

UNDERSTANDING DISPOSSESSED POSITION OF ABORIGINALS IN AUSTRALIA
THROUGH "SOCIO-HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL PROFILE".

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Article Received : 10/11/2014

Article Revised:17/11/2014

Article Accepted:19/11/2014

ABSTRACT

"Socio-historical and political profile of Aboriginals in Australia", presents as the title suggests an outline of socio-historical and political conditions and circumstances of Aboriginal people in Australia. It traces the history of how British colonized Australia and the Aboriginal struggles during colonisation. In other words, it looks at the historical background of Aboriginal people of Australia. This chapter throws light on the theoretical perspective of how the Aboriginal people were controlled and managed by the white people by means of implementing various harsh and torturous policies of Assimilation, segregation, annihilation etc. Moreover, this chapter traces the development of Australian Aboriginal literature and the purpose of Aboriginal literature. Aboriginal literature has been highlighted thoroughly in this chapter. This paper also tried to examine the current socio-economic status of Aboriginal people and a short overview of law and policy making since 1788 which concerns the development of the progress between the Australian constitution and Aboriginal people.

This paper further defines and speaks for Aboriginal people and concepts. Most Australians have stereotypical images of Aboriginal people which are the result of non-Aboriginal concepts built on views of European superiority. It outlines the challenges of Aboriginal people to the history of European and Aboriginal relations since 1788 as written by the "victors". It traces the determination of Aboriginal people to be heard and to present their own versions of what has happened in the past over 200 years. As a collection, these chapters are intended to introduce areas/platforms/factors whereby divergences and convergences among Aboriginal writings which are happening in comparative form. In order to justify the above mentioned proposition, this article addresses serious questions and experience.

It might help if we non-Aboriginal Australians imagined ourselves dispossessed of the land we lived on for 50,000 years, and then imagined ourselves told that it had never been ours. Imagine if ours was the oldest culture in the world and we were told that it was worthless. Imagine if we had resisted this settlement, suffered and died in the defense of our land, and then were told in history books that we had given it up without a fight. Imagine if non-Aboriginal Australians had served their country in peace and war and were then ignored in history books. Imagine if our feats on the sporting field have inspired admiration and patriotism and yet did nothing to diminish prejudice. Imagine if our spiritual life was denied and ridiculed. Imagine if we had suffered the injustice and then were blamed for it'.

-Mr. Paul Keating, Prime Minister of Australia.

This paper tries to present an outline of socio-economic, political and literary conditions of Aboriginals in Australia and also looks at the major factors or main indicators of socio-economic status of Aboriginals in Australia. 'Socio' refers to people and the ways they fit into the community in which they live. It refers to how well they are educated, whether they have jobs, and other factors mentioned ahead. 'Economic' refers to the financial position of groups within society including how much they earn, whether they own their own home and the type of assets (inheritances, savings, property etc.) they have. The main indicators of socio-economic status are Social indicators like education, health, contact with the criminal justice system employment or unemployment level type of occupation or job and access to services like water, sewerage etc. Economic indicators like income, salary, wages etc.

"Socio-historical and political profile of Aboriginals in Australia", presents as the title suggests an outline of socio-historical and political conditions and circumstances of Aboriginals in Australia. It traces the history of how British colonized Australia and the Aboriginal struggles during colonization. In other words, it looks at the historical background of Aboriginals of Australia. This paper throws light on the theoretical perspective of how the Aboriginal people were controlled and managed by the white people by means of implementing various harsh and torturous policies of Assimilation, segregation, annihilation etc. Moreover, this paper traces the development of Australian Aboriginal literature as well as the purpose of Aboriginal literature. Aboriginal literature has been highlighted thoroughly in this chapter. This paper also tried to examine the current socio-economic status of Aboriginal people and a short overview of law and policy making since 1788 which concerns the development of the progress between the Australian constitution and Aboriginal people. It also takes up the issues of major legislation that has affected Aboriginal people; commonwealth legislation or 'Law of the land' and finally turning points in the application of Aborigines Protection Act (1909) in NSW.

This paper further defines and speaks for Aboriginal people and concepts. Most Australians have stereotypical images of Aboriginal people who are the result of non-Aboriginal concepts built on views of European superiority. It outlines the challenges of Aboriginal people to the history of European and Aboriginal relations since 1788 as written by the "victors". It traces the determination of Aboriginal people to be heard and to present their own versions of what has happened in the past over 200 years. As a collection, these chapters are intended to introduce areas/platforms/factors whereby divergences and convergences among Aboriginal writings which are happening in comparative form. In order to justify the above mentioned proposition, this article addresses the following questions: What are the convergences and divergences in Aboriginal writings? How far and in what measure these Aboriginal writings have transformed the full dimension to the cruelties and humiliation they had suffered, into literary expression and experience? How does the narrative agenda within the autobiography form an anti-caste narrative or anti-racial discrimination narrative?

How are they engaged with identity politics in an attempt to understand the kind of identity asserted in these autobiographies as well as the boundaries of these identities? How do these autobiographies represent an attempt to assert a new form of socio-historical narrative? And lastly, where do the present trends in both writings lead to?

In Aboriginal writing the emphasis is in terms of course structuring in literature programs, the availability of texts at universities' and the High Commission libraries and focus in translation programs, remains by and large on the canonized white Australian male writers like- Patrick white, Thomas Keneally and, David Malouf. Judith Wright and Aboriginal writers like Sally Morgan or Ruby Langford are added on

occasionally as token representatives of the gender and Aborigine erasures of what is exported as a 'national' literary canon. Furthermore, it can be easily observed that as these 'new literatures' are opened up for academic research and study in the postcolonial framework the Aboriginal voice is variously mediated, appropriated, co-opted, accommodated and commodified. The Aboriginal 'predicament' finds greater publicity when mediated, represented or incorporated in the texts of mainstream writers. As the Aboriginals begin to make themselves heard, being spoken for - appropriation of voice - however sympathetic or emphatic, fails to be unproblematic. The premise seems to be that unless these discourses or literatures and its texts are made 'accessible' to the dominant mainstream literatures in English discourse.

As for Aboriginal Autobiographies, it has been claimed by many Aboriginal women writers that while the narrative they unfold is their personal story, their experiences are similar to those of many other Aboriginal women. For this reason their autobiographies can be viewed as 'testimonies' to the way Aboriginal people were treated by non-Aboriginal people. Many of the writings are a "testimony" to the struggle to survive because of the human rights denied to Aboriginal people. Sexual violation in many cases was perpetrated by station owners, and males in households where Aboriginal women were employed as of the women in the family was either raped, sexually violated, or harassed by a non-Aboriginal man she worked for, or did not know. Aboriginal women's writing is also a 'witnessing' to the rights or lack of rights, citizenship given to the Aboriginal people living in a liberal society. It is true that one of the oldest tenets of liberalism is equality before the law of legal rights, equality of citizenship. Having citizenship means individuals have access to a number of social goods: for instance, voting rights, medical attention, social security, legal rights, police protection, etc. What the Aboriginal Autobiographies under consideration reveal is that Aboriginal people were not given even citizenship right (which they got in 1967) and without citizenship right many Aboriginal people were denied the basic legal and health rights, It can be argued that by reading these autobiographies from the stand point of the Aboriginal women's experiences, through different reading practices, these narratives can be viewed as a communal "telling" of the collective experience of people's judged as 'inferior' by the dominant social order. Yet, at the same time, these writings are a form of resistance to the discourses in the form of practices of the dominant group.

Aboriginal literatures are mirror images of the lives, sorrows, problems, pain and violent of whites on voiceless Aboriginals. There are numerous expressions of red-hat experience and fighting instinct in the literature of Aboriginals. The most important aspect of the Aboriginal autobiographies is to explore how intricate struggle these writers have faced. That is why the Aboriginal writers in their writings always to voice the voiceless. More than anything else, the 'right' or 'ability' of the marginalized group to write literature comes under immediate contestation. That is why Aboriginal literature speaks about struggles for human rights, injustice, their experiences of pain, and feelings of ownership, entitlement, superiority and exploitation exploited by the whites. They search for the routes to reach their roots. The Aboriginal writings always deal with -

- (a) Land right issues
- (b) The stolen-generation of Aboriginal children
- (c) Black deaths in custody
- (d) Women sexual exploitation
- (e) European policies of Assimilation and annihilation etc.
- (f) Issues of multiculturalism and reconciliation.
- (g) Dream time Literature
- (h) Magic Realism

Aboriginal life is agonizingly painful, charred by experiences. Their experiences are deliberately prevented to find room in literary creation. They are compelled to grow up in a social order that is extremely cruel and inhuman and compassionless. As a result, Aboriginal writing in Australia has begun to emerge discursively as powerful visible forms of protest against a chequered history of exploitation both in socio-politically materialist and discursive realities. The prime aim of retrieving their past is to probe the 'routes' to uncover their 'roots' as their roots form rich glorious past. As they have been retrieving their glorious past through Post-Colonial studies they construct their cultural and national histories and identities. While they are

committed to 'Write' 'Right' History they do not indulge in exploring their knowledge, thoughts and experiences rather they try to represent the true history of Aboriginal communities. Alex Wright in her *Epic Carpentaria (2006)* tells the need and significance of the Aboriginal Truth. She believes in the truth that '*Land is people*', '*People are stories*', '*Stories are History*' and '*History is Truth*'. People of these communities lost the power of dreaming, imagination and have arrived to the point of feeling that it is not even worthwhile to dream because they can't make their dreams come true. A sense of loss, a sense of disruption hunts the clan of the Aboriginals. The absence of 'dreaming' the land in which they are living with the advent of the whites lost its spirituality. In another novel Kim Scott's *True Country (1993)* one of the aboriginal characters Billy fully assimilated himself to White community unaware of his aboriginal roots. But when he came to know about his Aboriginal family history, he visualized his true country and longed for it. In his own words "We carry in our hearts the true country/ And that cannot be stolen/ We follow in the steps of our ancestry/And that cannot be taken" (*True Country*.P.98). 'Aboriginal' in Australia as identity categories evoking a sense of homogenized collective communities has evinced a problematic relationship within the social, historical, political and discursive frameworks of conceptualizing national identity. This is mainly because the socio-political and discursive marginality historically assigned to them has been concomitant with the epistemological authorization of these subaltern identities within the national framework.

In Australia, the images that Europeans have constructed of Australia's indigenous inhabitants have both shaped the nature of Aboriginal and non- Aboriginal relations and provided the framework within which Aboriginal history has been and is still being written. If it true, that rarely in Australia's history of contact between indigenous Australians and their non-Aboriginal counterparts has there been a favourable representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and lifestyle. In Australia, Aboriginal people are hostage, in the main, to images created by non-Aboriginal Australians. It has been said that the power of a people to say who they are, to define their icon identity and to relate their history is fundamental to their existence. To deny a people their law, languages and the use of their land is a denial of basic human rights. These fundamentals of civilization were systematically stripped away from most of the indigenous people of Australia by colonization. As Dalits are fighting against 'casteism' in India, Aborigines are fighting against 'racism' in Australia. Aboriginal people have lived with racism since colonization. In the present day, racism is not as rife as in earlier times, but it still raises its ugly head in this modern. Racism is though officially outlawed in terms of the formation government bodies such as the Radical Discrimination Act passed in 1975- and the Equal Opportunity Act of 1984 established to combat any discrimination based on race, however, there are still Australian people who denigrate others because of their race. Racism is the biggest scourge (curser misfortune) Aborigines have had to line with and they are still fighting an insidious form of racism that keeps them apart from enjoying the equality and equity that other Australians take for granted and enjoy in that country. Aboriginal people want to be accepted as a people with as much rights and responsibilities as other Australians. They do not want to be differentiated against (by racist remarks) or thought of as different from the human race just because they are Aborigines, but want to live their lives free from the scourge of any kind of racism because they have much to offer to this in every way. Their fight for social justice in the arena of racism is ongoing until white Australians accept Aborigines as an integral or important part of Australian society.

The two hundred years of Australian past history has been dominated and formulated by a network of 'white' discovers. Specifically, official representations of the relationships between 'Aboriginal' and 'non-Aboriginal' societies have been written by the 'colonisers' to construct an official Australian history. This 'history' has ensured the relegation of 'Aboriginal' history and heritage to a mythical time pre-1788 and thus these official constructions of history are instrumental in the subjugation and marginalization of knowledge's from displaced peoples. It can be argued that history, specifically official Australian history, seems to be a fiction that both creates and substantiates a political reality that is itself fictitious. A more equitable account of Australian history post - 1788 is possible if official history is mediated by a reading of 'Aboriginal' literature as history. It can also be asserted that counter-histories that both disrupt the apparent linearity and homogeneity of 'white' historiography and foreground previously subjugated. 'Aboriginal' knowledge's are emerging in a growing body of writings by 'Aboriginal' authors (designated as 'literature') that can be read as 'history'.

From 1788, which Aboriginal people call the invasion and non-Aboriginal people call British settlement, most representations of Australian people have been produced and controlled by others. This representation has been biased, culturally prescriptive and judged against non-Aboriginal values because those new arrivals to this continent did not see any positive attributes among the Aboriginal people and believed in their own superiority. There was little, if any, communication between the Indigenous peoples and the newcomers about culture, language and belief. Very few people communicated directly with Indigenous Australians using Indigenous languages in the early years.

Subsequently, the land was declared desert and uninhabited later represented as terra nullius and the various Aboriginal nations declared uncivilized.²¹ It should not be forgotten that when the British claimed sovereignty over this country in 1788 and colonized the land as 'terra nullius', the Aboriginal people were subject to grave injustices and have suffered the consequences of the 'terra nullius' theory, or assumption since then. As a result Aborigines not only suffered the loss of their land, but also suffered the degradation and dehumanization that British colonization left in its wake. Furthermore, to the indigenous people of Australia and the Indigenous peoples throughout other lands, European colonization was to disrupt their lifestyles, their cultural practices, ideologies and heritage to the point that some were totally wiped out. In the state of New South Wales, Aboriginal people were forced to leave their lands and go onto government controlled reserves. It was commonly believed by white settlers that the Aborigines would soon die off, and the reserve land would be sold and used for farming - but, by the start of the 1900s, a new generation of Aboriginal children was growing up in the reserves. This fact, combined with the large-scale arrival of white immigrants from Europe, changed the Aboriginal life forever.

Moreover, when it became clear that the Aboriginal people would not die off, the protection board for the Aborigines decided to break up all Aboriginal communities. They would then sell the land to the newly arrived Europeans for farming. The board started by taking away all land rights away from Aborigines to own or use reserve lands. As a result the Aborigines could own nothing. The reserves were made a training ground for Aboriginal children to become servants. The protection board had plans to remove Aboriginal children from their reserves and place them under the control of white employers. After these children were removed, they were never allowed to return home. The white society thought it would be in the best interest of the child to remove her from the corrupting, influence of her Aboriginal family. They would send the girls to an institution or foster home, and train her to become a servant. There were no rules or regulations for the treatment of the Aboriginal children who were sent to work. In addition, in the middle of the twentieth century, Aborigines worked for flour, sugar, and tea rations on the cattle stations of Northern, Central and Western Australia. Aboriginal women on cattle stations often worked harder than the men, who were mostly stockmen. The women not only had hard domestic chores - such as cooking, cleaning, washing, and caring for children - but, they also worked as cattle drivers; with camel teams; as shepherds; road repairers; water, carriers; house builders; and gardeners. If they tried to escape, they were captured and beaten.

What is more, it was the women who were responsible for keeping Aboriginal groups together in camps and on these properties. They cared for their children and for their men. The older women taught traditional skills and customs to the younger generation. Most girls who were removed from their white employees ended up in Sydney working for the middle-class white people. These girls usually were awakened before 5:30 a.m. to do all of the household jobs. Employers had the girls working seven days a week. However, they only got paid a small amount, and often got nothing. The middle-class whites didn't allow the girls to show any affection to white people, since they said it was like black rubbing off onto white. The Aboriginal people were just there to work. More so, the forced removal of Indigenous children happened in every state and territory of Australia. The separation of Aboriginal children started in Victoria and New South Wales as early as 1885 and, in some states, was not stopped until the 1970s. About 85% of Aboriginal families have been affected in some way, either by having children taken away from them or by being forced to make major decisions to avoid having their children taken. Mothers of some Aboriginal children would cover their fair-skinned children with black clay; hide them in trees, behind sand dunes, or in hollow logs. In addition, often the white people would send Aboriginal women out into the white community, and if they came back

pregnant, the rule was to keep each woman for two years and then take the child away; sometimes mother and child would never see each other again.

There were no rules or regulations for the treatment of the Aboriginal children who were sent to work. The children then grew up in a white community knowing nothing of the Aboriginal culture and environment. It was not until 1967 that Aboriginal people had a vote about their treatment in society.

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