

## AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINE'S CRAVING FOR LIBERATION FROM THE WHITES' SO CALLED LEGITIMATE PROTECTION BOARD: AN ANALYTICA STUDY

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### **Abstract:**

*From the very beginning, far-reaching incompatibilities were the main factors which led the Europeans and Aborigines being unable to come to terms with each other. The contrast was enormous in that one was 'civilised' and 'sophisticated' and the other considered 'uncivilised' and 'primitive'. Therefore, it was difficult for Europeans and the Aborigines to understand each other's complex societies, habits, intelligence and social values. To the Aborigines, an intrinsic part of their life was deep emotional attachment to the land, which had mythical and social values of considerable significance. The entire continent had mythical signs and values related to their tribal system and status. They were completely dependent on land for their dreams and aspirations. Through it, they had acquired their inspirations for art, music, dancing, and other forms of cultural standing and lived in comparative harmony with their environment. Their lives were not at all simple. They were with harsh climate, inhospitable land, droughts, and fires; they had a lot to contend with. Despite all the adversities, they lived in relative peace and harmony until the arrival of the Europeans.*

**Key words:** *Assimilation policies, genocide, protection boards, terra-nullies etc.*

Ever since their introduction, Europeans failed to understand the Aboriginal values of environment appreciation, respect for the past, and privileges affecting them. These attributes had assured their future and their survival for over 60,000 years. From the moment Aborigines realised that Europeans had come not just to visit them but to settle permanently, the Aborigines regarded the intrusion into their lives with disdain. Many took up their primeval armaments and struggled for their survival. Due to the fact that they were unable to organise themselves into a fighting force and were against sophisticated British firing power, they were crushed. Later, most Aboriginal attacks became mere skirmishes on guerrilla basis; they seldom succeeded in pinning the enemy.

For ages land was the utmost component in the lives of Aboriginal Australians. They were intimately familiar with all aspects of it, as their dependence was directly related to it. Their everyday living demanded that they should have adequate knowledge of land. They were in harmony with all living creatures around them. Through mythical beliefs and dreaming their natural world was included in their social world. Ceremonial sites were of particular significance, unlike other areas for hunting and gathering. Not only the ceremonial sites but also the whole concept of land was sacred to them. Their mythical beliefs came very close to creation of land, and since myth was closely related to their socio-religious terms, land became the sacred issue in an Aboriginal culture. In British terms, land was a God-given gift to them. It was highlighted by special significance and related to their sacred beliefs with spiritual importance. Land was an inalienable and incontrovertible right of possession. Spiritual linkage to

land by birth thrust a particular tribe to a sector of land, which facilitated food, ceremonial sites, and everything else for everyday living. Even today, landowning groups can be easily identified all over Australia. Land holding was a spiritual phenomenon, only truly held by mythical beings. Their human representations were granted alien on land to hold not for themselves and their future off springs but for the dead as well. There was definite ownership linkage through birth, myth, and death. Land title was held by signifying ritual emblems possessed by a particular tribe who had relevant claim. The title was not transferable. It was inalienable heritage of the particular tribe.

Hot climate necessitate daily hunting, as no food could be stored for any length of time. They all shared in fishing, hunting, and gathering available plants and seeds. In those circumstances, they had very little time to do anything else. Every activity related to the commune rather than the individual. Their system of living and any form of government were quite informal. There was no chief or king or leader as such. If the clan was not sanctioned by an elder on matters of misdemeanour or disputes, they were left to float along very much like the unstable nature and variations of the environment. People were not static. Ecology played a part, where they were bound together in the scale of nature in complex relationships. There was no competition, little violence, and they lived in comparative peace. They developed a classless society, where struggle for anything else other than food would be no longer an issue. They buffeted round in a constantly transforming environment which sometimes brought about for the betterment.

Against this attitude to life, they were persuaded by the white society to be 'civilised', whenever they were conquered or whenever they came into contact with white missionaries or station owners. Naturally, it was a giant leap for them to adapt. Those who did not want to be 'civilised' were possibly shot or cleared away from the white environment by using deceptive strategies. Since the white men placed no value on the black women's consent, women were taken as they pleased. The Aboriginal girls were viewed as sexual commodity to be used by pastoral workforce of both whites and black stockman as they deemed fit. They ended up with all the vices and diseases of the white society. The Aborigines, then as now, could not overcome the huge obstacles which confronted them. This was largely due to the fact that the white society had mistakenly assumed that the Aborigines had no culture and badly needed civilising. Later, they systematically had begun to assimilate them and their children into the white culture, which the Aborigines consistently tried to reject. Others, such as the outback station owners and missionaries, merely regarded them as part of the environment which was there for them to exploit.

It is, therefore, no wonder that the Aborigines felt the undesirable, which up to this day they have constantly resisted. As the ages rolled on, the new age groups have not ready to lose their lawful inherited lands, most of which have been irretrievably lost to white Australians. Despite the High Court decision in 1992 in Mabo Case, this atleast re-established, inter alia, that home-grown individuals were the native residents of Australia, and, therefore, the ownership of land rested with them, successive governments have no guts and ethical staying power to severely put into practice of the High Court's verdict. Pemulwuy waged a radical war against the British invasion between 1788 and 1802. Due to his fight to the invaders, he championed himself as one of the most revered and recorded about chronological facts in Australian aboriginal narration. He was considered as a brave warrior. Pemulwuy, a Bidjigal man from the Botany Bay area, experienced the witnessed the harm done to Aboriginal society by the invaders. And he was not tempted to befriend them as Arabanoo and Bennelong has done. He took initiation for several battles on the settlement from Botany Bay to the Parramatta area and later to Toongabbee. During this time, he left a notorious criminal gamekeeper namely John McIntyre. And he was then sought after for slay. He was gunshot and hospitalised in a fight during 1797 at Parramatta. Yet he runs away with the help of his hamlet. Wanted dead or alive, Pemulwuy was at last assassinated in 1802 and his head was sent to England. His son was Tedbury was captivated into custody in 1805. About one hundred years after Philip, the misconception that Aborigines never legally 'occupied' Australia was put to rest by the Mabo decision by the High Court.

Previously, judges were bound to follow the legal precedent that Australia was *terra nullius* (unoccupied) at the time of the settlement, and therefore, all Aboriginal land belonged to the Crown. Mabo Case recognised the principle of enduring native right.

Apart from the burning issues of land rights and reconciliation, improvements in their health and welfare remain much to be desired. These pressing issues are dark blights on the whole Australian nation and source of constant criticisms by progressive nations of the world and those who postulate human rights and do nothing about them. Politicians of all shades bungle on regardlessly and because of certain attitude racism has bred through ignorance and xenophobia. The dim light on the horizon for the indigenous people is likely to remain dim for a very long time.

These Aboriginal people are communally addressed as the 'Stolen Generations' because quite a few generations were affected. Even today, several Aboriginal people are still search for their routes to roots. The expression *Stolen Generations* is used for Aboriginal people compellingly taken away (stolen) from their families between the 1890s and 1970s. Of these people, none of them have the chance to see neither their parents nor siblings. Several decades we speak of 'generations' (plural) rather than 'generation'. This is the most flaming fret for members of the Stolen Generations. While taking the aboriginal children white community stole Aboriginal people's bright future. The social domains like culture, language, tradition, knowledge, dances and spirituality could only sustain if moved on to their children. By denying this kind of life white community destined to abolish Aboriginal civilization within a short time and got out of 'the Aboriginal problem'. By the early 20th century, underneath the absorption strategy white Australians thought Aboriginal people would wash out. Within three generations, they thought, Aboriginal genes would have been 'bred out' when Aboriginal people had children with white people.

It was an assumption for several years that the Aboriginal girls would rise up and get married nice white boys. There was an unrevealed plan behind them that they would merge as pleasant fairer kids. If the children were girls, they would marry white boys again and ultimately the dark colour would wash out. It was the deceptive sketch of the whites including A.O. Nevellie. The entire deceptive idea of stripping the children in the name of fostering them was adopted as a policy. It was based on the women because the women were considered as breed machine. Adult Aboriginal people resisted efforts to be driven out of towns by simply coming back. But children taken away were much easier to control. "I grew up feeling alone, a black girl in a white world, and I resented them for trying to make me white but they couldn't wash away thousands of years of dreaming (Auntie Rhonda Collard, member of the Stolen Generations)" (10).

Female children of Aboriginals who were taken away were not treated well. They were also ill fed and used them for station workers and domestic servants. With this kind of cut-price and time and again underpaid wages, they were made servants. The White society unable to put up the riches and road and rail network that helped them prosper without these people. The economy was forcefully taken away and used for their development. This is how the story of the Stolen Generations and the stolen wages become single story. The high-hand authorities created the impression that the aboriginal children were as their Aboriginal parents would neglect them. There are facts, however, that kids were malnourished or famished because Aboriginal people were not paid the full wages they were to be paid.

The Aborigines were strained to live on the Government reserves or mission stations. Yet they chiefly lived in filth and dearth. Though, they received the basic necessities like medicine, shelter, a least of foodstuff that in most places was insufficient to continue a healthy life, and the customary blankets. In a few places some coaching and basic training in practical skills was also provided. There was a very high child mortality rate within the reserves. It is noticeable fact, whether the mission or reserve was church or government run; the original people who were placed there were strictly controlled and strictly punished if they did not abide by the set of laws set by the whites. Aborigines were put into suffering like mute and ignorant animals and chained slaves in their own Land. They had been disconnected of their previous way

of life and were not essential to the comfort and security of Aboriginal people in 1900. The land is not mere rocks or minerals or soil, but a holistic environment that sustains and is sustained by culture and people. For aboriginal Australians, the land is the centre of all religious mysticism and this relationship and the spirit of 'country' is inner to the issues that are important to aboriginal people today. Aboriginal Australians were gatherers and semi-nomadic, with each clan having its own territory from which they 'made their living'. These dwelling places, customary lands 'traditional lands' were interconnected by geographic borders such as lakes, rivers, and mountains. They are undeclared and cared for their varied environments, and attuned to them. *"We cultivated our land, but in a way different from the white man. We endeavoured to live with the land; they seemed to live off it. I was taught to preserve, never to destroy"* (98). Aborigine Tom Daystar aboriginal social contact of the land is simultaneous to their exceptional tracking skills based on their gather life and hunter. This includes the ability to trail down birds, animals, to make out and find edible vegetation, to find sources of water and fish.

At the same time, Aboriginal literature also adopts strategies of deliberate silence over certain issues, almost as a means of holding power in hand. It is interesting to look at various arguments about Aboriginal literature as the outcome of Aboriginal suffering. Critics express the view that Aboriginal Literature is a protest literature. And majority of the people express the view that Aboriginal literature is the psychological outcome of social oppression. Hence, we say that an indigenous legendary dialogue emerges from the Aboriginal pain as the new times gone by (in the short or the longer term) of settled folks expressing themselves in the language of the colonizer. However, the Aboriginal writers do adopt strategies of shaping this history by selective disclosure. Yet, although most Native fictional conversation deals with the colonial quandary, it is not confined to the colonizer or colonized discourse alone. This research pinpoints how Aboriginal literature works as an foreword to the history people and at hand tight spot, and an eye opener to non-Aboriginal people. Refusing to fit automatically into any Western intellectual discourse, Aboriginal literature emerges as a decolorized or decolonizing literature in its spirit, content, purpose and functions. This literature functions not only as literature, but also as a historical, social, political and economic discourse, and it also bends the English language inevitably.

It is pertinent to observe that Australian Aboriginal literature and Aboriginal movement had emerged influenced by the similar political, social and cultural conditions. The referendum of 1967 on the cultural, ethnical prejudice causes in Australian constitution and the establishment of Aboriginal Tent Embassy on the lawns of National parliament in 1972 illustrated the arrival of new era in Aboriginal affairs. The autonomy and the taking sides pressure of Aboriginals increased throughout the entire country and led to the granting of franchise to Aboriginals in 1961 and 'freedom rides' organized by Charles Perkins in 1965. These social and political movements consolidated around the values such as sovereignty, self-determination and community control in the areas of social action. This has brought in the issues of land rights, cultural heritage, health, education and housing for more concentration and equal availability.

These important socio-political changes altered the Aboriginal culture and prepared them to invite the literary experiments of Aboriginal literature. This has further consolidated the basic association between the socio-political environment and indigenous imaginative characters in English. Adam Shoemaker in *Black Words White Page: Aboriginal Literature-1929-1988* (2000) analyses the relationship that existed between social consciousness and literary consciousness: "It is complex relationship. It is not one in which the literature demonstrably operates as a direct reaction to socio-political events (although this is occasionally the case); nor is it a relationship in which literature observably influences Aboriginal behaviour or political action" (10). Shoemaker is of the view that Aboriginal literature has to be understood as a close proximate reflection of social events. The naturalism conveyed in Aboriginal novels and the inspiration espoused by Aboriginal plays stem from the personal experiences of Aboriginal writers. Most of the Aboriginal characters are modelled upon individuals to a



great extent on the familiarity of Aboriginal writers. In short, it must be examined and evaluated that Aboriginal literature cannot be studied in isolation but always in terms of social environment, the historical events and in the midst of responsible circumstances. However, the approach to Aboriginal literature is explicitly historical, sociological and cultural and it refuses to be deterministic under all the situations. These perspectives demonstrate that Aboriginal literature is a phenomenon worthy of serious cultural and critical considerations.

Aboriginal literature is primarily concerned with Aboriginal themes. But, there are also several White society writers who took up themes of Aboriginals. Some of the Australian writers deriving inspiration from Aboriginality depicted Aboriginal themes. This has brought in the question of Aboriginal identity to be defined on the lines of exclusive Aboriginality. The Aboriginal consciousness has defined that Aboriginal literature strictly should comprise of the writings by Aboriginals only. Though, this perspective limits the subject of Aboriginality as the property of Aboriginal writers, it has exposed the politics of representation. Representation of someone on behalf of community, race or class is viewed as act of domination. It is also viewed as an act of independence and self-proclamation. Every race, community, class, caste etc., is expected to carry the representation on its own irrespective of the disunity involved. The sagacity of idealism, progressivism, and humanism is found to be in the efforts involved in making the subjugated groups learn the act of representation. Ernie Blackmore in *Speaking Out Black* (2008) probes the issue of who is speaking out whom in relation to Urban/Indigenous voice reflected in Australian theatre argues the voice that speaks for the large number of Aboriginals should necessarily be an Aboriginal voice. Though literature is the product of cross-cultural communication, Aboriginal literature is particular about the concerns of few Europeans who established genuine criticism against their own dominant society. It is also very particular about the parallel and contrastive approaches adopted by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal writers in dealing with controversial Aboriginal subjects. So, in the gradual evolution of Aboriginal literature, Aboriginal subjectivity has been shaped and moved from passive representation to deterministic uncompromising portrayal of ultra-post-colonial Aboriginality.

The Aborigines Protection Board was established to manage reserves and the welfare of the estimated 9000 Aboriginal people living in New South Wales in the 1880s. It was part of the Department of Police and was chaired by the Commissioner of Police. The Board had the power to: move Aboriginal people out of towns; set up managers, local committees and local guardians (police) for the reserves; control reserves; prevent liquor being sold to Aboriginals; and to stop whites from associating with Aboriginals or entering the reserves. The Board was renamed the Aborigines Welfare Board in 1940 by the Aborigines Protection (Amendment) Act 1940, which stipulated that Aboriginal people should be assimilated into mainstream white society. The existence of Aboriginal communities, many of whom were calling for "land in our own country", was a challenge to authorities. The Protection Board, initially charged with overseeing the gazettal of Aboriginal reserves, quickly took over control from the missionaries and installed its own managers. 2015 marks 100 years since amendments to the NSW Aborigines Protection Act gave the board far-reaching powers with consequences that are felt to this day.

The 1915 amendments gave the board complete power to remove Aboriginal children from their families. They also enabled the acceleration of the revocation of Aboriginal reserves and the casting off of Aboriginal families from largely independent and successful farms around the state. For many Aboriginal people of those times, this was a board not of protection, but persecution. The board utterly controlled the lives and affairs of Aboriginal people in NSW from 1883 until 1969.

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