Preface

They salute the poet from the untouchable caste
When they meet him
But they console their pride
Saying that they salute his talent and not him!
They admire his poetry
But will not acknowledge it
When they cannot fault his poetic talent
They run him down for his caste
But honour lesser poets of their caste with fat purses
They worship the idol
But cannot acknowledge its sculptor
No art can flourish in such a cursed land.

-- “Gabbilam” by Gurram Joshua

We are the citizens of Global Village. Identity has many facets. It may be connected to a geographical boundary for a country but for a culture it transcends all boundaries. Contemporary Nationalism is beyond the geographical boundaries and the concocted. ‘fourth world’ literature is the best example for trans-boundary cultural symbols of Nationalism. Nationalism is best represented in Literature and Culture. Inspite of their persistent resistance against assimilation and struggle for upholding their cultural identities ‘fourth world’ cultures have failed to create a unique entity and honour for themselves till very recent. In addition, conspicuous issues like multiculturalism, hybridity, ‘tolerance’,
globalization on one side and alienation, loss of identity, rootlessness on the other, whip the ‘fourth world’ into confusion. These contradicting issues leave the ‘fourth world’ depressed, dejected and lost.

Such are the circumstances where the ‘fourth world’ is doubly challenged. The ‘fourth world’ faces many challenges and dilemmas in creating an identity for themselves. Their search for identity is two-fold. At one level they need to trace out and understand their roots for a sense of belongingness to the land that they live in as the rightful possessors of land and on a second plane they have to break the popular notions held about them and prove to the world what they and their culture actually stand for. It happens so often that though people would have changed their manners and way of life in most of the cases they are still stereotyped.

Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen was the most frequently performed playwright and the most influential since Shakespeare in the early twentieth century. He was the first playwright who has presented contemporary social realities in his plays. Many acclaimed playwrights around the world like George Bernard Shaw, Oscar Wilde, Arthur Miller, James Joyce, Eugene O’Neill and Miroslav Krleža followed his trend to bring about change in the society through their plays. In a period when morality and unquestioning following the set conventions of the society were regarded as highest virtues, Ibsen was bold enough to reform the theatre and portrayed a strong critique of his times in his dramas. He dwelt deep, beyond what is obvious and especially those issues concerning to morality and life that everyone were silent about. He
believed that the responsibility of art is beyond entertainment. So he used the theatre to critique reality. He had set a new trend in drama that had asserted his influence till the modern day.

With the inspiration of Ibsen, Bertolt Brecht, a German playwright took theatre a step ahead as he strongly believed in art for social change after his experiences in the First World War. He made a mark of his own in reviving theatre and using it as an effective tool of social change. His is one of the most influential of the modern theatre. He introduced and developed Epic Theatre in contrast to the till then popular cathartic theatre. His concept of theatre is that it should not make people emotionally drained leaving them relieved of the strong feeling that they have experienced while watching the play but should be made to think objectively of what they have witnessed on stage. To achieve this end he had also introduced a range of theatrical devices. In cathartic theatre the audience identify themselves with different characters in the play and undergoes catharsis dispensing their rationality and judgment on the issues and concerns presented in the play. Where as in the Epic Theatre of Brecht, the audience watches the play very objectively, distancing themselves from the characters on stage. This objectivity on the side of the audience helps them to analyse and understand what has been presented in the play unbiased thus in turn enabling them to make proper, rational judgment. Brecht felt that this objectivity on the part of the audiences’ is the unique feature of the Epic Theatre which would help particularly when moral, social or political issues are dealt with in the plays. This in turn gives the same effect as the moral parables where the audience
interest is kept alive and thinking. This distancing of the audience from the play, in other words, is a way of making it clear to the audience that they are not the part of the play but are only audience is known as the ‘v’ effect.

One has to put in effort to understand ‘fourth world’ communities unbiased to be able to see the ‘real other.’ Coupled with this genuine understanding a thorough awareness and reflection on the world that one is living in enables one to realize the true essence of life building a culture of peace and tolerance. It is only a thorough understanding of the social, political and historical past of any community that one is able to break the popular conceptions of the stereotypes and understand the ‘other’ in their true essence. This is the very reason that Jack Davis in his plays had followed the Epic Theatre of Brecht to achieve his goals.

The life of Aborigines is full of conflict with the dominant Whites structures and their strategies of coping with the contemporary society are truly applaudable”. H. C. Coombs in his write up titled An Invitation to Debate in the introduction to Kullark: "The Referendum in 1967 which enabled Aboriginal Australians to be counted in the national population census …gave hope and promise that by their own efforts they could win back the right to live in health, dignity, and respect, in this, the land of their ancestors". It is not till around very recently, after the Whites man has first stepped on the sands of the Australian shores that the Whites man has realized and tried to take his first step towards treating the Natives as his equal. But by then irreversible damage had been done to the Native socially, culturally and psychologically, shattering their roots and
landing them into existential despair. One comes into this world naturally and the gradual evolution of the soul results in the play of thoughts bringing into the open true essence of one’s existence. The popular belief that no man is an island and that man is a social being holds good at any given point in time and in place. But one observes that though the Aborigines were still living in the land of their ancestors physiologically they are not in peace with their surroundings psychologically after the contact with the Whites on the Australian land. Their very sense of identity and belongingness has been put to question.

Following the trend set by Ibsen and Brecht Jack Davis presents to his audience a true picture of Aborigines of Australia. In his plays he retraces the initial colonial contact and the gradual dynamics between the settler and the Native thus rewriting the Australian history to be viewed through Aboriginal lens. The settlers have carried with them their attitude of being superior to the ‘other’. What has first started as an exploration for fertile soil for settlement with abundant natural resources to cater to the needs of the settler have gradually become problems of insanity in not identifying the Native of the land as human being.

All that the settler has believed in is the culture of his/her own empire. The Native was considered to be primitive and the settler very sincerely believed in the divine right theory and dominated the Native. The settlers have lured the Natives with earthly trivialities. They have replaced barungin, tracing food and moving on with agriculture and cattle raring and gradually threatening them with guns. Revisiting history also has another purpose. It is only by revisiting one’s
history that one can learn from one’s wrong doings and not repeat the same in the present and future. When history is forgotten there is a chance for the pasts’ wrongs repeating themselves.

With this perception the settler, as soon as he landed on the new found land, has started his ‘civilizing mission’. Many brutalities were committed in the name of civilizing the ‘other’. The colonizer’s discourse misrepresented history interpreting all signs of difference with the other and rendered the other as inferior and menial. The colonial discourse of the English has made all that is English as centre and all that is not English as marginal irrespective of its innate value. Racism is one of the most poignant social evils that the Aborigines face even in the present day Australia. Abundant examples of this are sprinkled all over in the play. As Eleanor Bourke, Director, Aboriginal Research Institute, in his article titled *The first Australians: kinship, family and identity* quotes the proceedings of the First National Conference on Adoption in 1976:

> Any Aboriginal child growing up in Australian society today will be confronted by racism. His best weapons against entrenched prejudice are a pride in his Aboriginal identity and cultural heritage and a strong support from other members of the Aboriginal community.

The economic depression of the twentieth century in the post second world war era has jolted the roots of the imperialism around the world, especially that of the Great Britain which by then has successfully colonized more than one fourth of the total world’s nations. Britain, having being taking part in the two world
wars has landed in debt. Added the dissemination of knowledge due to the industrial revolution resulted in greater awareness on issues among the peoples of the world. The civil rights movements and sprouting of organizations like the United Nations has paved way to a new mode of thinking. This has helped the Native writers to voice not only the dormant imperialistic attitude through their works but as well create a new consciousness among Native communities and the citizens of the world.

They have given voice and solutions to a multitude of issues related to the ‘fourth world’. The writers of each of the colonized country have helped their people to redefine themselves and their national identities. This aspect of redefining their national and personal identities becomes crucial as the impact of colonialism can still be very strongly felt in many of these former colonies. The colonies, though have political independence, cannot effort to go back to its original state of affairs, be it cultural, social, economic or political, due to these residual effects. The members of the old ruling class, now in the post colonial era have become the dominant Whites in the Australian scenario, who have dominated the Australian soil, politically, socially and economically pushing its original dwellers to the fringes in all the three arenas. The farming and hunting economy of the Aborigines, the strong sense of community and its traditional law is now dominated by the alien culture of the White man. Many of the postcolonial dilemmas do not have plain and obvious solutions as the root cause of these problems are far reaching, complex and often with hidden agendas and blind perceptions even to this day. It becomes even more complicated to resolve
an Aboriginal issue as the Aborigines’ perceptions on issues is very different from that of the settlers’. Jack Davis plays give a new hope and definition to the Aboriginal identity by giving a very realistic picture of the Aboriginal plight. Jack Davis does not take sides. He remains indifferent towards biases and gives life to his characters very objectively fulfilling the true vocation of the genre that he has chosen to write in. From the state of Australia being declared as *terra nilius* to the present, his plays are voices unheard. They bring into light many stark realities of their existence. The innocence of the Aborigines in welcoming the new comers thinking that they have returned from the world of their dead ancestors to the unguarded death of the Aboriginal hero Yagan killed by two young Whites boys whom he had befriended, the plight of the Yorlahs in the present, the existential struggle of the Aboriginal family in *The Dreamers*, the structural violence inflicted on the Aborigines in *Barungin* and the dispossession and displacement of the Aborigines in *No Sugar* are all a testimony to the Aboriginal plight. But Jack Davis has very skillfully intertwined these many aspects into this plays very organically giving true meaning to their existence and the innate might of the Aboriginal culture.

Aboriginal culture is primarily a culture of kinship and community. Their culture is deeply dependent on their community. Traditional knowledge, skill and wisdom are passed on from one generation to the next generation. Assimilation has great impact on these communities. Eleanor Bourke, Director, Aboriginal Research Institute, in his article titled *The first Australians: kinship, family and identity* states that: "Nearly all Aboriginal families know of relatives
who were removed as children and put into European custody. Aboriginal people refer to them as ‘taken’ or ‘stolen’. The effects of such policies and practices are still reverberating in the Aboriginal community.” But Jack Davis has helped fill in this gap creating spaces for such voices in the White dominated Australian society. The approach that Jack Davis employs is that of optimism. He is well aware of the intricacies that are to be taken care for his plays to pass censorship at the same time thoroughly aware of the innate power of dramatics to bring about social change. Thus he presents food for thought for both the Aboriginal and well as non-Aboriginal audiences. Jack Davis not only presents the inequalities and injustices present in the society but as well presents new alternatives to overcome these problems.

He uses the drama as a tool for self analysis, helping his audiences look within for their own attitudes and to create awareness about things happening around them by presenting his character in their true nature, with both their strengths and weaknesses. His intention is not to point out the mistakes that are present in one’s personality but rather to subtly suggest and create an awareness of the vices of human nature and civilization. As a man a step ahead of his times, he strongly believes that one can undo the wrongs of the past if the understanding is mutual and reciprocal.

Jack Davis presents the history, present, culture and life of the Nyoongahs of South Western Australia in the four texts that I have chosen to study. But the issues presented by him in these texts hold good to any minority group in any
part of the world. Talking about his play *The Dreamers* in an interview that he has given to Adam Shoemaker he states:

But this one is more or less psychological play which deals with part Aboriginal people, Aboriginal people in an urban setting but still it applies to any ethnic group throughout the world today. It could happen in Germany; it could happen in Canada; and it not only applies to the Aboriginal people or Indian people or Eskimo people: happens to non-Aboriginal people also. We all suffer from the same thing. (WESTERLY)

As Jack Davis deals with a number of key issues of Australian Aborigines’ in his plays he deals with a number of issues concerned with human existence. The first chapter titled 'The Aboriginal Literary Expression' traces the evolution of Australian Aboriginal Literary evolution in the background of Australian Aboriginal history as Aboriginal Literature cannot be decoded without an understanding of its history and culture. The chapter also gives a glimpse of Jack Davis’ life which would help one understand his contribution the Aboriginal movement better.

The second chapter titled 'The Glorious Aboriginal Past' re-writes the Aboriginal past from the initial contact to the life of Aborigines’ in the twentieth century in his work *Kullark*. *Kullark* in Nyoongah language means home. It is a highly political play of his in which he weaves together all the major happenings over a period of one fifty years and their effect on the Aboriginal existence even
in the present. This he does by appropriating many aspects of the theatre to suit his purpose.

The third chapter titled ‘Historical Realism’ gives an in depth analysis of the plight of the Australian Aborigine during the Depression Era as depicted in the play *No Sugar*. Wendy Blacklock giving the foreword for the play says: “*No Sugar* tells the story of a family’s fight for survival during the Depression years and was staged in a semi-promenade setting in which the audience followed the players on their journey through the action of the play.”

The fourth chapter of the thesis titled ‘The Existential Consciousness’ unravels the urge of the modern Aborigine to go back to the bush in his play *The Dreamers*. The action of the play is set during the depression era in an Aboriginal household living in the suburbs of a town from sunrise to sunset. The character of uncle Worru symbolizes the Aboriginal longing for the bush and traditional life. But this longing is satiated by the modern comforts like the TV, car, etc. The Aborigine in the modern context appreciates and wishes to go back to his traditional life but is also wise enough to accept the fact of life that it is all over now. Modern Aborigine is proud of his/her lineage and is also bold enough to fight for themselves and their people within the existing framework. Nonetheless the longing is always present.

The fifth chapter titled ‘Contextualizing the Brutal Violence’ brings to light the Aboriginal deaths in custody in the late twentieth century as depicted in the play *Barungin*. The play becomes crucial as it culminates in the utter
violence inflicted on the Aborigines through the years which has been always been hidden from the Whites Australians and the rest of the world. It thus weaves all the experiences of Aborigines together into a whole.

One common thread that runs though all the plays of Jack Davis is that they reflect Aboriginal resilience though times with optimism into the future inspite of their bitter experiences.