrelli, chiara. "*Reading and Re-reading Indigenous Australian literature: Kim Scott's Benang*", University of Barcelona: *The Journal of the European Association of Studies on Australia*, Vol.2.1(2011):89-99.Observatory Australian Studies Center, Web.09 APRIL 2015
10. Noonuccal, Oodgeroo. *'The Past'*: Australian Poetry Library.web.23 may 2015.
11. Renes, C Martin "*The stolen generations, a narrative of removal, displacement and recovery*", in CM,Renes ed., *Lives in migration: rupture and continuity: essays on migration*, 2.3(2011):30-49.Centre d'Estudis Australians, Universitat de Barcelona.Web5 May 2011
12. --- "*Kim Scott's fiction within Western Australia life-writing: voicing the violence of removal and displacement,*" Universitat of Barcelona, Coolabahs, 10 (2013):177-187.
13. Scott, Kim. *'Benang'* New Delhi: Penguin Books India 1999, 2003. Print.
14. Walsh, Michael, Colin Yallop. "*Language and Culture in Aboriginal Australia*", Canberra: Aboriginal Studies, 1993. Google Books. Read, Peter. *Settlement: History of Australian Indigenous Housing*, Canberra: Aboriginal Studies, 2000. Google books.