Australian government announced the policy of Reconciliation in 1991 to reconcile with the Aborigines. The policy implied the change in the perspective of Australian government. Earlier, the government wanted to dilute the identity of the Aborigines to train them in the dominant culture, but one of the aims of the newly framed policy was to preserve the Aboriginal culture and heritage. Now, the policy of Reconciliation is about two decades old. This chapter discusses the impact of reconciliation on the Aborigines.

When one reads Plains of Promise and Carpentaria by Alexis Wright, her dilemma about the policy of reconciliation is evident. While she seems to be very optimistic about the policy of reconciliation in the first novel, her second novel seems to show that her hopes in reconciliation are shattered. In fact, when one analyses the main incidents of the last two decades about the white Aboriginal relations, then one realises that most of the white Australians are still not sure about their attitude.
Dilemma is probably the best word that describes the attitudes of white Australian towards the Aborigines. This dilemma is evident in almost all the walks of life. There are so many instances in the recent Australian history which show that the opinion of majority whites continues to swing between the two extremes. Sometimes people show extreme courage to support the Aboriginal cause, at the same time some of their actions undermine their good intentions and in fact, put a question mark on their actions.

The first instance of this was seen in the case of Cathy Freeman, an Aboriginal girl, who won her gold medal in Commonwealth Games in 1994 in Canada. She was twenty one year old at that time. After winning the gold medal, she did her lap of honour wrapped in Aboriginal flag. She carried the Australian National flag too, but she was reprimanded in the Chief of the Australian sports team for parading in the Aboriginal flag and was warned against repeating the exercise (Seth 2661). There were some people who supported Cathy, but there were many who were furious:

She (Cathy) was representing Australia we have a national flag. That is the only flag that other nations know and recognise. That is the only flag she should have draped herself in… (because) the vast majority of Australians see the Aboriginal flag as a divisive symbol. (qtd. in Seth2661)

Australia recognised Cathy’s achievements and she was the person who was bestowed the honour of lighting the Olympic torch during 2000 summer Olympics in Sydney. She was also awarded Australian of the year in 1998. But her criticism for draping the Aboriginal flag shows that many people in Australia are not comfortable with public showing of Aboriginality.

Similarly, the Australians initiated National Sorry Day on 26 May 1998, during which a whole range of Community activities were performed. Most remarkable among them were sorry books which were kept outside public places for people to record their feeling about the mistreatment of the Aborigines. In each sorry book, an apology was printed, which read:

By signing my name this book, I record my deep regret for the
injustices suffered by indigenous Australians as a result of European settlement and, in particular, I offer my personal apology for the hurt and harm caused by the forced removal of children from their families and for the effect of governments policy on the human dignity and spirit of Indigenous Australians.

I would also like to record my desire for Reconciliation and for a better future for all our peoples. I make a commitment to a United Australia which respects this land of ours, values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, and provides justice and equity for all. (Kennedy, Archive 258)

Photographs of some of the sorry books are given below:

Source: www.aiatsis.gov.au
On behalf of myself and those I represent, I unreservedly apologise to our Australian and Torres Strait Aboriginal People for the harmful and hurtful events perpetrated against them, willingly and unwillingly by those who arrived in this land since 1770/’88.

For all the lack of understanding, lack of caring and for the resultant situations I am deeply sorry.

Let us all hope, pray and work towards a new enlightenment and positive future of reconciliation and co-operation as a unified Australian family under God.

_Kenneth J. Fair_  
Mayor, Randwick City Council

26th May 1998

Source: www.aiatsis.gov.au

---

Take my hand my Koori brother  
It’s time for me to care  
It’s time to understand  
Forgive me  
for I hang my head in shame  
because of the deeds of the past  
take this weight from my shoulders  
and fill this empty space with your love and light  
As the pain in your eyes disappears into the flow of life.  
Let’s go walk-about together  
Teach me about your land  
your family, your culture  
My heart and mind are open  
Embrace me with this indigenous love

---

Hand in Hand  
Together to evolve  
into the eternal bliss  
of the life you have been told  
our lives together as one  
will begin a dreaming  
a bond so strong  
Together to experience this land  
Together to love each other  
Peace under our feet, my dear Koori brother...

---

Gisty Kilkeary

Source: www.aiatsis.gov.au
I am very sorry that as a young adult and teacher I did not teach the truth about our aboriginal friends — I’m really very sorry. P.B. Elphinstone

GERMANIE GEEGHR YAMAIYINNEN

Kathy Le Maire

Mark Atäitme

Peter Teller

Bar Chojey

Forgive me for my ignorance. Now that I know the truth, I promise I will not cease from denying it.

I’m saying sorry because the Australian Government and the majority of us are sorry for us, Aboriginal racist racism.

To the people, I know, I will always support your fight for equality.

So, I wish to express my sorrow and apology — and my wish for justice for the Aboriginal people.

May we all come together in peace and love.

Source: www.aiatsis.gov.au
On Sunday, 28 May 2000, more than 250,000 people participated in the Corroboree 2000 Bridge walk across Sydney Harbour Bridge ("Sorry Day and the Stolen Generations"). All these events showed as if Australians were ready to acknowledge the wrongs that had been done to the Aborigines, but they again elected John Howard a Prime Minister of Australia, a person who had refused to apologise to the Aborigines for their historical mistreatment.

It is interesting to note that the Australia is the only country which does not have any treaty with the Natives. On the other hand, almost all the other settler communities like the United States, Canada and New Zealand have treaties with the First Nations tribes. The first call for a treaty came from Larrakia people in 1972.
The Larrakia people of Northern Territory vowed to keep fighting until a treaty was signed with them. The McMahon Liberal Government rejected their claims, arguing that the Commonwealth could not sign a treaty with them because their ancestors became British subjects with colonization (Wright, J. 14-15).

In 1979, treaty gained more importance as two groups called for the treaty. Interestingly, the Aboriginal Treaty Committee (ATC) was a group of Australians of European descent interested in the Aboriginal cause. They advertised in the *National Times* in August 1979.

We the undersigned Australians, of European descent, believe that experience since 1788 has demonstrated the need for the status and rights of Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders to be established in a Treaty, Covenant or Convention freely negotiated with the Commonwealth government by their representative. Australia is the only former British Colony not to recognise native title to land. From this first wrong two centuries of injustices have followed. It is time to strike away the past and make a just settlement together. We believe at last. (qtd. in Auguste 426)

The ATC was supported by National Aboriginal Conference NAC a group of thirty five Aborigines in charge of advising the federal government in Indigenous affairs. During their second conference, the NAC passed a resolution calling on the Commonwealth government for a treaty. The five main points at stake were:

- The protection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity;
- The recognition of land rights;
- The conditions for mining;
- The compensation for the loss of tradition lands;
- The rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to control their own affairs. (qtd.in Auguste 427)

In November 1979, they formed a sub-committee to consult the Indigenous population on a *Makarrata* - a Yolngu word that refers to a dispute settlement
ceremony and the NAC chose it instead of ‘treaty’ because:

It makes it clear this is intended to be on agreement within Australia between Australians. If the agreement is called a treaty it could also be seen as an international agreement between two sovereign nations. A treaty between two separate nations can be registered with the United Nations and protected by international public opinion. The federal government has indicated it does see the agreement in this way. (qtd. in Auguste 427)

The signing of Makarrata was meant for protecting Aborigines heritage, Aboriginal land, Aboriginal languages etc. Strong political movements of the Aborigines forced Prime Minister Bob Hawke to propose a concept between the government and the Aborigines. The concept of reconciliation came into being with the establishment of council for Aboriginal Reconciliation as a statutory authority under the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act of 1991. The council was funded by the government of Australia; and prominent Aboriginal as well as non-Aboriginal politicians were appointed to the council. The council’s first strategic plan included the following goals:

- Communicate with the nation about the process of reconciliation;
- Consult the Aboriginal community in order to advance the process of reconciliation;
- Ensure that, at all levels the government and community, there is a commitment to cooperate in furthering the process of reconciliation;
- Faster cooperative action to cover disadvantage and to increase understanding, with a focus on the local community level. (Kaplan-Myrth 71)

In fact, first of all reconciliation as a policy needed to acknowledge the wrongs that have been perpetrated on the Aborigines since the time of invasion. While many Australians acknowledged the black chapters of Australian history in the Sorry Books, the Australian government failed to do so and instead of acknowledging the damage done by dispossession and genocidal policies like that of stolen generations, Prime Minister John Howard made following observations about Australian history:
(There is a challenge) to ensure that our history as a nation is not rewritten definitively by those who take the view that Australians should apologise for most of it. This ‘black armband’ view of our past reflects a belief that most of Australian history since 1788 has been little more than a disgraceful history of imperialism, exploitation, racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. I take a very different view. I believe that the balance sheet of our history is one of heroic achievement and that we have achieved much more as a nation of which we can be proud than of which we should be ashamed of. (qtd. in Stearns 493)

The stance adopted by Howard was negative, where he negated all the past wrong doings of the invaders. So the most important part of the reconciliation process was not fulfilled. John Howard did not feel any wrong was done to the Aboriginal people, so his negative stand puts a question mark on the process itself. The difference of opinion of the people of Australia and the Prime Ministers shows the dilemma of the nation in relation to their stance towards the Aborigine.

The dilemma is evident in the works of Alexis Wright also. Her first novel, *Plains of Promise* seems to endorse reconciliation and it showcases her great hopes in reconciliation. Towards the end of the novel through the story of Mary she shows how the lives of Aborigines have changed over the decades. Important thing to note is that the novel also shows the other two eras of suppression and assimilation. While these two are shown as diabolic and detrimental to the Aborigines, she seems to endorse reconciliation. When compared to the life of Ivy’s mother and Ivy, life of Mary is more comfortable. She is able to decide what is good for her. She is also able to live an independent life with her daughter Jessie which was impossible in Australia of yester years.

The novel gives an overall impression that Alexis Wright is very hopeful about the future of Aborigines in modern Australia, but her second novel *Carpentaria* presents a starkly different picture. The novel shows that nothing has changed for the Aborigines; things have become rather grim. Earlier, the Aborigines were able to retain their culture to some extent, but it seems that in reconciliation
era, their culture will be the most important casualty. The novel shows that the hopes placed in reconciliation were false and the Aborigines were the losers in the whole exercise.

The first novel *Plains of Promise* was published in 1997 and optimism was still high at that time. At that time reconciliation was still a new idea and intellectual Aborigines like Alexis Wright were prepared a give a chance to the whites to forge new relationship between them and dominant white community. Moreover, the process of reconciliation was supposed to be completed in ten years. *Plains of Promise* was published when the reconciliation process was only five years old, so people like Wright were still hopeful. They still believed that something magical will happen and the miseries of Aboriginal people will be removed in the next ten years. So *Plains of Promise* shows the hopes sustained by Aborigines during that era while *Carpentaria* was published in 2007 when reconciliation was already fifteen years old and the Aborigines were still languishing in poverty, abysmal living conditions. Though hope is depicted in *Carpentaria*, the hope does not emanate from the government’s policies. It comes from the Aboriginal spirituality and belief.

*Carpentaria* was written in post-Pauline Hanson era. Pauline Hanson was elected to Australian Parliament in 1996 as an independent MP. She went on to form her own political party, called Pauline Hanson’s One Nation Party that gathered approximately one million votes across Australia in the 1998 election. Pauline Hanson and her colleague believed that the Aborigines should be thankful to the whites for bringing the fruits of civilization to them:

Hanson and her followers felt that the Australian nation, which had “done too much to civilize” the Aborigines, was being denigrating for its past “Well – intentioned” actions. Instead of that nation taking an apologetic stance toward the indigenous, she and her supporters argued that Aborigines ought to be thankful for being brought into modern world with all its benefits. The fighting stance adopted and assertions of “true Australian identity involved in such responses to the complexities of a decolonizing society (and of a transforming identity), reveal that such an identity is experienced as embattled, in a
state of alarming decline and about to be swamped and left behind.”
(qtd. in Moran, Psychodynamics 671)

Pauline Hanson’s votes in 1998 elections show that there are many people in Australia who shared her beliefs. They may remain hidden from the main scene, but may have an impact when it really matters.

Though in the long run, opinions of people like Pauline Hanson do not matter, but their vociferous articulation of racist ideas and their acceptance by a million people certainly has a psychological impact on the Aborigines. People who were feeling much safer in the reconciliation era were again feeling endangered with people like Pauline Hanson in parliament and a person like John Howard at the helm of affairs.

Moreover, the statistics of health also does not show an encouraging picture of the reconciliation era. Much before the start of reconciliation era in 1968, Dr. Coombs, Chairman of the Federal council on Aborigines stated:

- If an aboriginal baby is born today it has much better than average chance of being dead within two years.
- If it does survive it has a much better than average chance of suffering from substandard nutrition to a degree likely permanently to handicap it (a) In its physical and mental potential. (b) In its resistance to disease
- It is likely in its childhood to suffer from a wide range of disease, but particularly ear, nose throat and respiratory infections, from gastro-enteritis, from trachoma and other eye infections.
- If it reaches the teenage it is likely to be ignorant of and lacking in sound hygienic habits, without vocational training, unemployed, maladjusted and hostile to society.
- If it reaches adult age it is likely to be lethargic, irresponsible and above all poverty stricken-unable to break out of the iron cycle of poverty, ignorance, malnutrition, social isolation and
There is not much difference in the data collected in 2003. The plight of the Aborigines is represented by the following data:

- Life expectancy for Indigenous women is 19 years less than for non-Indigenous women, with a difference of 21 years for men;
- The rate of Indigenous infant mortality is 2.5 times that of the total population;
- Indigenous children are 32% less likely to complete year 12, the final year of secondary schooling in Australia than non-Indigenous children;
- Indigenous people are 15 times more likely to be incarcerated than non-Indigenous people;
- The rate of unemployment for Indigenous people is 2.5% times greater than the national average. (qtd. in Summerfield 143)

This data becomes even more pathetic when it is discovered that Australia in 2003 was third on the list of nations having best Human Development Index behind Norway and Iceland (“HDI** and GDP**”). Human Development Index (HDI) is a comparative measure of life expectancy, literacy, education and standards of living for countries worldwide. It is a standard means of measuring well-being, especially child welfare. It is used to distinguish whether country is developed, a developing or an under developed country (“Human Development Index”). Despite the poor performance of Australia on the front of Aboriginal health, Australia was placed at number three in the list of best performing nations. This shows that all other Australians except the Aborigines are taken care of in health and social needs. This also shows that Aborigines are left on their own because of the rampant racism that is an important aspect of white-Aboriginal relations in Australia.

_Carpentaria_ was underway when all these data were being collected and published. Alexis Wright had a direct feel of all these conditions as an Aboriginal worker. She wrote _Carpentaria_ because she was disillusioned with the process of reconciliation. Over the years, reconciliation had become an empty slogan, which
held nothing in it for the Aborigines. Alexis Wright has refused to be misled by the phoney process of reconciliation. In her essay “Politics of Writing” she admits:

Sometimes I feel that forgiveness is almost unimaginable. There is no healing road of reconciliation for many thousands of Aboriginal people. How can there be? The Indigenous people of this country are still on the road of genocide at the hands of Australian governments.

(qtd. in Sharrad 8)

The essay “Politics of Writing” was written in 2002 which shows that Wright was aware of what was going on among the Aborigines.

Through *Carpentaria*, Wright makes clear two things: acid test of reconciliation does not lie in the cities like Canberra, Sydney or Melbourne. These cities have already become cosmopolitan centres because of the continuous influx of immigrants from different countries. In these cities, the people have no other choice except bearing one another. Moreover, these cities are very near to the centres of power and police can reach at any place within minutes. So racial relations on the surface are generally cordial or seem to be cordial. The real test of reconciliation lies in small towns like Desperance, which is described by Wright in the novel, where the racial relations are still fragile and can breakup at smallest provocation. In such breakups, Aborigines are the main sufferers. Wright shows how the lives of Aborigines and whites are intertwined in small towns. Because only a limited number of people reside in such small towns so playing possum with the presence of other is almost impossible. While the bigger towns are so overcrowded that people can easily avoid the people they want to avoid.

The second thing that is clear from *Carpentaria* is that the Aborigines cannot wait for reconciliation to happen. In fact, as the novel seems to point out; reconciliation is not a solution of anything. Rather, Wright seems to suggest that going back to the Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal spirituality is the only solution, the novel shows if the Aborigines have to gain pride, the place they want in the white dominated society then asserting Aboriginality is the only solution.

*Carpentaria* was first published in 2006, almost fourteen years after the process of reconciliation started; the beginning of the novel itself makes the
intentions of the novelist clears:

A NATION CHANTS, BUT WE KNOW YOUR STORY ALREADY. THE BELLS PEAL EVERYWHERE. CHURCH BELLS CALLING THE FAITHFUL TO THE TABERNACLE WHERE THE GATES OF HEAVEN WILL OPEN, BUT NOT FOR THE WICKED. CALLING INNOCENT LITTLE BLACK GIRLS FROM A DISTANT COMMUNITY WHERE THE WHITE DOVE BEARING AN OLIVE BRANCH NEVER LANDS. LITTLE GIRLS WHO COME BACK HOME AFTER CHURCH ON SUNDAY, WHO LOOK AROUND THEMSELVES AT THE HUMAN Fallout AND ANNOUNCE MATTER OF FACTLY, ARMAGEDDON BEGINS HERE. (Wright, Carpentaria 1)

It is clear that in the distant communities the “white dove” does not land. In the distant communities reconciliation is still a farfetched reality where the relations between whites and Aborigines are still troubled.

Wright shows how the Aboriginal people in the town are living in abysmal conditions without properly constructed houses. The white people of the town believed that “the Aboriginal was really not part of the town at all” (Wright, Carpentaria 4). The Aborigines have become fringe dwellers who depend on rubbish dumps of the whites to construct dwellings for themselves and their families. Through the novel, Wright clearly tells that Howard’s slogans of “practical reconciliation” are hollow:

Prime Minister Howard’s practical reconciliation has three objectives firstly, to improve the living standards of Indigenous people, as a step to providing equal opportunity for all Australians, secondly to acknowledge Australia’s inter-related histories, without direct blame or guilt for past wrongs, thirdly to achieve mutual agreement on the need to work together, acknowledging difference in a manner that does not present an obstacle to a shared future. The concept targets socio-economic issues such as housing, education, health and employment, through policy initiatives. According to the
commonwealth Government these are “basic citizenship rights” and achieving them is a “litmus test of reconciliation.” (Summerfield 144)

_Carpentaria_ shows that “litmus test” has failed. Government boasted of initiating “practical reconciliation,” but did every possible thing to make Aboriginal people dependent on state and kept on deciding what was good for the Aborigines without including them in the decision making process. They were denied land rights, a process started by Labour Prime Ministers was curtailed by Howard Government and the Aborigines were forced to become fringe dwellers. Professor Larissa Behrendt argues:

"Practical reconciliation" fails to understand that the protection of rights includes the ability to exercise economic and property rights. Recognition and protection of these would put land under people's feet, allow access to natural and other economic resources and work towards ensuring that Indigenous communities were economically self-sufficient. It can be argued that without the protection of these rights we will be dependent on welfare and on benevolence of the legislature. "Practical reconciliation" is not going to change systematic welfare dependency or any other structural issue. (qtd. in Summerfield 146)

Larissa Behrendt exposes the inherent dichotomy of practical reconciliation where Howard Government was ready for "practical reconciliation," but was not ready to give them land rights. In fact, Wright shows that reconciliation was started by the whites to cheat the Aborigines. In the novel, the whites are ready to "accommodate any request whatsoever” in name of "meaningful coexistence" to "make deals happen for the impending mining boom." (Carpentaria 8). The whites are wise enough to coerce the Natives by announcing several things to take benefits:

Numerous short lived profiteering schemes were concocted for the locals in order to serve the big company's own interests as they set about pillaging the region's treasure trove: the publicly touted curve of an underground range embedded with minerals. (Carpentaria 9)

Alexis Wright seems to suggest that policy of reconciliation was initiated by
the Commonwealth Government so that the feelings of the Aborigines could be assuaged and the mining projects could go on without any disturbance. Once the job was over, the Government came back to same old story and the Aborigines were left in lurch.

It is important to realise that reconciliation is needed in Australia not because the Australian Government wants dollars from mining on Aboriginal lands, but because of the past dispossession and brutal treatment of the Natives by the whites. Reconciliation is needed because the Aborigines were dispossessed and injustices were perpetrated on them. Reconciliation means acknowledging the past mistakes and forging new relationship for future:

Reconciliation may be defined as mutual acceptance by groups of each other. The essence of reconciliation is changed psychological orientation towards the other. Reconciliation means that victims and perpetrators, or members of hostile groups do not see the past as defining the future, as simply a continuation of the past. It means that they come to see the humanity of one another, accept each other, and see the possibility of a constructive relationship. (Staub 869)

Thus one of the important aspects of reconciliation is the acknowledgment of past mistakes, but Prime Minister Howard favoured only one particular version of history. Howard denied the history of dispossession and massacres throughout his term:

In facing the realities of the past, however, we must not join those who would portray Australia's history since 1788 as little more than a disgraceful record of imperialism, exploitation and racism.

Such a portrayal is a gross distortion and deliberately neglects the overall story of great Australian achievement that there is in our history to be told, and such an approach will be repudiated by the overwhelming majority of Australians who are proud of what this country has achieved although inevitably acknowledging the blemishes in its past history. Australians of these generations should not be required to accept guilt
and blame for past actions and policies over which they had no control.

However, we must acknowledge past wrongs, understand that they still cause a great deal of personal distress and resolve to improve areas of indigenous both now and into the future. (qtd. in Riggs and Augoustinos, Psychic Life 467)

Thus reconciliation policy faltered at the first step only because of adamant attitude of John Howard. In fact, some analysts like Stewart Motha have described reconciliation as a Neo imperial gesture, that amounts in Australian context, to a process of re-inscribing a ‘post- colonial’ political community under one law that "subordinates indigenous laws and customs, once again, in the name of ‘civilisation’ and its new effigies, democracy and human rights. (77)

From the very beginning, Australian Government did what it wanted and never paid attention to the desires of the Aborigines. So the reconciliation was an oppressor centered policy and not an oppressed centred one. The significant differences in interests and approaches by the Aborigines on one hand and the Government on the other was evident in the 1997 initiative of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation when they organised the Australian Reconciliation Convention. The kind of themes it pursued were not the practical reconciliation issues favoured by the Government but the issues taken up by the Aborigines were more "foundational issues such as reconciliation in the community, human rights, the formulation of documents of reconciliation, and constitutional issues." The council of the Aborigines recommended "treaty and apology and reconciliation of prior Aboriginal custodianship in the preamble to the constitution" (Goosen 257). The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation ceased to exist in 2001 and new independent non-profit body called Reconciliation Australia came into being.

Wright's novel shows that ten years of reconciliation has not done any good to the Aborigines, because the policy of reconciliation was aimed at reconciling the Aborigines to the prevailing conditions rather than reconciling with the Aborigines.
An important difference comes to the meaning of verb ‘reconcile’ depending on whether the verb is followed by ‘with’ or ‘to’:

To reconcile ‘with’ conveys the meaning of ‘harmonising,’ ‘healing’ or ‘making Friendly after estrangement.’ To reconcile ‘to’ is to ‘make another resigned or contentedly submissive.’ Thus, reconciliation ‘to’ implies a relationship of unequal power whereby a dominant agent can render another submissive, while reconciliation ‘with’ does not necessarily imply such a relationship. (Nicoll, Fiona 18)

Carpentaria shows that Australian society in the rural and semi urban areas is still a racist one and the era of reconciliation has not been able to abate that racism. Albert Memmi concluded that racism has its roots in interactions in which "one finds oneself in contact with an individual or group that is different and poorly understood" (23). But "racism only becomes racism "(32) when these differences are deployed “to denigrate the other" (37). Thus the "entire machinery of racism” is about “the legitimization and consolidation of power and privilege" (38). Most of the colonial regimes were based on the notions of racial policy and racism was followed and practised as a state policy, in the modern age racism seems to manifest itself as "indirect, inferential and covert policies that use the denial of overt racist intent to escape responsibility for racialized consequences" (Lipsitz 216).

Racism has proved very flexible and has adapted well to the changed circumstances. Research indicates that racism has evolved to fit with the ideologies of liberal and egalitarian societies. “Overt” or “old fashioned” racism involves a judgment of other races as biologically inferior to the dominant group” (Saxton, A. 15). “Modern” racism is expressed in ways that are more socially acceptable and is manifested as a judgment of racialised others in relation to the dominant culture’s social and moral norms, such as work ethic, self-reliance and individual achievement (Saxton, A. 15).

State has changed its policies, but racism has become more subtle and hidden and the ends of this new form of racism are same. In fact, racism is one of the most important tools of oppression:

Common ways of interpersonal oppression are verbal or emotional
abuse where the target individual is subjected to degrading language and portrayed as useless, inferior, incapable, lazy, unlovable, stupid and a litany of other demeaning adjectives. Accompanying the verbal abuse there is usually emotional abuse where by the victim is denied primarily psychological goods such as love, care, nurturing, friendships, support and compassion. The psychological abuse is intensified by the threat of physical force. (Prilleltensky and Gonick 135)

Wright shows that racism is part of the life of Aborigines of Desperance. Normal Phantom’s youngest son becomes a victim of some young boys who are wearing “White hoods” (Carpentaria 343). White hoods are probably a reminder of extremist racist organization of Ku Klux Klan which flourished in the United States. Kevin tries to escape but he:

Felt the knife gliding down his neck being presses deeply into his flesh. There were several voices in the car, all talking to him at the same time. ‘take this for Gordie,’ fists flew at him from the front and from the back. He started to panic, and in his panic, felt spasms running through him. Kevin had moved into another world, when suddenly the car stopped, and he was tipped out onto the ground. (Carpentaria 344)

Young Kevin is beaten so badly by these people without any reason or provocation. The law in Desperance is “eye for an eye. A black for a white” (Carpentaria 356). The novelist also makes it clear that the racism of the boys who have beaten Kevin is inherited from their parents. The parents of these boys are proud of their children: “the fathers of those louts who bashed Kevin were openly boasting to Uptown about putting a nigger down for Gordie” (Carpentaria 356). In fact, what Wright depicts in the novel is the extreme kind of racism where the Aborigines are blamed for everything that goes wrong in the town. Will Phantom is blamed for the fires in the town. Three young boys are blamed for killing Gordie. All these Aborigines are made culprits without any proof.

The three young Aborigines: Tristrum Fishman, Junior Fishman Luke and
Aaron Ho Kum are subjected to inhuman torture which kills them. It is interesting to note that Tristrum is only ten years old while his brother Luke is twelve and Aaron Ho Kum is aged eleven. Other murders also take place in *Carpentaria* but those were "black murders" (*Carpentaria* 313) and Gordie was a white man so his murder “was different and required the very best one could expect of civil action from the Australian Law” (*Carpentaria* 313). The incident shows that the Aborigines have still not gained human status in the eyes of the whites. The lives of whites and blacks are not equal.

Justice in this reconciliation era is still reserved for the whites. The Aborigines are still the citizens of other world where they can be incarcerated without any reason. The inhuman torture is described by Wright in a powerful manner. Here Wright’s anger is visible:

Truthful noticed how abstract their blood looked as it dripped down from the clean walls and onto the lean concrete floor. A sickening image of cattle being slaughtered flashed across his mind the first thing he understood was he would have to clean up. (*Carpentaria* 334)

The boys after the torture look like as if they “had been put through mincing machine” (*Carpentaria* 334). The children commit suicide in the lockup. Interestingly, nobody bothers about the suicide of Aboriginal boys. The scene clearly shows that racism prevails in its worst form in the post-reconciliation Australia and even innocent children are not spared.

What Wright has written about the Aboriginal boys may be fiction but many accounts by other writers show that these things happen in reality. Henry Reynolds in his book *Why Weren't We Told?* (1999) describes an incident where two young Aboriginal girls were imprisoned for swearing at their teacher (8). Henry Reynolds found the punishment “deeply shocking” (8), but at the same time remarked that from the response of the superintendent showed that it was a routine matter.

Wright is at her best when she exposes the racism of the Whites. Most of the time a direct comment from her is missing, but her description makes everything clear. For example, when the town people come to know that Mozzie Fishman's sons
are being blamed for the murder of Gordie they start blaming the father: "What a shame the father don't stay around town and be a real father for a change" (Carpentaria 329). But when name of Aaron Ho Kum crops up, nobody wants to blame the parents (Carpentaria 330) because father of Aaron Ho Kum is a white man Lloydie Smith. Though Lloydie Smith had never acknowledged the fatherhood of Aaron Ho Kum, yet he could not be blamed because white man could do no wrong. Lloydie Smith was not even held responsible for siring Aaron Ho Kum, but for the whites "Miscegenation was the word, he said, for inter-breeding was treated as though good white sperm had been falsely procured by a lesser kind and produced a snake" (Carpentaria 331). Thus racism still bedevils the mind of people and the division between the whites and Aborigines is still strong which emphasizes that the process of reconciliation has failed in most of the places like Desperance.

Strong laws have been enacted against racism in almost every society, but these laws fail to do any justice in the remote areas where enforcement agencies are not very strong. So the racist people like Bruiser go scot free with whatever they do. Truthful is the only policemen in Desperance, but rather than finding the culprits he is busy in cultivating relationships with the powerful people of the town. He is a human, though who is not racist, but his selfish interests are put before his duty. His humanity forces him to stop Bruiser from torturing the boys, but then regrets his action:

The moment passed and the cop put his gun away. He felt defeated. He was angry with himself now. Only a junior cop would go around pulling his gun like a cowboy. One stupid decision and he know he had lost all the credibility he had earned, cultivated over years, to become Bruiser's mate. (Carpentaria 336)

Truthful’s example shows that only racist people like Bruiser are fit to survive in rural Australia who can inflict pain remorselessly. Truthful’s conscience pulls him down and the death of boys creates severe psychological problems for him and he becomes a neurotic. His example shows that racism has a two way effect: it affects the perpetrator as well as the victim.

There are so many unsolved deaths and murders in the town, but they remain
unsolved because the town people like Bruiser are not interested in calling extra police men because they find it more convenient to blame every murder on Will Phantom or the Aborigines. The attitude of whites remains the same in both Plains of Promise and Carpentaria. They are not worried about people being killed. While in Plains of Promise Eroll Jipp is worried about grant, in Carpentaria Bruiser is worried about the influence of an outsider. Bruiser is worried that the outsider policemen may have other ideas and they may be racially tolerant who will not blame everything on the blacks. The only police man they have in Desperance is truthful who is either busy in gardening (Carpentaria 71) or winning the favours of Girlie. Truthful is a policeman who “knows” the people of the town and what they “want”(Carpentaria 324). Bruiser makes it clear that the outsider policemen if called to investigate may not pay attention to them:

They don’t know us. Did they look like they knew us, or were even bothered to ask us what we think, and we live here all the time? No, they just went around wasting taxpayers’ money, made a right monkey of themselves and whoosh! Where did they go? We looked around and found ourselves sitting here like we always have because? Because we belong here. (Carpentaria 324)

Clearly, only one point of view exists in the town and everybody has to go according to that, because the whites from the other parts of the country may not agree to this point of view so they are unwanted in Desperance. The point of view is the supremacy of the whites, they want to remain in the same state because by keeping the Aborigines in the pathetic state gives them a feeling of superiority.

Reconciliation is a process that cannot be completed in ten years time. It is not a physical process, rather it is more of a psychological process where the minds of the whites have to be de-racialised. On the other hand, the Aborigines are to be assured that past will not repeat itself and they are safe and their rights secure in modern Australia. According to Audrey R. Chapman:

National reconciliation is a long term process with two major dimensions. First it requires the transformation of relationships among former antagonists. The goal is to enable
them to achieve sufficient accommodation and trust to be able to live together peacefully and co-operate and collaborate with the one another. Second it involves the establishment of a new type of relationship between the citizens and the Government resting on political institutions based on at the rule of law and respect for human rights and thus facilitating co-operation across boundaries leading to a shared commitment to common future. (143)

The Australian case is a peculiar one because in the past the whites were extremely powerful who could kill Aborigines, abduct and rape their women and go scot free with it. The Aborigines were totally at the mercy of the whites. So the process of reconciliation has to start from by waking up the whites like Bruiser from the reverie where they were all powerful. The history of uneven power relations comes between the two races and makes reconciliation difficult. Wright makes clear that reconciliation is not possible till the mindset of people like Bruiser undergoes a change. It is also interesting to note Bruiser is very "popular mayor" who has been voted "citizen of the year" for ten straight years (Carpentaria 34). His popularity shows that his rabid views are shared by many of the residents. Stan Bruiser still remains firmly rooted in the past where the Aborigines were not considered human beings. Regarding Aboriginal unemployment he says:

Put them to work making keys so they can lock their food up somewhere and not have to share everything they get with their families. Number two, he explained.... They should be forced to make bathtubs, like the old tin ones so they could take regular baths; and number three, they should be sent back to the cattle stations and made to work for nothing, board and keep, that's good enough for them if they aren't interested in making money to get ahead like everyone else. (Carpentaria 36)

It is clear that Stan Bruiser is still living in assimilation era where the Aborigines were expected to live like the whites but that is not all, he brings the past while talking to the Aborigines and taunts Angel Day about the "times he chased her
on horseback down to the creek until her bony legs gave up” (Carpentaria 41). He brags about “how he had chased every Aboriginal woman in town at various times, until he ran them into the ground then raped them. He had branded them all, like a bunch of cattle” (Carpentaria 41). It is clear that mindset like this can complicate the situation. Henry Reynolds describes an incident where a Torres Strait Islander bashed a white man. The white man was beaten because: the white man had tried to shoot the Islander in the Northern Territory twenty years before. He “kept laughing and joking about it and boasted that he had already shot eight black fellas” (Reynolds, Why 55).

It is clear that the white men like Bruiser keep on bragging about the past because they still think that the Aborigines are inferior to the whites. White historians like Henry Reynolds admits that "racism continues to be a powerful ever present force” (Reynolds, Why 248). Racism even persists in the metropolitan centres but in covert way. A study was conducted on the 1st year university students. The groups of students scored low on scales of old fashioned and modern racism and admitted that the Aborigines were socially and economically disadvantaged. But most of them expressed great concern about Government's spending on Aboriginal programmes and many of them believed that too much money was being spent on Aboriginal unproductively. They also objected to existing affirmative action policies for Aboriginal candidates in the university arguing that the policy was advantageous to the Aborigines and individual merit should be the only criteria for getting university education (Mellor 47).

The Aborigines have often reported different kinds of racism. The most common kind of racism is verbal which includes name calling, jokes and taunts, intimidating comments. The Aborigines are after referred to as “Black slut, boong, abo, coon and nigger” (qtd. Mellor 476). The racist comments include telling the Aboriginal people directly or indirectly that they are dirty:

About two month ago we went to Alice Springs and on the train we had this one person who was giving us the history of Aboriginal culture all the way from Adelaide to Alice Springs. Yeah and he was telling the people in the train the ways of the Blacks, that they were
Reconciliation cannot take place with racism still prevalent in Australia. So the practical reconciliation is a failure because it promised housing etc. to the Aborigines which have no importance in Aboriginal society. So rather than paying attention to these physical aspects, a process of psychological reconciliation should be initiated.

In 1991, when the council for Aboriginal Reconciliation started a 10 years reconciliation process led by a council for Aboriginal reconciliation, the preamble to the act outlined the rationale for the process:

- Because Australia was occupied by Aborigines and Torres Strait Inlands who had settled for thousands of years before British settlement at Sydney cove on 26 January 1788 and,
- Many Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders suffered dispossession and dispersal from their traditional lands by the British Crown and,
- To date there has been no formal process of reconciliation between Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians (therefore)
- As a part of reconciliation process the commonwealth will seek…to address progressively Aboriginal disadvantage and aspirations in relations to land, housing law and justice, cultural heritage, education, employment, health, infrastructure, economic development, and any other relevant matters in the decade leading to centenary of Federation, 2001. (qtd. in Short, reconciliation 495)

Reconciliation also means, preserving the cultural heritage of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders people. But *Carpentaria* shows that culture of the Native people of the Australia faces most potent threat in the era of reconciliation. Wright shows her concern through the appearance of Elias, who miraculously walks into town from the sea. When he comes from sea, People thought that he might be “an angel carrying the message” from the God or “a Ghost, spirit, demon or a sea monster” (*Carpentaria* 62). So many interpretations have been offered about Elias, but after going through the novel it seems that Elias is an ancestral spirit of the
Aborigines.

When the Aborigines first saw the whites they saw the new visitor as their deceased Natives and friends and for them the whites were “the incarnations of the spirits of some departed relative of friend” ("Account Respecting Beliefs of Australian Aborigines" 200). Wright also shows Elias as white man. Elias is White, but Wright provides with many hints that this white man is closely related to the Aborigines. Wright again and again stresses that Elias has lost his memory which is the case even with the Aborigines who have lost their memory of their cultural and social ceremonies and their skills which were developed to survive in the harsh climate of Australia.

There are few people like Normal Phantom and Mozzie Fishman who still have the skills that were passed on them by their ancestors. But the transmission of these skills has stopped. The great seaman Normal Phantom has become a taxidermist and Mozzie has become a wanderer. The younger generation is also not much interested in learning the heritage of their forefathers. Some of the boys of younger generation have become alcoholics; some suppress their hunger by sniffing petrol while others have joined the professions of the whites. So Elias arrives at a time when Aboriginal culture is on the verge of extinction.

Elias as a spirit of Aboriginal ancestors is innocent like the Aborigines of previous generations who were too credulous and were easily cajoled by the whites to work in their cattle stations. Elias too is engaged by the whites to "guard the town" (Carpentaria 83). Through this move Wright exposes the mentality of whites in rural areas and makes it clear that residue of white Australia policy is alive in such remote areas. People in Desperance are still afraid of the “threats of invasion” from the “hordes of Asians swooping down across the Pacific Ocean” (Carpentaria 84). Elias is supposed to keep a vigil against such imagined invasions. Things change pretty fast in the town and after shire council office is burnt down by some arsonist, Elias, the Messiah, becomes a villain and is ordered to leave the town.

Wright's description of Elias makes it clear that Elias does not belong to this world. She calls him "other-worldly, like a fugitive from another time" (Carpentaria 92). Further development in the novel makes it clear that Elias is indeed a fugitive
from another time, a spirit who has come to do an important job, to save the heritage of his people. There are many instances in the novel which prove that Elias is indeed a superhuman. When Will Phantom discovers his body, he thinks that Elias might have been "dead man for weeks or month" (*Carpentaria* 164), but his dead body does not show any sign of deterioration. Will takes his body to his father’s room and keeps his body there, but it does not deteriorate. Normal Phantom takes his body to a special place in the sea which again shows that Elias is not an ordinary person rather he is a spirit or ancestor who has come to perform a work, but he is able to perform his work only after his death.

On the departure of Elias, Wright comments, “A short memory was sometimes better than a long one or having no memory at all” (*Carpentaria* 91). The statement is true for all the Aborigines as the long memory is very painful for them and is full of tortures, murders, rapes and segregation of children from the families. Through Elias, Wright wants to suggest that short memory is better because when people have long memories like Normal Phantom they are bound to suffer because the memories of dispossession and brutal massacres of their ancestors hang like a burden on their minds. Similar is the case of Mozzie Fishman who continues to be haunted by the memories of the past:

He never liked what he saw in the visions because it was too frightening he said sometimes he saw thousands of these hands at work. He could see them killing Aboriginal people. He believed the hands belonged to all kinds of white people some dead. Some still alive, and he know because he was able to recognise hands, that some of those hands belonged to people who were still living and still sitting themselves on top of Traditional Law. (*Carpentaria* 127)

Elias's short memory shows that all the Aborigines will have to develop short memories like Elias to reconcile with the whites in the present day Australia. This again affirms Wright's belief that reconciliation is only a one way process where only the Aboriginal are working for the reconciliation. In an interview with Kerry O'Brien she says “I think there's great effort on our side to try to reconcile the spirits” ("Interview with Kerry O'Brien"). Similar are the thoughts articulated by
Uncle Bob Anderson who said, "Whenever I hear the term reconciliation, it seems it just means that they think we've got to reconcile ourselves to the situation. There's no justice at all" (qtd. in Ferrier 37). Thus one of the important messages in the novel is that the Aborigines will have to forget the past for reconciliation to take place because whites will never try to heal the wounds of the Aborigines. Elias comes at a time when Aboriginal culture is facing gravest threat of extinction. Aboriginal stalwarts like Normal Phantom are under so much pressure that they remain aloof and do not transmit the knowledge handed over to him. The policies of Australians Government in reconciliation era remain assimilationist where extinction of Aboriginal culture is must and the Aboriginal are expected to behave like whites. Indigenous activist Mick Dodson has commented on this assimilationist policies.

I am saddened that on the eve of the 40th anniversary of the referendum to grant citizenship rights to indigenous people that so many of these rights are eroding away before my eyes...Government mainstreaming policies brimming over with overt assimilationist messages (are) not only denying our people cultural expression but it also disregards the colonial legacies of dispossession, separation and brutality that have left many of us traumatized incapable without significant support, to bridge the divide between the have notes, the employed and the unemployed the healthy and the sick. (qtd. in Subasic and Reynolds 247)

Saving of Aboriginal cultures around the world is very important because they include knowledge collected by the human beings over thousands of years. The Yanomami tribals of Brazil, for example, use 500 species of plant for food, medicine and for building hunting and fishing material (Goodman and Grig 16). Once the Yanomani culture becomes extinct their knowledge of these medicinal plants will become extinct.

Similarly the knowledge of the Australian Aborigines is important for even the whites. Once Normal Phantom decides to go back to the sea the white people also feel happy because "their sons would be safe at sea too" and once they learn the
art of surviving in the sea they "would become invincible like Norm" (Carpentaria 230). When Normal goes back to sea even the whites are happy:

Quietly the town celebrated Norm, the fisherman’s fisherman’s return to sea. Years ago, before he stopped fishing, Norm’s relationship with sea had been a beacon of light to others. His understated prowess in maritime adventures had led all nature of mature men to believe that they lived in good company of a sea wizard in God’s own country, and once again, simply from living in close proximity to Norm’s prickly bush camp, his good luck will naturally flow onto all others who were fishing too. The pressure imposed from the weight of seamen’s graves lifted. All negative thoughts disappeared. There was no longer an ocean full of bad omens and impending deaths. Norm made it safe for others. (Carpentaria 313)

Normal Phantom has extraordinary capabilities of surviving in the sea. But these capabilities are not supernatural; rather they have been learnt from the people. These qualities have been cultivated over the generations and have been transmitted to Normal from his ancestors. It is clear that these extraordinary qualities are heritage of humanity and they showcase how human beings have learnt to live and survive in the difficult circumstances. Normal himself knows his qualities:

I am the best fisherman that ever breathed or that I can talk to the birds for company and I follow the tracks made by the stars so I never get lost and sometimes I go away fishing and never come back until people forget my name? (Carpentaria 292)

All these extraordinary qualities would have vanished with Normal because he was not interested in transmitting these to the next generation. But when Normal goes for burial of Elias in the sea, he is led by the sea to an island where he finds his grandson Bala, son of his estranged son Will Phantom. Thus Elias paves the way for reconciliation of the father and son. In the process Normal also finds a student in Bala, his grandson, to preserve his knowledge of sea (Carpentaria 507).

In the novel, Normal Phantom and Will Phantom represent the two different generations of the Aborigines. Normal’s generation is passive and is not ready to do
anything to change their fate and remain aloof to the oppression; bears it silently
developing psychological problems. On the other hand, Will Phantom is an active
individual who wants to change the conditions of his people. Like his father, he does
not choose to confine himself in the room, rather he actively opposes the mine. It is
the job of Elias, the ancestor to bring both these generations together to redeem their
land and their culture.

Earlier the Aborigines were not well versed with the European technology; it
took almost two centuries to become well versed with white man's destructive
things. In *Carpentaria*, Will Phantom and his mates use that technology to destroy
the mine. On the other hand Normal Phantom, the traditional Aboriginal elder brings
the cyclone which destroys the town of Desperance and brings the land in its
original condition and restores it in the form it was before the white settlement.

The novel shows the conditions of the Aborigines before the deliverance of
historic apology by Kevin Rudd. The Labour Prime Minister delivered an
unconditional apology to the members of stolen generations in the Parliament on 13
February 2008:

That today we honour the indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest
continuing cultures in human history.

We reflect on their past mistreatment. We reflect in particular on the
mistreatment of those who were stolen generations this blemished
chapter in our nation's history.

The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in
Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving
forward with confidence to the future.

We apologise for the laws and policies of successive parliaments and
government that have inflicted profound grief suffering and loss on
four fellow Australians.

We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander Children for their families, their communities and their
country.

For the pain, suffering and hurt of these stolen generations their
descendant and for their families left behind, we say sorry. And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and proud culture we say sorry.

We the parliament of Australia respectfully request that this apology be received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation.

For the future we take heart, resolving that this new page in the this history of our great continent can now be written we today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians. ("Kevin Rudd says sorry")

Kevin Rudd's apology created a very positive atmosphere among the Aborigines and around the world. The Stolen Generations Alliance received emails from many countries torn apart by war in Africa, and eastern Nations who told that they gathered in their "communities and together watched the apology" (Fejo king 137). Similarly a person of Papua New Guinea took the Apology DVD and showed it to his family. Soon the whole village gathered to see it and the person who brought it was asked to interpret it. At the end of "the viewing there were lengthy discussions around the history of Australia, the stolen generations disbelief that these practices had been enacted that the Apology had been delivered and the possible paths Australia might take from here (Fejo king 137).

The Aborigines were also optimistic that things will change after the apology. The Apology meant the acknowledgement of historical wrongs assured them that things will not repeat, but the optimism was short lived. According to Kevin Rudd the Apology was made in a "true spirit of reconciliation." In the apology he said:

Last Year I made a commitment to the Australian people that if we formed the next government of the commonwealth we would in parliament say sorry to the stolen generation. Today I honour that commitment ("Kevin Rudd says sorry").

In fact, the apology offered by Kevin Rudd remained hollow words only. In his apology, he apologized for the laws and policies of the previous government, but
he did not do anything to repeal those draconian laws and policies which were still in force during this tenure. One of the most horrible among them was the policy of Northern Territory intervention initiated by John Howard Government.

The Northern Territory National Emergency response was a package of changes to welfare provision, law enforcement and other measures introduced by Howard Government in response to the claims of rampant child sexual abuse in Northern Territory Aboriginal communities ("Northern Territory National Emergency Response"). The package was a response to the Little Children are Sacred report. In August 2007, Australian parliament approved $587 million package. The key measures were:

- Introducing widespread alcohol restrictions on Northern Territory Aboriginal land;
- Enforcing school attendance by linking income support and family assistance payments to school attendance for all people living on Aboriginal land and providing meals for children at school at parents' cost;
- Introducing compulsory health checks for all Aboriginal children to identify and treat health problems and any effects of abuse;
- Acquiring townships prescribed by Australian Government through five years leases including payments of just terms compensation;
- As part of immediate emergency response increasing policing levels in prescribed communities;
- Scrapping the permit systems for common areas, road corridors and air strips for prescribed communities an Aboriginal land. ("Social Justice Report 2007")

The Intervention has played havoc with the lives of Aborigines. According to Professor John Altman, “The basic liberties of Aboriginal people were suspended and a draconian and paternalistic state project of improvement was launched to "Stabilize, normalize and then exit" these communities in the name of the children” (“NT intervention three years on”). The government progress report has proved that
the intervention is indeed draconian. January to July 2009 report indicates that enrolments are up slightly in the school, but attendance has declined very slight (-0.3%) despite the nutrition programmes at 65 school. On health, hospitalization for children aged 0-5 years are down, but crime has gone up, alcohol substance abuse, drug related incidents, domestic violence and assault reportage and convictions have gone up ("NT intervention three years on"). The most disturbing fact about the Northern Territory intervention is increase in the number of attempted suicides. According to a report “the number of attempted suicides in the communities affected by the federal intervention in Northern Territory has doubled in four years. The latest Closing the Gap Monitoring Report…shows the number of attempted suicides and self-harm cases in remote Territory communities has risen from 109 in 2007-2008, to 229 in 2010-2011" (Horn and McNally).

Carpentaria makes it clear that the decisions like Northern Territory Intervention are taken because of racism that is still rampant in the Australian society. While describing the white man’s attitude towards the convoy of Mozzie Fishman, she writes: “who knew why there were boongs squatting down on the riverbank?” (Carpentaria 130) The word “boong” is italicized because it is a racist word used for the Aborigines. The novel shows that the white people hate the Aborigines and consider them “dirty people” (Carpentaria 130). So the decisions like Northern Territory Intervention are not based on facts, rather they are taken because of the mental constructs.

It is important to note that the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) has also criticised the policy of Northern Territory Intervention. The report said that despite, “Australia seeing itself as a country without racism, laws such as the NT intervention” showed that racism had become "embedded in Australian life." The report worsened health outcomes for children and psychologically scarred Aboriginal people by branding them paedophiles (Robson and Left).

Another very powerful organization to criticise the Northern Territory Intervention is World Council of Churches. The Living Letters team sent by the World Council of Churches found that the intervention was discriminatory. The
report called *Ampe Apelyernemane Meke Mekarle* "Little children are sacred" was commissioned by local Northern Territory government but the Australian Government, did not wait for their response and decided to act on its own. The Living Letters team claims:

The Intervention policies brought much shame to Aboriginal people. The nature of the policies and much of the discussion at the time implied that they were the cause of their own disadvantage. At a practical level the "Intervention" had a severe impact on daytoday life. For example people were not able to spend their money how they wanted and felt shame at having shopkeepers telling them they were not able to buy some items. They also felt embarrassed that much of the discourse implied all Aboriginal people were alcoholics and paedophiles. In fact, one of the first actions the federal government took was to place a sign at the entrance to every community prohibiting alcohol and pornography in those communities. The government used claims of a paedophilia ring in the Northern Territory to justify the intervention, "but did not include a sufficient amount of consultation and negotiation with the Aboriginal community in the investigation of these allegations and resolution of the situations. ("Statement on the situation of Indigenous Peoples of Australia")

It is important to note that Howard Government and successive Australian Government have read only that part of *Little Children are Sacred* report which suited them. The report also found:

- Most Aboriginal people are willing and committed to solving problems and helping their children. They are also eager to better educate themselves;

- Aboriginal people are not the only victims and not the only perpetrators of sexual abuse;

- Much of the violence and sexual abuse occurring in Territory communities is a reflections of past, current and continuing social
problems which have developed over decades;

- The combined effects of poor health, alcohol and drug abuse, unemployment, gambling, pornography, poor education and housing and a general loss of identity and control have contributed to violence and sexual abuse in many forms;

- Existing Government programmes to help Aboriginal people break the cycle of poverty and violence need to work better. There is not enough coordination and communication between government departments and agencies and this is causing a break down in services and poor crisis intervention improvement in health and social services are desperately needed;

- Programmes need to have enough funds and resources to be a long term commitment. (qtd. in "Social Justice Report 2007")

John Howard and later Kevin Rudd ignored these points of the reports. The Rudd Government's failure to repeal the "Intervention" despite unfavourable report given by Government agencies sends a signal that the Apology was only a farce. Martin Renes claims that the Apology was offered “so as to create the adequate political climate for the intervention to continue” (112). Renes quotes Raimond Gaita who had written that Rudd's pledge "to apologise to the Aborigines for wrong done to them since settlement would mean nothing if it were not part of a practical concern to alleviate the material and psychological misery of many of the Aboriginal communities" (112). Rudd's apology did not do any good to the Aborigines, but only gave them a short term hope that things will improve. Rudd did apologise to the Aborigines, but did not do anything to improve the condition of the Aborigines.

Alexis Wright is satirical while describing the living conditions of the Aborigines in Desperance. Her one sentence sums it up: “A fish lives far better off than a dry old blackfella from Desperance” (Carpentaria 256). The people live in shabby homes which are made of dump and remain “dry” (Carpentaria 14) in rainy season in such homes is a challenge. In fact, Wright makes clear that so far reconciliation has been an empty slogan and the conditions of the Aborigines have worsened. Marcia Langton too states that the Aborigines are falling in abysmal
poverty and underdevelopment highlighting:

The unassailable facts in hundreds of impoverished Aboriginal communities across remote Australia radically shortened lives; the highest national rates of unemployment; widespread violence, endemic alcohol and substance abuse; the lowest national levels of education; the life long morbidity for hapless citizens suffering from heart disease nutrition and life style related diseases such as diabetes.

(158)

It is very clear that reconciliation has become an empty slogan without any substance. Kevin Rudd tendered an Apology, but that Apology turned out to be a lip service only and failed to do anything which could ameliorate the situation.

The problem in Australia's that most of the people remain in a mode where they negate the cruelty that was perpetrated on the Natives of Australia in the past and without acknowledging the past it is almost impossible to change the present. There are people who are fighting a lost battle against "black armband" historians like Charles Rowley and Henry Reynolds. Keith Windschulttle has shown an uncanny ability to distort the facts about the history of Australia and has tried to prove that settlement in Australia was largely peaceful. In fact, he blames Aborigines for senseless violence against the whites:

It was a tragedy the (Tasmanian) Aborigines adopted such senseless violence. Their principal victims were themselves. Their violence, moreover, was criminal and not "guerilla warfare" or any other sort of organised resistance to the European invasion of their island. According to Windschuttle, the reactions of the Aborigines to their well meaning white neighbours were senseless murder and plunder. The real tragedy of Aborigines was not British colonization per se but that their society was on the one hand so internally dysfunctional and on the other hand, so incompatible with the looming presence of the rest of the world (qtd. in Bratlinger 663).

At the first instance, Keith Windschuttle's charge that Aborigines killed the whites seems implausible because the whites were better armed than the Aborigines.
Research done by Lyndall Ryan and Henry Reynolds etc. has shown that the Tasmanian Aborigines were brutally murdered by the whites. Robert Hughes has called the eradication of the Tasmanian Aborigines as the only “true genocide in English colonial history”(120).

People like Keith Windschuttle cannot be blamed when the head of the state, Prime Minister Howard was of the opinion that child removal policy was "benign" (qtd. in Kaplan Myrth 73). Howard did not apologise for the stolen generations because he considered the policy was beneficial to the Aborigines. He is supported in his views by people like Andrew Bolt who challenged Professor Robert Manne to name just ten children who were stolen by the authorities. Professor Manne gave him the list of the names, but Andrew Bolt dismissed all the justified their removal on health and other reasons (Bolt, Andrew).

It is certain that people like Howard and Bolt are not a few; rather their views are covertly shared by many. According to philosopher Raymond Gaita “reconciliation” can be seen as “truthful dialogue” or “fully valid conversation” where evil done to indigenous peoples are fully acknowledged and they see and accept this acknowledgment” (qtd. in Whitlock 200). But the irony of the situation is that people like Howard and Bolt are not ready to admit that Aborigines were badly treated in the past.

One thing that is important in the case of reconciliation is that reconciliation cannot be brought by the government alone rather it has to be practised by people individually. Government can only frame policies and providence conditions which are conducive for reconciliation, but the major work has to be carried out by the individuals. In fact, Wright also shows that officially Desperance is also living in reconciliation era, but the reconciliation is not taking place. The whites are still living in colonial hangover. This makes Kevin Rudd's apology a symbolic act where the head of the state is feeling sorry, but the general population is not.

Kevin Rudd may have apologized to the Aborigines but all the people did not welcome the apology. The above statements show that many people are not convinced that they should feel sorry for anything. For example Moree Plains Shire voted down Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s apology; in a “resolution the shire said
that they do not support it and there was not need to support it” (Anderson, Michael). So is clear that in order to implement the intent of public statements and policies of reconciling with the Aborigines other process should be initiated. Such processes include changing negative attitudes towards indigenous people as well societal structure that maintains them. This change needs to take place at all levels, “at the individual level and at social level” (Dudgeon and Pickett 83).

In fact, many researches indicate that reconciliation is a never ending task. The process of reconciliation “must continually be reinitiated even as one believes it has been accomplished when liberation has been reached in one place oppression will show itself somewhere else …Liberation is then a constant battle, and critique, democracy and participation are means to achieve it” (Montero 529).

The common Australian people were conditioned for a long time with the negatives images of the Aborigines. So it was almost an impossible task to uncondition them in only ten years. This “de-ideologization” (Montero 526) will take a long time to take place. Montero describes de-ideologization as a “process of constituting and reconstructing an entire consciousness capable of understanding of the world one lives in and its circumstances as a totality” (Montero 525). Alexis Wright shows that the main barrier to reconciliation remains the mindset of the people. Carpentaria shows that the people still believe that the Aborigines are dirty people:

So, there was no bringing out of Red Roses box of Australian chocolates to share but instead, there were gawking people wherever there were shabby cars full of black men filing into a town. All we want to do, the residents chimed to each other behind locked doors in a mighty big hurry, is to guard the decency of clean-living people. (Carpentaria 130)

This shows that the white people still carry the baggage of racist constructs about Aboriginal people. A psychological change must take place for the real reconciliation to take place.

But Australia seems to have done exactly opposite with the Northern Territory intervention and has strengthened the negative stereotypes of the Aborigines. The
review of the emergency response (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and indigenous Affairs, 2008) found a few thing of note:

- The Northern Territory Racial Discrimination Act 1975, which was repealed has not been re-instated.
- The quasi-military response to little children are sacred report has not been rolled back and the army, police and social workers are still in place.
- The anticipated huge numbers of suspected child abuse case have not been uncovered.
- The Rudd government (the Gillard Government) has not rolled back income management.
- Aboriginal people not have the additional housing they need.
- Aboriginal people have been disrespected and disempowered.
- Aboriginal men have been vilified as paedophiles and the abusers without having the opportunity to defend themselves with the non Aboriginal men mentioned in the Little Children are Sacred report getting off without a mention; and,
- Aboriginal parents who have been doing the right thing for their families have never been recognised and rewarded. (Fejo king 139).

All these things show that the Reconciliation can only happen if the Aborigines are given the right to self-determination too. At present the Australian Government and its officials decide what is best for the Aborigines. Most of these people are insensitive to Aboriginal needs and cultural practices. The Aborigines have to be the part of decision making process. Aboriginal political advocates argue that “reconciliation and Aboriginal self-determination” (Kaplan-Myrth 74) must go hand in hand. The outsiders should not decide what is best for the Aborigines, rather the Aborigines should be given the chance to take their own decisions.

Aboriginal literature has to play an important role in the process of reconciliation. According to the noted Aboriginal writer Mudrooroo:

   Indigenous literature in English is part of process of reconciliation,
for Indigenous literature begins as a cry from the heart directed at the invaders of our land. It is a cry for justice and better deal, a cry for understanding and an asking to be understood. (Mudrooroo, Milli Milli Wangka 2)

It is important to note that most of the Australians still believe in the stereotypes perpetrated by the colonial discourses where the Aborigines were portrayed as “stone age” people. Most of them do not have an experience of a direct contact with the Aborigines. So the works of literature like Plains of Promise and Carpentaria do an important job of making the people aware of the real conditions of the Aborigines and hence sensitize the mainstream Australian people about the plight of the Natives. The novels make it clear that the Aborigines are not basically notorious as portrayed by the narratives, rather they have become like this because of oppression they have faced for centuries. A person who will read Plains of Promise will develop a firsthand understanding of what happened with the children of stolen generations. Similarly a reader of Carpentaria will realise that the Aborigines are still living in a virtual hell and all the facilities that are available to the whites do not exist for the Aborigines.