CHAPTER 3
RE-LOCATING THE ABORIGINAL LANDSCAPE

Landscape is intimately linked with the new way of seeing the world...

D. Cosgrave

Landscape among the Aboriginal people was never a piece of land or just a panorama of beauty; nor was land there to benefit them economically. On the contrary, it reflects their spiritual and religious beliefs. It is their ‘spirit country’, which has been misinterpreted by the Europeans as ‘terra nullis’. For the Aboriginal people, landscape reflects their spiritual and religious beliefs. Their lives were shaped by their Dreamtime stories, which explains to them how the world came to be and how they must cohabit with nature. Their existence was strictly governed by their traditions – something that is evident even today.

The Aboriginal people continue to visit their sacred landscapes, which act as a continuation to their mystical union with the land and their ancestors. As reflected in their traditional songs, landscape is both occupational and ideological. It symbolised life and a view of the world, ‘in which humans and natural species were all part of the same ongoing life force.’ In the eyes of the Aboriginal people, the Australian landscape is a ‘myth-evoking’ one.

However, in the last 200 years, this view regarding landscape has undergone tremendous changes. With the arrival of the
Europeans, the Aboriginal people's concept and interpretation of landscape went through a lot of changes. The European concept of landscape was different from what the Aboriginal people believed in. As reflected in their poetry, the Dreamtime landscape stories have been replaced by European policies. The 'Europeanising' of the landscape, led to spiritual annihilation, which had drastic consequences not only among the Aboriginal people, but the Europeans as well.

The uprooting from their ancestral land to the cities led to a complete change in their ways of living and interpreting their new landscape—the city. Thus comparison with the past and the effort to remain traditional and save what was left of their 'myth evoking' landscape marked a new beginning in Aboriginal poetry. This belief with regards to land and landscape is evident in all the genres of Aboriginal art. The main aim of poetry was to establish a sense of understanding and respect regarding their views about landscape.

This chapter will look at how the theme of landscape, became an integrated part of Aboriginal poetry. It will examine the significance of landscape as reflected in their oral culture and written literature. It will also compare the concept of landscape before and after the European invasion and how much it has changed in the last 200 years of occupation. It will examine the Aboriginal people's multi-dimensional relationship with landscape and the 'shift' from landscape to citiescape. The 'shift' gave rise to the question of 'accepting' the change in the landscape, which have effected their spiritual and religious beliefs. All this led to attitudinal changes among the Aboriginal people. It has left a deep impact on the way they lived and live.
SIGNIFICANCE OF LANDSCAPE IN ABORIGINAL POETRY

According to Lisa Bellar, “Each one of us is aware of how colonisation has and is still impacting on our lives. All of us know what it is to hurt inside. What is required is to find an effective way through which we can face the traumas, internalised racism...and other forms of abuses.” ¹ The 'effective way', was found in poetry. It enabled them to deal with their pain and 'release' their emotions as well as their social, political and cultural concerns. The Aboriginal people used poetry as a medium to express their views and interpretations about the 'two' landscapes without romanticising it.

Poetry has given a voice to the long silent suffering that the Aboriginal people have undergone. In their poems, one gets a clear view of the Aboriginal people's socio-political aspirations. For Aboriginal people, literature is the "expression of an indigenous minority not only living on the fringes of the majority community, but as a separate nation of people, which until the last two decades was completely under the heels of the oppressors."²

They believed that literature should have a social value not only to the individual, but to the community as well. For the main concern of these writers is to write about their past correctly, keeping the present in mind. According to most of them, the past is there only to explain the present and to postulate ideals for the future. For in the past resides the 'true Aboriginality.'

Poetry (in the written form) was an extension of their rich oral heritage. Once believed to be dying out, many aspects of the oral culture have survived and are flourishing as a literary genre of contemporary Aboriginal life. Aboriginal literature is highly influenced and inspired by 'oral literature'. It forms the backbone of the entire literary genre, history, culture and customs. It is extremely accurate in its interpretations. "There is no cutting or editing in the oral system, owing to the strict requirements of traditional storytelling, cultural lore, and custodian and individual's personal knowledge."3 Thereby oral tradition is considered "far more accurate and important than any form of written history."4

Oral narratives can be 'traditional,' 'semi-traditional' or 'non-traditional.' When one goes deeper, one finds that, oral story and songs work in a multi-dimensional form. They are a major means of 'transmitting and sustaining Aboriginal culture'. Information is transmitted, through 'dialogic transition' in which an array of signifying systems operates simultaneously. On formal ceremonial occasions, performers and audience are both participants. Meaning is assigned to words in the context of dance, ritual gestures, and ground drawings, carving and body paintings. On informal occasions, people might sing songs or recount anecdotes to each other while gathering bush tuckers, or doing their daily chores.

3 Pauline E. Campbell-McLeod, Nallawilli, Sit Down (and Listen) The Dreamtime Stories—An Oral Tradition, p.156
4 Ibid.
Oral tradition thus involves far more than just its set of spoken stories or music. It is in fact, intricately bound with non-verbal communication and also with the broader, dense fabric of social and cultural life. The Aboriginal people had about 250 languages, spoken by 700 distinct tribes, before the arrival of the Europeans. Each was unique and distinct from one another. Through the oral tradition customs, beliefs and laws of the land was passed from one generation to another. They formed a connection between the people, their country and landscape.

The Dreamtime songs and stories reflect the connection that the Aboriginal people had with the landscape. It is part of oral tradition, which is part of the complex spiritual belief system. These stories were deliberately used as 'part of a system of teaching and learning'. It informed them about "the nature of the country, the terrain, the resources, where people should go to find what and when and how; where not to go, what places were dangerous, how to behave in different situations, how to behave towards other people...." With the European invasion, new Dreamtime stories came into being. For example, "stories of islands pushed along by clouds (sailing ships of the 1700s), of invasion by strange men, ghosts, or evil spirits from across the seas (1788-1950s), and of four-footed, hoofed, monstrous creatures with two heads that stink like bunyips and defile nature (men on horses) of 200-30 years ago." 6

Each genre of art represents Dreamtime, in different forms. For example, the stories are 'verbal' representation, art is visual

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6 Pauline E. Campbell-McLeod, n.3, pp.156-57
representation, customs represents practical form, music represents acoustic form, totems represent spiritual form and the land represents physical form. These stories form an integral part of Aboriginal people land and culture. It is their form of education. It followed strictly the laws pertaining to traditional story telling, cultural lore, custodianship and individual knowledge. For example, their stories regarding the universe, the stars, sky and the earth have contributed to the creation of myth-evoking landscape.

With the advent of the Europeans, Aboriginal people suffered severe cultural disruption and displacement. The last 200 years have been one of confusion, complexities, and displacement for the Aboriginal people. Waves of frontier violence, disease and missionaries who banned traditional languages and ceremonies locked up the Aboriginal people in their own country. Oral tradition was seriously jeopardised. The Europeans, failed to recognise the richness of oral tradition, and considered it to be a sign of the 'backward, primitive, and ignorant.' The Aboriginal people writing—sand drawing, body scars, painting, and carving—was basically graphic in style, which the Europeans failed to decode. Thus they labelled them as 'illiterates,' simply because they were ignorant about the Western 'technique of reading and writing script.'

Under adverse social and political circumstances, the Aboriginal people were forced to learn the language of their invaders. The shift from oral to written started during the late 1970s. The first piece of 'writing' by an Aboriginal is presumed to be Bennelong's letter to the steward of Lord Sydney, in 1796. Bennelong did not follow the Western norm of a 'one-to-one'
address, and dictated the letter as if “everyone he speaks to/about are in each other’s physical proximity, and thus can be spoken to so.” This letter reflects the oral tradition that has been ingrained in the Aboriginal people learning system.

By the late eighteenth-century, texts were produced by dictation and other collaborative modes. Their language was recorded and published by the ethnographers, missionaries, government officials, explorers and historians. During the initial years, most of the works were written by government officials, on behalf of Aboriginal people, often ‘quoting or paraphrasing’ their words. In this way, Aboriginal people made their entry into texts authored mostly by the Europeans.

It was only in the year 1964 that Aboriginal people witnessed the beginning of contemporary Aboriginal literature. The writings of Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Kevin Gilbert and Jack Davis, paved the way for Aboriginal literature to have a voice in the Western form. They are seen as the founders of contemporary Aboriginal literature. They were the products of ‘assimilation revolting against assimilation.’ Through their writing they have successfully left their mark in all genres of literature.

They all shared a number of common concerns and methods. They called “for justice and land rights, challenged racist stereotypes, dismantled exclusionary models of national identity and corrected biased historical narratives of progress and peaceful settlement they also insisted on the continuity of past and present. Not only had the past left indelible scars on the present,
new wrongs were perpetrated against Aboriginal Australians every day."

The new phase in Aboriginal people history thus witnessed a great deal of Aboriginal creative writing in English, as did the politicisation of its cause. Their poetry is rooted in their oral traditions, which have deeply influenced their written tradition in English. In both the cases, landscape and history has been the most inspirational themes in poetry. These two themes has become an integral part of poetry. Through their poems, the poets were able to rectify the lopsided interpretation of the landscape by the Europeans. They used different styles of writing poetry, both as a means to protest against the atrocities of the Australian government and also save their oral literature.

By skilful interplay of words and situations and using subtle hints, the new club of Aboriginal poets strove to bring about a change in their interpretation of landscape. What was 'bush' to the Europeans, was for the Aboriginal people their 'ancestral' land, which was a constant source of inspiration and knowledge. Today, landscape is no longer attached only to culture, but has a strong political meaning attached to it. Most of their poetry is about how to preserve the remaining landscape of the 'past' and also to find a link between the present and past landscape.

The changes, which the landscapes have undergone in the last two hundred years, in the hands of the Europeans, have been

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the most discussed and disturbed part among the Aboriginal poets. These changes uprooted them from the land of their ancestors, and compelled them to relocate, in the new urban set up. Their association with the landscape was not like that of the Europeans; to them it was their identity.

The Aboriginal poets' main aim was to correct the misinterpretation of the landscape along with the different notions attached with it, not only among the Europeans, but also among the urban Aboriginal people. They emphasised on landscape and its changing symbolism and interpretation. It has brought to light the importance of it in the Aboriginal society, even after two hundred years of occupation by the Europeans. Landscape is evident in every part of their existing culture and most of all in their thought process; for this has provided them the strength to survive and save guard 'their' landscape, not only for their community, but for 'their' nation as well. These poets have played a leading role in the Aboriginal people struggle. They were able to develop a new awareness of nationhood among their own people by bringing a balance between confrontation and accusation.

The basic aims of Aboriginal poetry were three-fold. Firstly, it wanted to break the stereotypical and negative image created by the Whites with regard to the interpretation of landscape. Secondly, to interpret and re-write the past using their own perception, dismantling the motivated narratives of the colonisers. It contests the veracity and integrity of the image, which the Whites portray even today. Thirdly, it wanted to re-establish the concept of Dreamtime in the new urban set-up.
The poems have drawn a parallel with the landscape and the Aboriginal people notion of identity in the Australian context. The landscape described in their oral songs and the one in their poems, is a mixture of past and present images of landscape. Their search for the 'past' landscape in the new concrete urban set up, reminds them of their painful past. The constant shift between the 'two' images of landscape, has given a new dimension to the concept of landscape among the Aboriginal people. Today, the ancient landscape "exists more in time than in space, the best having overlaid by two hundred years of European culture and development."\(^8\)

Their adjustment to the urban landscapes brings out the complexities that govern the interpretation of landscape in the Aboriginal society. As Denis Haskell states, "White people have the arrogant attitude of saying that their way of life, their white, western, and straight-line of thinking of how reality should be described is the only one."\(^9\) The majority accepted and believed the fact that the Aboriginal people were unable to decide for themselves. The dominant and common theme in all their writings besides history is landscape. It has become inseparable from Aboriginal literature. It has developed a strong historical sense, which gave a crystal clear view of the social reality of the past as well as the present.

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\(^9\) Jack Davis and Bob Hodge, (ed.), n.5, p.4
RE-SHAPING 'THE DREAMTIME' LANDSCAPES

The original inhabitants of Australia, the Aboriginal people lived in complete accordance with nature. They were uniquely altruistic, egalitarian and were characterised by a rich ceremonial culture and religious life. They emphasised mystical communion with the environment rather than individual achievement and human life to be a part of the natural cycle. The happiness and gentleness of the Aboriginal society indicates a traditional naturalistic culture.

They have occupied Australia for more than 60,000 years and have developed strategies to survive in diverse ecologies, ranging from dry deserts to snow-covered mountains and tropical rainforests. They were semi-nomadic hunters and food gatherers and nature played an important role in their economic life. They chose to move systematically across the land, coming to nature's garden rather than setting out their own plots. The Aboriginal people did not farm in the conventional style nor did they fence i.e., domesticated animals.

The Aboriginal people used the 'firestick' to control the animals and at the same time increase the productive capacity of the land. Fire was crucial to the Aboriginal people and they managed the land by using fire very skilfully. As Major Mitchell describes, "Fire, grass, kangaroos, and humans inhabitants, seem all dependent on each other for existence in Australia; for anyone of these being wanting, the others could no longer continue." They had intimate knowledge of their surroundings and loved and

16 Australian archaeologist, Rhys Jones, coined the term fire-stick in 1969 to describe the use of fire as a tool by the Aboriginal people.
respected it. Their love reflected a spiritual as well as an economic relationship to the land. The land not only gave life, but it was life itself.

As they moved across the land they saw a richly symbolic and religious world, in every tree, stone, flower, bird and river. They had a non-materialistic attitude towards life. As Captain Cook stated, "They live in tranquillity, which is not disturbed by the inequality of condition. The earth and sea of their own accord furnishes them with all things necessary for life. They covet not magnificent houses, household stuff etc. They lived in warm and fine climate and enjoy every wholesome air."\(^{11}\)

Their lives centred on the concept of Dreaming and the stories, which explain how the world came to be and how they must conduct themselves. It presents a view of the world in which humans and the natural species were all part of the same ongoing life force. They were human, animal, and bird at one and all natural things were in unity.

Throughout Australia, various terms were used to describe Dreaming viz., Djugurba in Western Australia, Bugari in La Grange, Ungud in Ungarinyin, Djunmanggani in Eastern Kimberley, Wongar in north-eastern Arnhem Land. All these words meant a condition of timelessness. They also had important ancestors—the Rainbow Serpent, Wandjina, the Lighting Brother—who lived in the local country in spiritual form generating life. Fig.\(^{12}\) reflects the concept of Dreamtime among the Aboriginal people.

\(^{11}\) S. Stone (ed.), *Aborigines in White Australia* (Melbourne: Heinemann Educational Books, Melbourne, 1974) p.15

Fig 1: The Dreaming as the basis of all aspects of life in traditional Aboriginal societies

To the Aboriginal people, the landscape was not just a tree or rock, but a creation of their ancestors during the Dreamtime period. It is not a chronological concept, like the Biblical Genesis, but refers to an ideology about the creation of the world and also how one must conduct oneself. It implies a code of conduct, pattern of life and a form of behaviour. It also implies custodianship of land, sacred sites,
and acceptance of doctrinal rules. It was a period of 'creation, change, and learning'. It stressed spiritual values and continuity over change. As these lines states:

My image goes deep in the sand
The soil and the rocks and the trees
The souls of my people are here
The birds and the clouds and the breeze
The sun and the moon and the stars....

( Kevin Gilbert "Minister Man"

To them, land was their 'spirit country.' They had an earthbound philosophy. "The earth gave life to a man; gave him his food, language and intelligence; and the earth took him back when he died. A man's 'own country,' even an empty stretch of spinifex, was itself a sacred icon that must remain unscarred. The Aboriginal people trod lightly over the earth; and the less they took from the earth, the less they had to give in return." They viewed life as 'part' of nature, in the same way as trees, animals and birds. All things are intertwined with nature, from days and nights progressing to life and death. As these lines states:

I am the land
I am the trees
I am the rivers
that flows to the seas
joining and moving
encompassing all
blending all parts of me
* stars in my thrall

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13 Kevin Gilbert The Blackside: People Are Legends and Other Poems (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1990), p.8
Life moved in a systematical and cyclical manner. They never imposed themselves on nature, rather they became a part of it and adapted to its changing patterns and demands. The poem further states:

\begin{verbatim}
Binding and weaving
with you who belong
sometime discordant
but part of my song
birds are a whisper
the four breezes croon:
raindrops in melody
all form the tune
of being belonging
\end{verbatim}

Nature is interwoven in all aspect of human life. As mentioned before, for the Aboriginal people landscape was not about beauty, but was a combination of symbols, which "form" the "tune" of "belonging" to the land. Irrespective of whether it is the whisper of the birds or the melody of the "raindrops," all form an integral part of the Aboriginal people life and culture.

\begin{verbatim}
Aglow with the surge
 to life and its passions
to create its urge
in living expression
its total of one
\end{verbatim}

They emphasised on the idea that people are not the centre of the natural universe, but people are part of nature; not above nature nor subjugated to nature. With this belief the Aboriginal people survived the huge diverse biosphere and lived in the land of
'plenty' which was offering them their needs and an identity. As these lines states:

And the I and the tree
and the you and the me
and the rivers and birds
and the rocks that we've heard
sing the songs we are one
I'am the tree you are me
With the land and the sea
We are one life, not three
In the essence of life
We are one transience.

(Kevin Gilbert "Unity"14)

However, the advent of the Europeans led to dislocation and a complete change in the life styles and values of the Aboriginal people. It indirectly led to the disappearance of the traditional systems and culture of the Aboriginal people. The disappearance of the Aboriginal people from the most fertile parts of the continent resulted in death and decay. The dereliction of ancestral lands was like spiritual annihilation to most Aboriginal people, who died 'heart-broken, hungry, and diseased.' As these lines express:

Gone is the rainbow
from the sky
gone is the bird
that can't fly,

Gone is the willow
that can't cry,
gone is the wind
that can't sigh,

14 Ibid., p.73
To the Aboriginal people, the land was 'changeless in entity.' They shared a spiritual bond with the land. The European inconsequent and incomprehensible action uprooted the long link that the Aborigines had with their land. As these lines states:

> A distant rock, a far off land  
> deeply planted stands  
> loyal and grand.  
> Remembrance of timeless years gone by  
> alone at night, the rock will cry.

The emotion in these lines highlights how a "loyal" and "grand" landscape has been stripped of it grandeur. Today, it is remembered with nostalgia, where the landscape is "alone." It also reflects the transition that the Aboriginal people went through. Today, they are searching, in their own land, for a way to connect with 'the' landscape, which was once spontaneously a part of their existence. In trying to strike a link with the past and present landscape, the Aboriginal people are compelled to accept the 'mix' landscape, which is a bitter interpretation of their culture and a lost tradition. As these lines states:

> Hunger for money, stripped the land  
> Mined the Earth in which she's bound  
> Bulldozed the surface, to graze their beef  
> Distorting the Earth in disbelief...

(Elizabeth Brown "Spiritual Land"^16)

The spirituality of the landscape was "stripped" and "bulldozed" for material gain. In its two hundred years of occupation, the Europeans have turned the Aboriginal people's world upside down. The land that was their spirit country and each of the flora and fauna was their ancestors were overlooked for the material gain of the European immigrants.

The irony is that these material gains did not reach the Aboriginal people at all. The suffering they went through is irreparable. Even today, one wonders in "disbelief" as to how and what made the change in the landscape so drastic, that one failed to see beyond material gains. The landscape, which was:

Oh world of wonder and beauty
Went through a drastic change, which was shocking and unbelievable.
You have changed before our eyes
We who live off you, do not understand
What possessed you to authorise
The rape of this land
Gone are the people,
The children of the earth.
Gone from their rituals, and place of their birth...

(Eva Johnson "Land Our Mother"17)

With the introduction of agriculture and animal rearing, there were further changes in the landscape. As mentioned before, the

Aboriginal people were basically food gathers and skilled hunters. As they were not familiar with the European concept of farming and rearing, they were viewed as "primitive and unskilled people who lived off the land without making any effort to improve either their lot or the land."\textsuperscript{18} This image was popularised among all the Europeans, and stayed put for a long time.

"The Aboriginal people do nothing to 'assist nature'. The Europeans alone coaxes and cultivates mother earth and gives unto it the sweat of his brow"\textsuperscript{19} As stated by Barr and Cary, "This popular portrayal was the basis of the European justification for the displacement of the Aboriginal race from their grassland home. If the Aborigine did nothing to improve nature, then the race must give way to those who will...."\textsuperscript{20} As reflected in the following lines:

\begin{quote}
Weep, weep, weep
your resin tears
the men come with their saws
the ripping plough
to maim and slice you,
for the shade you gave
their children
blocks sunshine from the grasses now
the bleating sheep
the cloven hooves of cows
and snuffing pig-marks
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{18} Neil Barr and John Cary, \textit{Greening A Brown Land} (South Melbourne: Macmillan Education Australia, 1992), p.11

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p.12

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p12
The Europeans also cleared large tracks of forest and woodlands, as agriculture and pastoral industry progressed. These tracts had religious significance for the Aboriginal people who felt 'maimed'. They have been sliced and ripped of the land, which represented their ancestors.

On the landscape seem
more aptly fitting to their inner soul
than thou majestic tree
who sculptures not their dreams
or heritage.

(Kevin Gilbert "The Land Clearers"\textsuperscript{21})

The Europeans failed to connect to the landscape, which unlike the Aboriginal people, who were part of an age old "heritage" which have been sculptured for "their dreams." The "majestic trees" were nothing more than good timber. The failure to respect the Aboriginal peoples' beliefs and understand their interpretation of the landscapes, had a long-term effect on the way Europeans gave shape to the landscape, which soon collapsed under the progress.

As a result of all the new activities on their land, the Aboriginal people, who once occupied the whole land and led a semi-nomadic life, were compelled to turn to grazing and farming. They were all caught in a "spiritual no-man's land, vacillating between the frontier hostility of tribes for whom the land was fully

\footnote{Kevin Gilbert, \textit{Black from the Edge} (South Melbourne: Hyland House, 1994), p.40}
committed and that of the usurpers overrunning their former lands." 22

Whatever traditional culture existed among the Aboriginal people, before the arrival of the Europeans, began to change with time. It became more complex in the face of numerous policies by the Australian government to civilise the savage. As the poem states:

Gone now and scattered  
The scrubs are gone, the hunting and the laughter.  
The eagle is gone, the emu and the kangaroo are gone from this place.  
The bora ring is gone.  
The corroboree is gone.  
And we are going.

(Oodgeroo Noonuccal "We are Going"  23)

During the era of protection, 'Reserves' were set-up in order to 'civilise' the 'conquered' people who 'lacked direction'. The settlements attempted to convert, destroy, displace, isolate, and eventually assimilate the Aboriginal people from their 'indolent wandering' and transform them from 'degraded people to the status of god-fearing, hard-working Christians'. These reserves, was also the starting of an urban' life for the aboriginal people. They were no longer "the hunting and the laughter" of the emu,

22 The Aboriginal people still continue to be caught in this dichotomy even 200 years later.

23 Oodgeroo Noonuccal, My People (Milton: Jacaranada Press, 1964) p.25
kangaroo or the eagle. The ‘bora ring’\textsuperscript{24} as well as the ‘corroboree’ is also gradually disappearing.

They were loosing the ‘link’ with the land, which their ancestors inhabited. The Aboriginal people wanted to continue to occupy their land. They literally lived off it. They used its flora and fauna for their survival. These reserves further deteriorated the Aboriginal landscape and also introduced them to the European way of life—the urban way of life to be more specific. They were forced to live an urban style of living, which they were not familiar with. They were chained to a life, which was alien to them and did not go with the landscape, in both practical and theoretic manner. As these lines states:

\begin{quote}
The long low sweeping ground
The horizon black in starlight
And somewhere now the sound
Of a child’s cry in the night.
\end{quote}

By implementing innumerable laws, Aboriginal people were forced to stay in these reserves. Initially, these settlements were for mixed Aboriginal people, later it indiscriminately engulfed all the Aboriginal people. They appeared like ‘concentration’ camps. The landscape was monotonous, and the only sound one heard was “a child’s cry in the night.”

\begin{quote}
They stir a fire is dying,
The sparks fly upward blending
With night and a people crying.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Bora rings} are circles of foot-hardened earth surrounded by raised embankments. They were generally constructed in pairs having a bigger and a smaller circle. The rings are joined by a sacred walkway. They were used during the initiation ceremony.
O where, O where is the ending?

The mind forgets tomorrow
Eyes grow dull with the years,
Afraid of the heights of sorrow
And to fathom the depth of fears.

(Jack Davis "Aboriginal Reserves"

Unknown to the Europeans, they had strong emotional and spiritual ties with the land. "Here were their sacred sites—the home of their Dreamtime ancestors, whose spirits still dwelt among their rocks, rivers and caves and natural features had been the setting for the great deeds of these ancestral heroes who might have given shape to the various clans." As these lines states:

I once walked along the trails of my Ancestors through deserts, mountains, rivers and sands where food was plenty, where goanna tracks led to waterholes where the bandicoot whistled her name I gathered nuts from the kurrajongs tree and suckled wild honey I swam with catfish in billabongs of water lilies and tasted cooked food from ovens underground

It narrates a land of plenty. There were nuts, honey, and food from the "under-ground oven." The Aboriginal people ancestors passed a landscape of "mountains, rivers, and sand," where the

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"bandicoot"\textsuperscript{27} whistled and swamped with the 'catfish'. It presented a landscape that is close to the European concept of Eden.

\begin{verse}
I smelled the promise of the winds 
along trials of the dreaming 
and my mother's footsteps embedded in sand 
I have walked along the trials of my ancestors 
that now have blown away with the winds of time 
only in memory will I walk along the trials 
only in memory will they remain
\end{verse}

(Eva Johnson "Trials"\textsuperscript{28})

The landscape had imprints of their ancestors, which have disappeared with time. It has left a permanent stamp in the "memory" of its people. The Aboriginal people saw no reason as to why they should change their way of life or accept the beliefs and standards of Western civilisation, which radically differed from theirs. They put great energy into their religious ceremonies. Most tribes believed the world was made not by a single god, but by a number of their 'ancestral creation-spirits during the primal creation period.' They believed in re-incarnation. As these lines states:

\begin{verse}
The desert wind, the harsh sun, your tribal land 
Is part of you, your very soul 
How can a stranger understand?...
\end{verse}

(Jack Davis "Yadabooka"\textsuperscript{29})

\textsuperscript{27} Bandicoot is a medium-size terrestrial marsupial. It is an omnivore.

\textsuperscript{28} Eva Johnson, n.26, p.122

\textsuperscript{29} Jack Davis, n.25, p.21

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To the Europeans, the holy places of the Aboriginal people were not to be taken seriously as they were not man-made, but merely 'swathes of nature.' To the Aboriginal people the holy places of the Europeans seemed trivial, because 'their shrines were 'merely man-made.' For a long time, most Aboriginal people failed to understand the 'story of the stable' and Christmas.

They never understood why the missionaries forbade their innocent sacrifices. They slaughtered no victims, animals or humans. Instead, when they wished to thank the earth for its gifts, they would simply slit a vein in their forearms and let their own blood splatter on the ground." According to the Aboriginal people, "To wound the earth is to wound yourself, and if others wound the earth, they are wounding you. The land should be left untouched: as it was in the Dreamtime when the Ancestors sang the world into existence."30

Thereby, the change in the landscape, its meaning and interpretation have undergone radical change. The Dreaming landscape lost its tracks in the by-lanes of reserves and policies. The interpretation has acquired a political tone, which has overshadowed the aesthetics interpretation. In the present urban scenario, the interpretation of landscape is squashed between the past and present interpretation along with political, social and cultural conditions.

THE MATRIX OF LANDSCAPE AMONG URBAN ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

At present, a large number the Aboriginal people have been de-tribalised and urbanised. They live in the cities where they are far removed from Aboriginal traditions and culture. Their contemporary situation, with specific problems, is a consequence of their having a past that is still 'present' for them. The world's oldest culture, their relationship to the land and its glorious past has become complex and confusing. The urbanisation of the Aboriginal people brings to light the changing concept of landscape and its interpretation among the Aboriginal people themselves today. For the Aboriginal people, landscape was not just part of their culture. It symbolised their existence and identity. It continues to be a part of their life, but with a difference:

In my dreams I hear my tribe
Laughing as they hunt and swim,
But dreams are shattered by rushing car,
By grinding tram and hissing train,
And I see no more my tribe of old

After 200 years of suffering, the Aboriginal people’s “dreams” are shattered by cars, trams, and trains. The laughter of their tribe is heard only in the dream. The landscape of their ancestors is no longer to be seen. The landscape, which their ancestors made is now a distant past.

As I walk alone in the teeming town.
I have seen corroboree
Where that factory belches smoke;
Here where they have memorial park
One time ludras dug for yams;
One time our dark children played
There where the railway yards are now

The new landscape has replaced the old. The factories, "memorial park" and "railway yards," have replaced the place where once the Aboriginal people dug yams and their children played. The town is a reminder of the shift, which the Aboriginal people were forced to take.

And where I remember the didgeridoo
Calling to us to dance and play,
Offices now, neon lights now,
Bank and shop and advertisement now,
Traffic and trade of the bust town...

(Oodgeroo Noonuccal "Then and Now"31)

The poem highlights the present attitude of the Aboriginal people towards the landscape and also the landscape they live in. It reflects the aspirations and frustrations of the Aboriginal people today. The need for the Aboriginal people, to link with their past landscape is vital for their present survival. For then only will they be able to survive and to a certain extent lessen their sense of rootlessness. The playing of the 'didgeridoo'32 in the urban landscape depicts the confusion and chaos that the Aboriginal people are facing in their new landscape.

Landscape strongly reflects the social, economical, political, and cultural links that the Aboriginal people have. It is always there in their mind. They cannot de-link themselves with the landscape,

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31 Oodgeroo Noonuccal, We Are Going (Brisbane: The Jacaranda Press, 1964), p.18
32 Didgeridoo is a musical (wind) instrument used by the Aboriginal people.
which they have 'heard' from their elders. Landscape is imbibed in them and managed to present a crystal clear view of the Aboriginal people's condition and there search for an identity. The main emphasis was to express their views and interpretations about the 'two' landscapes without romanticising it. As these lines states:

\[ \text{Imported trees are alien} \\
\text{and the fairest English rose} \\
even after generation \\
\text{still remains an English rose} \]

(Kevin Gilbert "The Blackside"\textsuperscript{33})

The poem reflects the complexity with regards to the views regarding landscape by the Aboriginal people and the Europeans. They are yet to claim the landscape wholly without any changes. The communication gap between both the groups has evoked different responses with regards to the landscape. The poem also brings to light the dispossession, brutality and hypocrisy, which the Europeans have inflicted on the land. The drastic change led to the uprooting of the Aboriginal people and the extinction of the flora and fauna which was/is vital to keep the Australian landscape different and authentic. For landscape and culture are interlinked; as the poem states:

\[ \text{Hot day dies, cook times comes.} \\
\text{Now between the sunset and the sleep-time...} \\
\text{Dancing corroboree.} \\
\text{Like spirit things in from the great surrounding dark} \\
\text{Ghost-gums dimly seen stand at the edge of light...} \\
\text{Errie the scene in leaping firelight,} \]

\textsuperscript{33} Kevin Gilbert, n.13, p.3
Errie the sounds in that wild setting,
As naked dancers weave stories of the tribe
Into corroboree.

(Oodgeroo Noonuccal “Corroboree”34)

The poem reflects the inner voice of the 'urban' Aboriginal people against a "great surrounding dark" landscape. It highlights the happiness and gentleness of the Aboriginal society, where humane life was always considered to be part of the natural cycle of life. The inevitable imposition of European values totally destroyed the Aboriginal people’s rich and meaningful traditional life. The poem “errie” along with the 'lost culture' of the Aboriginal people, also reflects the marginalisation in mainstream Australia. Corroboree also reflects the culture, which survived against all odds. As Gilbert states:

I have been here before, my distant life
an image from a fleeting childhood dream
the quondong trees, the wild brush-turkey’s nest
and emu dropping larger than they seem

(Kevin Gilbert “Homeland”35)

In spite all the urbanisation and innumerable policies of assimilation, the connection with Dreamtime is strongly linked. The poem shows the strong connection between the past and the present. The Aboriginal society is going through a transition, where old patterns of living and thinking have been bended in order to adjust with new ones. Among the Aboriginal people, the European

34 Oodgeroo Noonuccal, n.26, p.20
35 Kevin Gilbert, n.21, p.82
concept of landscape did not exist. Their concept centred on mythical pastor and ancestral divinities.

Far down below my country gleamed  
In thin dry rivers and blue-white lakes  
And most I longed for, there as I dreamed,  
A square of the desert, stark and red,  
To mould a pillow for a sleepy head  
And a cloak to cover me

(Jack Davis "Day Flight" 36)

For the Aboriginal people, their past landscape is like the "cloak" which protects them and offers them comfort like a "pillow for a sleepy head." The poem also reflects what the Aboriginal people are longing for—nothing more than an assurance that they will not lose their heritage, which offers them the support to survive in the present bleak scenario. Aboriginal landscape juxtaposes the past with the present and these are related to the future. The three of them are combined together in order to attain a composed interpretation of landscape.

When the Europeans changed the landscape and compelled the Aboriginal people to adjust to it, they were actually denying a part of their own history. From the beginning, the Aboriginal people have stressed on the need to rectify the interpretation of landscape as it is linked with Australian history, which for so long has been misinterpreted. The basic point is to clear the past, so that one gets a clear picture of the present and future. As these lines states:

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36 Jack Davis, n.25, p.9
The walls all cracked and faded, bare.
The glasses windows stare and stare
Like the half-dead eyes of a dying race...
A sad but strange, compelling place.

(Jack Davis "Slum Dwelling")

The confusion, which the contemporary generation is facing
is in finding the answers to the question, as Gilbert states:

Who is an Aboriginal? Is he or she someone who feels that other Aboriginals are somehow dirty, lazy, drunken, bulging? Is an Aboriginal anyone who has some degree of Aboriginal blood in his or her brain and who has demonstrably been disadvantaging by that? Or is an Aboriginal someone who has had the reserve experience? Is Aboriginality institutionalised gutlessness, an acceptance of the label' the most powerless people on earth'? Or is Aboriginality, when all the definitions have been exhausted, a yearning for a different way of being, a wholesome that was presumed to have existed [before 1788].

The poem reflects the urban Aboriginal people's consciousness about their landscape, which they want to retain of what is left. The poem is the mirror image of today's condition. It reflects the cultural conflict that the Aboriginal people are going through. Some of them want to return to their old way of living, while others want to participate fully while still attempting to become acceptable in the white world. It presents the shadowy future that they are facing today. Some of the Aboriginal people

37 Kevin Gilbert, n.16, p.55
want to retain some of their values and structure and some of them want to participate fully in mainstream Australia, by consciously or unconsciously embracing some of the European customs.

I watched the sun's last gold array
Fade and fold the day away;
I heard the light's last laughing word
From the kookaburra bird;
I heard the wind and winter rains
On the high tin roof and the windowpanes.
There was little-boy bliss
In a mother's kiss,
Then the day was really over.
Man, don't yearn for the past to return,
The years have all passed over.
I know now there are many things
With hidden strings
Deep down in the clover.

(Jack Davis"Retrospect"38)

With the various policy of assimilation, majorities of the Aboriginal people were forced to transform and acclimatise themselves to the changing Australian society. From semi-nomadic food gathering and hunting tribes, they changed into sedentary families. Followed by a change in their 'ethno-genetic' make-up, most of the Aboriginal people today are culturally and genetically different. These policies of assimilation have totally isolated them from their roots. The Europeans were indeed 'evil spirits' who destroyed their Aboriginal society by creating a complex social system, which left the Aboriginal people firmly at the bottom of the social ladder.

38 Jack Davis, n.25, p.2
As reflected in the poem, the whole of the Aboriginal society went through a considerable change. The Aboriginal people found themselves for the first time 'categorised as a unified group' by the Europeans. It was assumed that Aborigines could be transformed and made more 'like us,' by careful tutelage and guidance. It was also assumed that Aborigines, after making the transition from 'primitive' to 'civilised,' would then be rewarded by being made citizens. One by one, Aborigines would leave behind their affinity to kin and country and, as individuals; each would take on the mutual obligations and responsibilities of citizenship. It was to be a prerequisite of citizenship that the individual must demonstrate that he or she was in every way 'like us 'except for skin colour.39

In this whole process of transforming them 'like us,' the Aboriginal people were caught in two worlds. This ambiguity and conflict regarding landscape is reflected in the poem. As Kevin Gilbert states, "he is a victim: a victim of colonisation, a victim of government policies that have been wrong and a victim of discrimination."40 This element of 'mistrust' and 'fear' is reflects the complexities that the Aborigines are facing today. In the poem

The perfect peace of silence sounds
new life
to the drought-parched earth
and brightly coloured parrots crouch
unseen as the bough bows down
the cattle bunch to an afterthought


of a legend of long ago
remembering somehow another life
and joy in a flake of snow

Time and again it has been mentioned that until the advent of the Europeans the Aboriginal people lived in complete accordance with Nature. They do so even now, but for a different reason and with a difference in attitude. This clearly gets reflected in poems.

The sounds of silence echo to
the joys of a child’s embrace
while rivers leap in a sombre glow
to fling on a deep wild race
the dogs cavort to the touch of grace
while away on the farther hill
the kangaroo bounds to his retreat
for the hunter seeks him still
in the chain of life the space of time
there’s time for the heart to thrill
and leap to meet the sweeter face
of snowflakes on the hill
the gum trees dip their leaves at last
in a sighing graceful flow
to the truth of love and life
as arit
by god in a flake of snow...

(Kevin Gilbert “Everlasting Transience”41)

The “flake of snow” represents the mirror where one can see the most beautiful and sombre picture of a landscape. Filled with the “truth of love and life”, the landscape reflects once again the

41 Kevin Gilbert, n.21, p.76
Aboriginal people’s connection and their interpretation of landscape. As Robert Hodge says, "Where Whites could only see a barren and meaningless land, Aboriginal could see and hear and smell a thousand signs of life that guaranteed them a rich and varied existence in their own country."\(^{42}\)

Landscape is inextricably linked with the origins of the society. In one sense, landscape impersonates and identifies man relationships with others. Therefore, the interpretation of landscape is considered to be the history of the human race. The way it narrates life and its “actual events” makes it the story of man’s developing mind. As these lines states:

\[
\begin{align*}
I \text{ walked slowly along the river.} \\
\text{old iron, broken concrete, rusted cans} \\
\text{scattered stark along the shore,} \\
\text{plastic strewn by man and tide} \\
\text{littered loudly mute on sparse growth} \\
\text{struggling to survive.}
\end{align*}
\]

In the urban settlement, the Aboriginal people experienced and witnessed oppression in all forms and in everything. These settlements left a deep and indelible scar, on the Aboriginal people, gets reflected in their interpretation of the landscape. Most of the interoperation narrates incidents, which they experienced in these settlements. It was different and tough to survive. It was also confusing as one is told about a rich cultural heritage and on the other hand one has to fight even for the basis necessities. As these lines reflect:

A flock of gulls quarrelled over debris,
a lone shag looked hopefully down at turgid water
and juggernauts of steel and stone made jigsaw
patterns against the city sky...

The breeze rustled a patch of bull-oak
Reminding me of swan, bittern, wild duck winging-
Now all alien to the river...

[Jack Davis “One Hundred and Fifty Years”43]

The Aboriginal people stress a different ordered environment
in which, life can be lived according to ones own terms and
conditions. Landscape concept and interpretation should reflect
their belief that the time will soon come when all Australians will be
proud of their landscape and its interpretation. This will enable them
to lay bare the truth, the anger, the frustration, and the
determination that has taken place in the last two hundred years.

Most of the interpretations narrate tales of successive
generations who witnessed, “their beloved country stripped of its
possessions and saw their own race wane as the blood of the
Whites mixed with Blacks.”44 The interpretation especially poems
present a pattern which is immensely subtle and complete, that has
a far-reaching impact. Here the Aboriginal consciousness reaches
an impasse where the possibility of change between the Europeans
and the Aboriginal people are visible. As these lines states:

From the dancing fire they took me

44 Lorraine Mafi Williams, (ed.), Spirit Song: A Collection of Aboriginal Poetry
and the firelight reached out for me
and the stars above
looked down from the blackness
of the dreamtime.

In his poem the Europeans are presented not in white or black, but in shades of grey. Through the use "blackness" Weller weaves an interpretation where "dreamtime" has been engulfed in darkness and the Aboriginal people were forced to accept the new landscape. As Davis states, "I think you can only cry for a certain time. You only cry for a time under any circumstances. And in writing this I had lots of frustration and lots of agony."45

Tears from my eye fell slowly
like moonlight falling upon the ground
while trees leapt in pain
in the corroboree
of the fire's flames.

The poem further highlights the Aboriginal people's voice, which needs to be raised loudly in areas that for so long seemed deaf to their words. The whole confusion lies in the destruction of a society, which was totally different from the Europeans. The Aboriginal people were a semi-nomadic. Their society was based on 'egalitarianism.' It was largely non-competitive, and the social organisation was based on sharing food and possession. They gathered food and created objects. Unlike the Whites, they worked only when necessary, not in order to 'get ahead.' There was no single Aboriginal 'nation,' or language, or religion. Instead there were hundreds of 'tribes,' of languages, and sacred legend—

cycles or 'Dreaming.' Unlike the Europeans, the world of the Aboriginal people was not 'global' or 'national,' but was 'overwhelmingly local.' As these lines states:

The wind whistled lowly through leaves-
Droning like a didgeridoo.
And tortured shadowed figures
Whirl and twist silently
in ageless rhythm.

Trees and rocks and land cry.
while the stars I want to see
scatter like silver tears,
like all the white faces
of my nightmares....

(Archie Weller "Dreamtime")

It created a vacuum which if filled will solve the innumerable problems not only of the Aboriginals, but also of Australia in general. As mentioned before, a large part of the Aboriginal population lives in urban areas or in adjacent country towns, and are far removed from other Aboriginal people who still live in the outback. Their contemporary situation, with specific problems, is a consequence of their having a past that is still 'present' for them. Life in the suburbia generally reflects a socio-economically-deprived lot. Nowhere does one get to see the rich cultural heritage that they once owned.

A sun scorched sea
that aeons ago
was home of leviathans
now
burnt sand
where nomads tread
unkist by soothing rain
of snow
incarnadined by desert glow
the profound awe-filled
spaces teach
the nobler truths
that minds can reach
past sombre silenced gold

(Kevin Gilbert "Where Nomads Tread"\textsuperscript{46})

However, with European oppression and the forceful imposition of an alien culture, the quest for an Aboriginal landscape has become a complex multi-faceted problem for the Aboriginal people today. With the younger generation virtually knowing nothing about their rich cultural heritage the people are further separated from their roots. Compelled to follow a culture that was not theirs to begin with, and which made fun of their tribal culture, Aboriginal culture was slowly dying out.

In spite of innumerable laws and legislations, the Europeans were able to subjugate the Aboriginal people and leave them at a dead end. The reaction to all the policies and laws have left them in a state of confusion, where they are neither able to go back to their "old ways," nor fully accepted in modern society. Their present is still bad and their future is uncertain. The squalor and the meaninglessness of contemporary life and the gradual degradation of Aboriginal culture, gets worst.

\textsuperscript{46} Kevin Gilbert, The Blackside: People Are Legends And Other Poems (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1990), p.1
With the gradual disappearance of the landscape one also witnessed the disappearance of the Aboriginal self. In the urban setting, one gets to see the pain, decay, and uncertainty that the Aboriginal people are going through. The new set-up is nowhere near the rich landscape, which their oral literature speaks about. It symbolises the rich past of the Aboriginal people, which the younger generation is not aware.

Landscape poetry acts as a medium to communicate between the past and the present. It represents one of the world’s oldest cultures, practically their relationship to the land and through these poems, one recalls with nostalgia the rich, glorious past. These poems also bring to light the future interpretation of landscape, and how it will survive in the material world and also with the urge to re-link with the landscape. As reflected in these lines:

Despite what Dorothea has said
about the sun scorched land
you’ve never really loved her
nor sought to make her grand
you pollute all the rivers
and litter every road
your barbaric graffiti
cuts scars where tall trees grow
the beaches and the mountains
are covered with your shame
injustice rules supremely
despite your claims to fame
the mud polluted rivers
are fenced off from the gaze
of travelers and the thirsty
for foreign hooves to gaze
a tyranny now rules your soul
to your own image blind
a callousness and uncouth ways
now hallmarks of your kind...

(Kevin Gilbert "Australianess"\textsuperscript{47})

The poem personifies the link with the tribal past. It laments the degradation of the Aboriginal society at the hands of the Europeans and the younger generation’s total ignorance about their heritage and history. It also questions the European version of landscape and its failure to preserve it. It also shows an unpredictable future. The poem also highlights the plight of the Aboriginal people today. Both the situations present the sorry state of affairs that the Aboriginal people are in today. It showcases the wealth of a society whose existence is at stake.

\textit{In days after the raining}

valleys rushed pleasure. So him came
pointing own country.
Forgotten,
shrugged
gasped, what they done to us...

(Lionel George Fogarty "Mangroves of Ceremonial Clay Roarers"\textsuperscript{48})

Gilbert effectively brings to light the degradation of the 60,000 year-old Aboriginal culture. The counter-discourse between the past and the present is tackled by the way the Europeans and new Aboriginal generation looks at landscape. One cannot overlook the fact that the Aboriginal people had to undergo a lot

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{48} Lionel George Fogarty, \textit{Kudjela} (Spring Hill: Planet Press, 1983)
in not only adjusting to a new landscape, but also in re-linking themselves to their 'spirit' country. As these lines states:

   As strong as the trees and warm as the breeze
   'We belong to the Land,' my grandmother once said
   'Her wondrous beauty is what keeps us strong, gives us strength and
   reminds us all of where we come from.'...

(Yasmin Johnson "The Answers Are Within"49)

The change in the landscape illustrates the drastic change that the Aboriginal people went through. In the past they were happy and content living in the bush, but with the advent of the Europeans and with each passing year, they were engulfed by new policies and laws, which acted as salt to their wound heart. As reflected in:

   The silence pierces the night.
   Her cries are heard throughout.
   My mother was strong and free,
   Now chained by her captives, in a land of lost dreams...

(Yasmin Johnson "Mother Earth"50)

The silence of the night, pierced throughout the land. The lost landscape haunts the Aboriginal who wants to set the landscape free from its captivators. The landscape, which once was filled with laughter, song and dance of the coroboree, is now filled with an eerie silence and "cries" of pain. The result of the policies left the

49 Kerry Reed-Gilbert (compiled), The Strength Of Us As Women: Black Women Speak (Charnwood: Ginninderra Press, 2000), p.15
50 Ibid., p.54
Aboriginal people a misfit in both the European society as well as in their own traditional set-up. They were seldom integrated into the White 'community' nor were they any longer able to live by the own values. This was followed by a change of relationship between the young and the old, within the society.

The younger Aboriginals who remained in contact with the Europeans were more conscious about their 'negative' picture passed to them by the Whites in the form of school textbooks. They had no sense of present, past, or future. The problem faced by the Aboriginal people is the difficulty in adjusting with the 'sedimented'. They are caught between two landscapes. They are aware of landscapes their ancestors talked about it but are not witness to it. They are today a part of a landscape in which they have grown up, though some element of alienation is still present.

Daylight disappears
Ghost lurk amongst the stars
The moon is most magnetic
And the clouds caress the dark.
Of all the nights I've ever seen
Tonight feels the most old
Of all the stories I've ever heard
This one to me she told.

Nellie presents a beautiful image of the night, where the "ghosts lurk" in the stars, and the clouds lightly "caress the dark". The element of mystery and confusion regarding the "old" "stories" reflects the uncertainty that the Aboriginal people are facing in their interpretation of landscape.

She sits there, her spirit in the trees...
Telling me she feels so lost
Her mother is not the same.
'The special sacred places,
The earth so red and rare
The waters once clear now spoilt.'
She cries tears of despair

The loss of the dreamtime landscape and the failure to associate with the new landscape has brought the Aboriginal people to a dead end. They feel very lost in the new landscape, which constantly remind them of the landscape of the past. The situation signifies:

I sense they fear the day
The day remind them of the past
And the pain it holds,...
I guess she still yearns for life
To tell people of her loss
The truth of all the suffering....

(Nellie Green"The Stars Fade Mysteriously")51

A suffering which is deeply associated with the landscape, which they have lost, and the struggle to conserve the remaining landscape of their past. As Kevin Gilbert states:

This education or rather re-education of the Aboriginal Australian must include a barrage of intensive propaganda about Australian history, identity and culture to counteract the negative material that is constantly raining from the major society at present.... Aborigines should change this situation. Aboriginals should be

51 Ibid., p.54
building a modern culture, something that is meaningful in today's context. This radical re-education of the Aboriginal by Aboriginal and the direction is vital.52

The widening communication gap within the Aboriginal community reflects the displacement, alienation of the self, negative perception of one's past, traditional and cultural incompetence; it reflects the heritage which 200 years of colonization have left them with.

Where is our land that used to be, not ravaged by careless hands cutting down all the trees that help us to breathe, eroded soils and polluted rivers....

The lost of valuable forest wealth, sacrificed in the name of progress and the developing the barren land, wiped totally the Aboriginal Dreamtime landscape.

All our native flora and fauna, almost gone! ...Once my people lived in a virtual garden of Eden, we did not desecrate our Mother Earth. She was looked after and cared for since time immemorial.

Langford highlights the Aboriginal people's views about landscape and its relationship with nature. She compares with the Garden of Eden, which signifies prosperity. The Aboriginal people took care of the landscape and considered it their mother. They never exploited it for economic gain. The Europeans:

took everything from us, leaving us destitute
and disposed in our own lands!...
the country really wasn’t ‘terra nullius’ as claimed,...
They have excluded us .
All our lives, but they use our Koori images on TV
For their own gain, not ours, for big bucks...

(Ruby Langford Ginibi “Terra Nullis”53)

It speaks about the innumerable challenges and choices, including whether to rebel, to conform, and to fight or to compromise with the present situation. Although social conditions have changed radically and the Aboriginal people have been able to move from the narrowness of their immediate past, the shadow of the European-induced past still rests heavily upon many minds. In the name of reconciliation, disillusionment, poverty, drinking, unemployment and lack of education still engulfs a majority of the Aboriginal people. Their aspirations are restricted, not by the limits of need, but by the limits on their hopes.

Denied a common Australian identity, they seek an Aboriginal one. Their ignorance and confusion is reflected in their interpretation of the landscape. Thus the difficulties of identity and definition, influences the views of landscape. For in the past two hundred years, the Aboriginal society also went through tremendous changes. Some of the Aboriginals are of mixed parentage, some were brought away from their culture and some have forgotten it or wish to do so or have no particular reason to be highly conscious of their lost heritage. The squalor and the

53 Kerry Reed-Gilbert, n.49, p.21
meaninglessness of contemporary life, followed by the gradual degradation of Aboriginal culture, is demoralising to the individual. The Aboriginal people had to reconcile with the changing cultural values and landscape.

Despite all the challenges, the Aboriginal people continued to follow their culture and its unimpeded relationship with the land. To them landscape is their identity, a reflection of their past glory, which provides them the strength, in their struggle to re-establish their status in Australia. According to Nellie Green, “For Aboriginal people, the notion of Aboriginality is inseparable from that of identity and identifying with the land we come from. This concept is intrinsically linked to the sense of belonging of homeland.”

The Aboriginal people link with the landscape, once snapped with European intervention, has been re-linked with the urge to revitalise the world oldest culture. They managed to strike a balance and bring a co-relation between “hundreds of thousands of years of oral tradition against the last twenty years of limited access to white education...in an alien tongue.” Though their relation with the land and their interpretation of the landscape have come under severe cultural challenges, their symbolism continues to remain deeply rooted in the landscape.

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54 Kerry Reed Gilbert n.49, p.47
55 Kevin Gilbert n.16 p.xv