Chapter - I

The Aboriginal Literary Expression

Research proves that the Australian Aboriginal’s is “the longest continuous history in the world” (Sabbioni, *Preface xx*) dating back to approximately 56,000 to 68,000 years ago. Aboriginal, indigenous, primitive, crude, uncivilized, the ‘Other’ are the titles given to the cultures of peoples that have survived through the thick and thin of times and who used many contemporary concepts like shelter, painting, art, baking etc way back at the ‘beginning of civilization’. Australian Aborigines deserve many laurels for the techniques that their ancestors have used in their day to day life right from the beginning of their ancient history. Research has also found evidence that the Australian Aborigines who lived a hunter-gatherer lifestyle have many ‘first ones to’ and ‘had them as early as’ to their credit. They started living in rock shelters, used stone tools and would have used red ochre for rock paintings and body decorations about 56,000 years ago. Similarly they have used underground oven around 30,700 years ago. They are the oldest makers of bread in the world, having had it made 30,000 years ago and in same period lies in their culture the traces of the concept of burial. Australian Aborigines are, right from the time of their ancients very spiritual, creative and technologically advanced race. In other words it could be said that theirs is a highly civilized life and culture not in modern sense of the term but in its true meaning, essence and spirit. Proof of this could be approximately traced back to some 30,000 years. Theirs is the initial of human art in the world. They had the art of Rock engraving, making stone and
bone tool artefacts, decorating cave walls with designs, cave and body paining with different coloured ochre, etc. They are also the earliest to use tools like axe. 18,000 years ago they have come up with the techniques of harvesting grass seeds, grounding, baking and roasting which was then the basic of their socio-economic life.

Geographical changes have flooded the bridges between the mainland Australia and Tasmania. The melting of ice caps has isolated the Tasmanian Aborigines from the mainland Aborigines 13,000 years ago. The present demography and climate of Australia were formed 10,000 years ago paralleled by the invention of the boomerang. 2000 years after this was the formation of The Torres Strait Islands and the first proof of the Aboriginal belief about the Rainbow Serpent, a belief that of the present which has survived the longest in history. This was followed by the formation of the Rottnest Island near Perth, Western Australia. The ancient history of the Aboriginals of Australia can be culminated with the migration of the Indians to Australia bringing along with them the ‘Dingo’.

The Chinese sailors and the traders from Indonesia were among the first ones to have sailed to the present Australia as early as fifteenth century. The Indonesian sailors continued their trade with Australia till it was stopped by the South Australian government in 1906. The Dutch and the Spanish were the first Europeans to reach Australia. It was in the same year that these two groups had many violent encounters with the Aborigines. The Europeans, in these encounters, dominated the Aborigines with their guns.
The resistance of Aborigines is not against the tradesmen but against the colonizers who have stolen their land and exploited their natural resources. Though there were deaths of both Aborigines and non-Aborigines in the process of resistance major and drastic were changes in the natural surroundings as well the social life of the Aborigines. It was not very long after Captain James Cook had discovered Australia in 1770 announcing it as an ownership of the ‘His Majesty’ that Captain Arthur Phillip had established the first penal colony in 1788. This accentuated the atrocities committed by the White settler on the Australian Aborigines and the Australian landscape. A total population of Aborigines, as estimated by Captain Arthur Phillip, in 1788 which was around 75,000 to one million dwindled drastically in the next couple of years and in a few cases annihilating complete clans. Two main factors played a major role culminating in the dominance of the Whites over Aborigines. Firstly the White settler had de-rooted Aborigines from their ancestral lands and gradually confined the Aborigines to reserves and settlements. They went on increasing their frontiers from time to time. The White Settlers had also brought animals, started harvesting and fishing, cutting down trees, putting the Natives in reserves and settlements and replicating the lifestyle of their home land in the new found land. The result of this is the direct impact of the new changes on environment. The natural landscape not only got polluted but as well natural resources became scanty by and by as the lifestyle of the settler did not have the concept of replenishment in their culture. This directly impacted the hurter gatherer nomadic lifestyle of the Aborigines which respected everything in creation and thus not
exploiting anything. Secondly, the settler also brought with him many diseases like flu, measles, small-pox and the like which did not exist in Australia before. As the Aborigines were not immune to these viruses their number dwindled drastically. Thus they had many crisis to handle.

The Aborigines of Australia have one of the world’s ancient spiritual histories and this has helped them cope with a multitude of crisis in all spears of life very boldly in spite of all the odds and also to resist the domination of the settlers. Odd things that have occurred from the side of the Aborigines were in fact the doings of the settlers themselves directly as the root cause of these lie deep in the odd laws and attitudes of the settler. Atrocities and massacres on the Aborigines were steadily increasing all through till mid nineteenth century. The British Select Committee’s report on the treatment of people in its colonies was very disappointing to the Whites, particularly the report on Aboriginal Australians. This led to the Policy of Protection by the then Whites Government. However as any other good willed law, the Policy of Protection soon had it loop holes for its crocked officials to take advantage of. ‘The Stolen Generation’ is the direct result of this policy. The policy proved to be just the contrary to what is has been started for. The twisted Whites government officials and White settlers used it to scatter the lives of Aboriginal people further. Two institutes played key role in this regard, one, the Whites government and two Christian missionaries. Though these two groups differed in their approach both were keen in ‘the civilizing mission’. Both the groups wanted to remove the traces of Aboriginality in the Indigenous population of Australia. The main aim of this policy is to
segregate the members of the Aboriginal families from one another. On the pretext of this policy Aboriginal reserves and settlements were created and Aborigines were moved there leaving their ancestral lands. Even at the reserves the Chief Protectors were granted rights to move the Aborigines as and when one liked from one reserve to another and to keep the Aboriginal children in the dormitories away from their parents. The Aborigines were expected to live according to the whims and fancies of the protector incharge and many prohibitions were laid upon them. For example they were not allowed to use their Native language, hold their ceremonies or do any such thing that took their culture into the future.

In the name of protection a ‘Protector of Aborigines’ is appointed by the government to supervise the activities related to the Aborigines and their lives. Under the cover of protection Natives were removed from their ancestral lands and put either in reserves or in the government settlements. Aborigines had to seek permission from the protectors even for basic needs and necessities. Every aspect of the day to day life of Aborigines was monitored by ‘the Protector’. Many a times Aborigines at these reserves/settlements were used as slave labourers. Even when they managed to get permission from the protector to work outside the reserve/settlement, their wages were claimed by the government. They had to seek permission from the protector even in those aspects of their lives like getting married, having children, etc. Many such initiatives were taken up by the Whites to put a check on the growth of Aboriginal population and the spread of Aboriginal culture. The protectors were also responsible to ensure that
these reserves were situated well away from the Whites cities and towns. This racist practice of separation continued as long till 1948 in places like Perth which is one of the major cities of Australia. If this is so the case of a major city in Australia towards the treatment of its citizens, one can imagine the state of affairs in the rest of the Australian sub-continent. The change in the ecology coupled with the poor living conditions on these reserves and settlements made the Aborigines not only helpless but physically weak as well. The living conditions at the reserves were so bad that many Aborigines died in the reserves and settlement. Aboriginal children were taught at the reserve/settlement itself by the missionaries or were put separated from their parents who would visit them once a week. At these missionaries it was generally believed that the Aborigine children are of no good at education as the Whites failed to understand that the Aboriginal concept of knowledge is very different from that of the Whites. Sometimes children were also abducted from their parents and were put in foster Whites families where the children were expected to totally forget their Aboriginality and become ‘Whites’. The Whites policemen at one point were given right to simply arrive, round up and take the Aboriginal children with them, to be put in missionary or to be given to adoption, without the consent of either the parents nor the Aboriginal community that the child belonged to. Around 1816 though a passport or certificate was issued to those Aborigines whom the Whites government thought deserved to be accepted by the White settlers, several limitations were set on their movement. These practices continued ill late 1960 carrying the harrowing experience of the Aborigines into
the twentieth century. Meanwhile the Whites expanded their settlements and created a parallel world of comfort and lifestyle based on the lines of their motherland in the new found land. The Aborigines were always at the mercy of the White settlers. Any kind of resistance was not tolerated by the Whites and any Aborigine daring to do so was sure to be exterminated or put in prison on some lame or twisted pretext.

Twentieth century was very eventful in the lives of the Aborigines. The atrocities that were committed by the Whites on the Aborigines till then were visible. But with the turn of the century masked atrocities were committed on them. The Whites dominated the whole system making the Aborigine invisible, both at the actual and symbolic levels. Many government policies came out during his period which not only discriminated the Australian Aborigines from the rest of the Whites Australians but the Australian politics stooped to the level of not recognizing the Aborigines even as Australian citizens. To the Whites Australian government the Aborigines became non-existent. In 1901 the Commonwealth Constitution of Australia declared that Aborigines would no longer be counted as Australian citizens which took away from them many rights as citizens of Australia like the right to vote, right to receive an old age pension, right serve their country in the army etc. However the Aborigines fought on behalf of Australia in the Second World War on par with the Whites Australian soldiers. Aboriginal people proved to be extremely good at the guerilla tactics in warfare and their other traditional skills as well were proved to be very useful at the warfront to the Whites. Aborigines were used by the White settlers in the
early days of their arrival on the Australian landscape to navigate, understand, analyse and utilize the new land of hope in the twentieth century to protect and fight on behalf the Whites during the war. The Australian Aborigines who were used in the Boer war in South Africa in 1902 to trace the Boer fighters were left there to their fate while the Whites Australian soldiers returned home. By 1939 two military units were formed totally by Aborigines who were formally enrolled by the Whites Australian government. 1934 marks another important milestone in Australian Aboriginal history. Under the new assimilation policy Australian Aborigines were ‘bestowed’ all the privileges enjoyed by their Whites counterparts provided they agree to do away with their Aboriginality. They were expected to leave completely all the traces of Aboriginality and adapt themselves to the European lifestyle of the Whites Australians. The exemption certificates issued to the Aborigines were considered by some Aborigines as the only way out of this systematic oppression of the Whites. But even to obtain these exemption certificates the Aborigines had to prove to the Whites of their good conduct and productiveness. The Aborigines with these certificates enjoyed all the privileges that the Whites enjoyed only by ceasing to be an Aborigine and by adopting ‘Europeanness’. There were many other injustices done to the Aborigines which could not be compensated for later on. One such ordeal is that of the nuclear tests in the mid twentieth century. These tests were conducted to the Aboriginal camps and thus were effected by radiation and other related issues. The Whites have not only shattered the original dwellers of the soil but as well contaminated and contaminated the landscape. Australia is rich in mineral
wealth and the Whites have exploited it by excessive mining. As Aborigines consider themselves as part of nature, their lifestyle revere nature and all that exists in it. They lived in harmony with nature and have never exploited it. Whereas, the lifestyle of the Whites exploited nature for their greed as they saw themselves different form nature.

Though discrimination against Aborigines and others racial groups was lifted by the government and voting right was as well given to the Aborigines by 1962 they were by and large still at the receiving end in the greater Australian society. Around 1938 a lot of protests and key measures were taken up by the Aborigines to assert themselves. The Aborigines have asserted themselves in different ways. The Aboriginal Progressive Association declared January 26, 1938 as a Day of Mourning when the Europeans were celebrating 150 years of their arrival. In the same year it has also started a monthly newspaper called *Australian Abo Call* to voice their opinion and fight injustices. The Aborigines stood united and fought discrimination not only in Australia but against that in Germany shown on Jews by the Nazi government by submitting a petition to the German Consulate in Melbourne. They have also fought against wage discrimination and ill-treatment of Aborigines in stations and many more. The 1961 Native Welfare Conference played a very important role bridging the gap between the Aborigines and the rest of Australia in many areas. There were many initiatives like in abolition of legislative control, starting and implementing many welfare schemes, supporting Aborigines through different economic schemes,
bringing awareness in non-Aboriginal Australians about Aboriginal culture and history. Many land rights movements also started during this period.

The motive of ‘assimilation’ in the Whites Australian policy had gradually turned into ‘integration’. By 1965 the Policy of Integration of the Government which was supposed to give the Aboriginal Australians control over their lives was not as fruitful as anticipated. All the legislations and policies that were brought out by the Whites Australian Government ended up only in the word but not in deed. The masked strategies of the Australian White governments continued and the Australian Aborigines had and are still fighting a battle which is not obvious and the subtleties of which can only be sensed with someone with great shrewdness and worldly wisdom. It is a battle not visible to a naked eye and sense. But the waves of change continued to be felt all over Australia. Freedom Ride of 1965, walk off of stockmen and women at Wave Hill, The South Australian Prohibition of Discrimination Act, The South Australian Lands Trust Act and many more played a vital role in shaping the future of Aborigines in the years that followed. The Referendum of 1967 has given a new meaning to the Aboriginal existence. It gave the Aborigines their due rights of being counted in the Australian census and also gave them the Citizenship rights. Discriminatory laws were put to an end and many legal changes were made to the Australian constitution and all that is Aboriginal has started to be protected and worshiped. For the first time in the history of Australian Aborigines it was decided that for the mutual understanding and goodwill among the Aborigines and the rest of the Australian society, it was decided that the non-Aborigines
would be informed about the Aborigines and their culture. Not only Aboriginal flag was designed by an Aboriginal artist named Harold Thomas but many measures as well were taken to restore to the Aborigines their due to claim back their life. Some of the measures included banning discriminatory legislation, not separating Aboriginal children from their families, allowing Aborigines to live in their ancestral lands, speak their language, follow their traditions and culture, etc. These gave the Aboriginal existence a new dimension to define their self, to describe what it is to be an Aborigine in a White dominated Australia. They have also started proving their mettle in many spears of life like in painting, sports, establishing first Aboriginal theatre, etc. But this did not except many Aborigines from the shackles of discrimination and traumatic past. The many regulations and limitations laid on the Aborigines living in the reserves still continued. This led directly to the land rights movement by the Aborigines. 1972 shifted the focus from the Policy of Integration to the Policy of Self-determination or Self-management. The Larrakia petition had established the Aboriginal entity over the Australian land and politics. It affirmed the right of Aborigines over land and their representation in the Australian government. Two milestones in the betterment of the living conditions of the Aborigines are the Racial Discrimination Act of 1975 and the Commonwealth Aboriginal Land Rights Act of 1976 in the Northern Territory. The first made it illegal to show any kind of discrimination based on colour of the skin or ethnicity as it claimed that the Aborigines were the original dwellers of Australia and so the injustices inflicted
upon them should be compensated. The second entrusts the ownership of traditional lands in the hand of its rightful owners, The Aborigines.

Though a lot of measures were taken for the integration and peaceful co-existence between the Whites and the Aborigines, the breach between them was not filled. The fissures continued to the present day and though often not spoken openly are present very perceptibly. The establishment of Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody is a proof for this. This again was because of the attitude of the Whites who failed to put into action what they have promised to do to fill the gap. Only in late twentieth century with the Northern Territory Aboriginal Sacred Sites Ordinance Aboriginal ancestral lands were returned to their rightful owners. It took so long for the Whites Australian citizens to recognize the pain inflicted on the original dwellers of the Australian soil. This is also the reason behind the Aborigines celebrating 26\textsuperscript{th} January as Survival day where as the Whites Australians celebrate it as ‘Australia Day’. The year 1988 is celebrated by the Whites Australians as a happy one commemorating the arrival of the Whites on the Australian continent. But for the Aborigines it is 200 years of trauma, pain and injustices. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission commenced in 1989 and The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation commenced in 1991. Both these initiatives had contributed a great deal for the mutual understanding, respect and peaceful co-existence of the two groups. In 1991 a council for Aboriginal Reconciliation was established by the government. The 700-page report of the ‘Stolen Children’ National Inquiry, ‘Bringing Them Home’ which was inveterate that the ‘Stolen Generation’ was the result of the act
of genocide by the Whites Australian government on the Aborigines, came as a great shock to the non-Aboriginal Australian citizens. The first National Sorry Day in 1997 as well was a great leap towards reconciliation between the two groups in a way that though the then government was not very ‘sorry’ the general public were. The White Australian governments’ attitude could be clearly sensed when it was summoned before the United Nations for violating its promises in making note and taking necessary action as recommended in the Bringing Them Home Report. It was not until 2008 that former Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd had officially apologized for all the trauma that has been inflicted on the lives of the Australian Aborigines. Since its conception The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation has taken up key issues in bridging the gap between the Whites and Aboriginal Australians. This it had done by trying to remove the stereotypes and by a better understanding of Aboriginal culture. Many other initiatives had been taken up all over Australian to achieve this end but as it always happens with many initiatives they have failed to a great extent in their implementation and the discriminatory practices still continue in the present day Australia. On a positive note these several efforts have given a new vigour to the Australian Aboriginal self-determination. The Australian Aborigines have many credits in getting the government respond to their self-determination like establishment of The National Aboriginal Alliance (NAA), parliament apologizing to the Aborigines, establishment of Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council, formation of Indigenous Implementation Board to assist Aborigines economically and socially, the Australian
Reconciliation Barometer and many more. Many Aboriginal artists, writers and others have started defining what it means to be Australian Aborigine in their own works. Not only this, by 2013 Adam Giles as Chief Minister was the first Aboriginal person to head an Australian government. In the year 2014 in Alice Springs a Freedom Summit declared the sovereign power of the Aboriginal people over their nations and their communities giving full authorities to them to control their lives. This also led to the Aboriginal Freedom Movement which has worked on a number of Aboriginal issues and rights. In the year 2016 the understanding between the Aborigines, non-Aborigines and the Whites Australian government has reached to a stage which resulted in the introduction of Aboriginal language in the Australian Higher Secondary Schools as a subject. Companies like Apple Store and Google Play have banned games which had Aboriginal characters to be killed in order to proceed in the game. Thus the Australian Aborigines were successful in sensitizing and influencing the non-Aborigines and the White Australian Governments in recognizing their true worth.

In spite of all these positive happenings, atrocities on the Aborigines still continue in the present day Australia. Any art in general acts as a very good means of self determination as well as a means to build bridges. It has a unique capacity to heal deep wounds. Many Aborigines were engaging themselves in this task. Especially from 1980s there were an array of Aboriginal artists, musicians, painters, authors, actors etc who were not only defining Aboriginality in their works but as well were helping the non-Aboriginal Australians
understand what Aboriginality means. And this they have done very impressively.

When one talks about the Australian Aborigines one should not mistake them to be a singular identity. They are singular in identity only to the extent that they are all connected to the Australian landscape and the Dreaming. But they form different communities. They make up several sub-groups even within their communities as well and their system of family and community is very different from that of the non-Aborigines’. This system of theirs is laid and handed over during the time of The Dreaming. They had a unique system in which this traditional knowledge is handed down from one generation to the next generation by selected persons who are eligible to take the part of the storyteller and disseminate knowledge. The Aborigines used this knowledge to lead a life in accordance to the Aboriginal spirituality and it also helped them to take the right decision in times of confusions in the present. The Dreaming had laid down systems of protecting and perpetuating their culture, life and the earth. Though there are common beliefs among all the Aboriginal communities in some aspects like the belief in Dreaming, Rainbow Serpent, etc. The Dreaming stories also vary from community to community. But the spiritual and its influence on the physical which is guided by the Dreaming is common all the Aboriginal communities. The Aboriginal lifestyle is based on this knowledge of the Dreaming. This Dreaming is a continuous process in which the past, present and the future are all linked in a cyclic pattern.
Australian Aboriginal Literature, unlike the mainstream popular written literature, is oral literature which has its origin in the folk lore. Australian Aboriginal Literature initially consisted of the stories of The Dreaming which were passed on from one generation to another generation through a select story teller for each of its purpose. These stories were not also initially revealed to outsiders. The Dreaming stories contained in them how their landscape was formed, the creatures that were created and present on the Australian landscape, the social structure of their society (both spiritual and physical), the norms by which the society and individual should behave, their languages, their rituals and ceremonies, about the fire, the earth, nature with its flora and fauna, different things in nature like the sacred sites, and the way they should be treated and respected, the trade ships, arrival of the Europeans, etc. Though there are certain variations in the stories from one community to another the major beliefs are common for all the communities. As the concept of community and owning is very different for the Aborigines, these Dreaming stories are owned by the communities as a whole. Many of these stories were scientifically investigated and verified by the Archaeologists. The Aboriginal legends, myths and ceremonies form the song cycles, corroborees, bark, body and cave paintings, sand drawings, storytelling, etc form part of Aboriginal literature. They have captured within them not only the great journeys of ancestral beings, sacred sites etc but as well every aspect of human life on this planet like the role of men and women in the society, marriage, children, hunting, food gathering, rules of society, treatment of birth and death, creation of land, different flora and fauna,
their laws, boundaries of their nations, social and personal values, etc. This knowledge is so directly linked with particular landscape that even in the present day the Aboriginal Elders ensure that a group of young students and their teacher are accompanied by them to a significant sight that a story to be narrated is linked to. This shows how the Aboriginal knowledge, stories, culture, life and land are intrinsically linked with each other and are inseparable. This also proves the fact that once removed from the land the true spirit of the Aboriginal stories, culture and life are lost. The knowledge of the oral tradition is passed on in the form of songs, paintings, rituals, ceremonies etc. Thus there is a direct relationship between the Aborigines and their land. Bill Edwards in his work, *Living the Dreaming. Aboriginal Australia: An Introductory Reader in Aboriginal Studies* states that the landscape itself is a text for the Aborigines as they read it for their physical and spiritual existence and meaning.

Thus the Australian Aborigines had literature ingrained in their oral tradition and landscape. The literature which started with the ancestral being writing on the Australian landscape has modified itself from time to time including in itself the stories of the Aborigines from time to time. In the present day this continues in a range from ceremonies and rituals, to theatre performances, documentaries, television and films.

Unfortunately after the British invasion of Australia, due to various reasons along with their land, resources, culture, and languages much of this literature as well had been lost. A few that remained in the memory of the Aboriginal elders were passed on and a few were captured in word and
translated. Translation however would not carry with it the true spirit of the original and these stories were no exemption. Many were very heavily Europeanized as they were viewed through the European lens. The Australian Aborigines have been appearing in the Whites travelogues and literary works through the Whites lens. The images of the Aborigines in these texts have shot out of the Divine Right Theory, western constructs of “race” and Social Darwinism. Terry Goldie states in *Fear and Temptation: The Image of the Indigene in Canadian, Australian and New Zealand Literatures* that:

…the indigene in literature is a “reified preservation” (4) revealing the ideology and culture of the authors. And the image presented (the signifier) does not lead back to the implied signified, the racial group termed the Aborigine, but rather to other images. According to him, the Aborigine is a semiotic pawn on a chess board controlled by the Whites signmaker. Yet the individual writer [the signmaker] can move these pawns only within certain prescribed areas; the Whites and the indigene having clearly limited oppositional moves. So each textual image seems to refer back to those offered before, the positive and negative images being swings of the one and the same pendulum. (4-5.)

The British were the one ones who have established many colonies around the world. The travelogues, journals, diaries, letters, memoirs and histories of the late eighteenth century European voyagers depicted the Aborigines through different lenses depending on their own perception of the Aborigines. Some
considered them to be hostile, crude and barbaric while the others considered them to noble savages who helped the explorers in taming the wilderness in the new found land. As the frontiers of the British settlement started transgressing boundaries on the coasts and moved inland there came the issues related to land. The settler- Native dynamics changed, changing the image of the Aborigine in the settler literature. There was a different image of the Aborigines to different settler in the nineteenth century. White missionaries who believed in the Christian ideals of conversion wanted to convert the Aborigines into Christianity and give them salvation. White government, under the influence of Social Darwinism, wanted to colonize and civilize them, Anthropologists wanted to study them as specimens. Thus the different White settlers stereotyped the Aborigines though their own lenses in the nineteenth century. It is only in the 1840s that the Aboriginal themes and characters started appearing in White Australian literature. Most of the Aboriginal characters in these texts were stereotyped and were negative. Even in the works of some bold White authors like James Tucker, Rolf Boldrewood and Rosa Campbell who were a bit sympathetic while dealing with the Native characters were not exceptions in stereotyping the Aborigines. They were very prejudiced in their depiction of the Aborigines. Poets like George Gorden McCrae and Henry Kendall have misrepresented the facts of Aborigines in their poems. For the first bit of the nineteenth century the Aborigine was invisible and did not exist. The novel *Coonardoo* by Katherine Susannah Prichard in 1929 has changed the game in the Australian literary history. It was for the first time in history of Australia a
genuine effort was made to understand the plight of the Australian Aborigines without any prejudices. Prichard had made the Aboriginal women character central to her work by bringing out to world the brutality and violence inflicted upon the Aboriginal women by the Whites males which she came to know during her stay in the Aboriginal communities and during her interactions with the Aboriginal women. The work has faced a lot of dissent from the Whites Australia because of which it was not until 1965 that it managed to appear in the Bulletin as a serial. Prichard example was followed by many 1930s writers. Novelists like Xavier Herbert, Judith Wright, Randolp Stow, Patrick Whites. Each of the writers of this period had tried in their works to give the Aboriginal experience a genuine factual face through which they tried to open the minds of the Whites Australian society. Herbert in his powerful work Capricornia (1938) had presented the world to the White Australians through Aboriginal lens by making the protagonist of his work, Naw-nim, a half-caste searching for his identity. The brutality and hostility of the White systems and culture on the Aborigines had been interrogated by Judith Wright. Authors of this period discussed many Aboriginal themes like the spiritual relationship between land and Aborigines, through the plot and characters seeking forgiveness of the Aborigines for all the atrocities committed by the Whites on the Aborigines, a unified Australia without black-Whites racism, etc. A few of the influential works in this category are The Moving Image (1946) by Judith Wright, The Islands (1958) by Randolph Stow, Voss (1957), Riders in the Chariot (1961) and A Fringe of Leaves (1976) by Patrick Whites, The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith
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(1961) by Thomas Keneally, *Trap* (1966) by Peter Mather, *The Fringe Dwellers* (1961) by Nene Gare. Poetry and drama which took up Aboriginal themes was produced in the last part of nineteenth century. According to Terry Goldie, Aboriginal themes of nineteenth century Australian literature were sex, violence, orality, mysticism and historicity. The male Aborigine, according to Goldie, is always depicted tarnished with violence and alcohol. The Whites Australian society failed to recognize that this condition of the Aborigine is the direct result of British Imperialism. Even a very well intentioned and most compassionate depiction of a White writer does not match the Aboriginal perspective on the same issue as the social and cultural orientation of the Whites is very different from that of the Aborigine.

Penny Van Toorn traces the earliest Aboriginal writings in English back to late eighteenth century when pamphlets, newsletters, newspaper articles, petitions, manifestoes, speeches, interviews, letters, anecdotes, traditional stories, poems and essays were all written by the Aborigines in English. Two of the earliest noteworthy Aborigines whose contribution to Aboriginal writings in English had gone unnoticed or should be said intentionally deleted from the pages of early Aboriginal literary history in English are Biraban, an Awabakal man on the Congregational mission at Lake Macquarie in New South Wales and the Christian Aboriginal evangelist, James Unaipon. Though Biraban had not only taught Lancelot Threlkeld, Awabakal language but also had helped him in the translation of the Gospel of St Luke into Awabakal, Biraban’s name was not listed along with Lancelot Threlkeld as the translator. Similar was the injustice
done to Unaipon. Though he had worked on par with George Taplin, a missionary, in recording of the traditional Ngarrinyeri stories and customs, his name was not mentioned. Though his Native Legends (1929) could be considered as the first book published by the Aboriginal author, anthropologist Willliam Ramsay Smith stole parts of Unaipon’s Legendary Tales of Australian Aborigines (1930) manuscript for his Myths and Legends of the Australian Aboriginals (1930) Toorn in Early Aboriginal Writing: and the Discipline of Literary Studies notes there is a lot of proof in the personal and formal documents of the early White settlers’ like the government officials, ethnographers, missionaries etc. which contains transcriptions of a variety of English spoken by the Aborigines. Mudrooroo in the work titled Indigenous Literature describes The Flinders Island Weekly Chronicle a journal in English by Tasmanian Indigenous men as an “expression of an Indigenous minority living on the fringes of the majority community”. This is the first written work in English from the Aborigines. This extended to political writings in the form of petitions like the Coranderrk bark petition and Yirrkala peoples’ bark petition. These petitions were political in nature sent to the government requesting them to take necessary action, Toorn examines in his work titled Early Aboriginal Writing: and the Discipline of Literary Studies that, the “authorship, attribution, editorial intervention and framing are economically and politically crucial to Aboriginal people” (760). As most of these petitions were related to land rights movement and the related political sphere they were mostly hidden either in the government archives or the government departmental files.
Toorn also observes that ‘While samples of traditional Aboriginal oral literature in translation gets included in anthologies of Australian literature. Early Aboriginal texts written in English are left out” (757). In spite of all this suppression, with the increasing opportunity that they have created for themselves in the White dominated Australia, the Aborigines have started writing about themselves, their history, their culture and their survival in their own words in but in English. Though they have initially chosen to write to re-define themselves and their identity, in doing so they have created a new identity for themselves and they have succeeded in their mission very effectively by reaching greater audience. Their achievement is clearly pronounced when Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker) had outnumbered all the other living Australian poets in selling her works and when her works were widely translated as well. This is a direct yardstick for the impact and quality of Aboriginal literature. A number of publishing houses like the Aboriginal publishing house, Black Books, Magabala Books, etc were established to give the Aboriginal literary movement a strong support to the ‘cross-cultural communication’ as Adam Shoemaker puts it. Talking about the impact of Oodgeroo Noonuccal’s work in his Black Words Whites Page, Shoemaker states that: “Noonuccal’s book ushered in an era of self-reflective literary examination by Black Australian; it is also completely changed the specimen on the slide under the microscope.”(5)

But this was not an easy task for the Aborigines. For example Kath Walker’s house was broken into and all her clothes were destroyed when it was
discovered that she had the creative power of penning down her feelings. Mudrooroo was the first to bring out the first Aboriginal novel Wild Cat Falling in 1965 followed by Living Black in 1977, a masterpiece by Kevin Gilbert. From then on there was a steady progress of Aboriginal publications with the bicentennial year of 1988 focusing on the original dwellers of the soil more than any time in history until then. From then on Aboriginal literature encompassed all genres of writing under its purview.

Mudrooroo in his work Indigenous Literature divides the Aboriginal poets into two categories. Under the first category fall poets like Jack Davis, Kath Walker, Kevin Gilbert and Colin Johnson who used the form and structure of the White settler to convey their messages. Poets of this generation, according to Mudrooroo are ‘scarred by assimilation’. The second category of poets, under which poets like Lionel Fogarty fall are more bold and had set a new trend in Aboriginal poetry. Mudrooroo states that poetry of Lionel Fogarty “is layered and textured into shapes and meanings which are difficult for European readers to understand” (43). What Mudrooroo means here is that for one to understand the spirit of an Aboriginal text one needs to have a comprehensive understanding of the culture and life of the Aborigines.

Aboriginal fiction is based on the oral story telling tradition of theirs. In these the Aboriginal authors not only tell the stories about what is traditionally important to Aboriginal life like their culture, its relationship with nature and the environment around them, human relationships not only among themselves but also with the natural environment around them, their status as Aborigines in the
present, their relationship with the settler and the dynamics between them, new role of modern Aboriginal man in the present situation of the Aborigines, women’s solidarity and definition of self as they are doubly victimized, etc. All the aspects that become central and important to the Aboriginal existence found place in their fiction.

Mudrooroo and Berndt trace back the significance of biography and autobiography to the Aboriginal oral tradition. Following this the Aboriginal biographies and autobiographies detail and narrate the life of Aborigines then and now which shows their innate strength of resilience in resistance, adapting and survival of hardships and low tide. In them the authors have narrated life incidents of what it is to be an Aborigine and what exactly their culture stands for. As the incidents in these texts drew from real life experiences they had a lot of impact on their readers thus stimulating change in the reader.

Drama especially has always been a very effective tool in social change. It very subtly brings to light the follies in human nature which the untrained mind fails to see. The Aborigines have used it very effectively not only as a means to educate and bring awareness among the non-Aborigines about what it is to be an Aborigine in Australia but as well a means to redefine themselves and their history. Many of the traditional oral traditions could be seen in the Aboriginal dramas like song and dance along with the modes and styles of appropriated stage, setting, appropriation of language, Aboriginal humour, etc. The Aboriginal playwrights brought to light the facts of their history, especially that part of history that has been misrepresented or left out in the Whites
Australian texts. Song, dance, didgeridoo, clap sticks, corroboree, etc encode many layers of meaning in the plays. The Aboriginal playwrights also appropriate English language in two different ways. One they do not stick to the Standard English of the Settler and also include a number of Aboriginal terms in their dialogue. The use of appropriated English directly de-centers the Settlers’ mother tongue and the use of Aboriginal terms gives the power of de-coding the dialogue and its implication to their Native speakers. Aboriginal humour is a very rare quality which demands a lot of applause as it very subtly targets but makes very obvious the follies of human nature. Adam Shoemaker in *Black Words Whites Page* states that, “this reliance upon laughter in the midst of adversity is an important element in the Aboriginal self-image. It is one which emerges very clearly in Aboriginal literature, particularly Black Australian Drama” (233)

Another significant aspect that the genre of drama facilitates is the aspect of Dreaming. When a particular scene is enacted on the stage the actors cease to be their independent selves and become part of the Dreaming connecting the past, present and future in a single continuum. Their past is re-written, their present brought to light which in turn influences in shaping their future. The corroboree and other acts help mould their future. All these aspects make drama the most effective tool of social change and its impact on its audience is, to put in Shoemaker’s words, of “total sensory impact” in comparison to any other genre of literature.
Jack Leonard Davis is the epitome of Australian Aboriginal dramatists. He had made an indelible impact on the non-Aboriginal audience about Aboriginal culture, history and the present. He is also the first published Australian Aboriginal playwright. Jack Davis plays many roles at once. He is a poet, playwright, actor, activist, and many more rolled into one. His plays pronounce not only the Aboriginal history, resistance, culture, present and survival but as well stand as a symbol of contemporary hybridisation across boundaries and cultures and strength of resilience. This he does coupled with his own share of humour. Humour as a unique characteristic feature of Aboriginal drama as discussed above plays a striking role in all of Jack Davis’ plays.

Born in Perth in the year 1917, Western Australia, Jack Davis is fourth of the eleven children of his parents. His parents were practicing Christians and the children had very good relationship with their parents. Jacks Davis’ father was very jovial man and was very friendly with his children. He was very hard working and insisted on discipline. He was good at hunting and a number of sports. He often took his sons out for hunting with him and was also an excellent story teller. During Jack Davis’ childhood his family lived in Yarloop till his father died in a hunting accident. Jack Davis’ mother and the children went different ways in search of employment after this incident. Jack Davis and his brother Harold were sent to the Moore River Settlement on the promise that they would be trained in farming skills which was never fulfilled. From then on Jack Davis earned his livelihood doing many different things. He worked as a stockman, boxer, horse-breeder, manual labour, train driver and truck driver. All
the jobs helped him understand the lives of the Aborigines in depth. But it was at the Moore River Settlement that Jack Davis learnt about his ancestral culture and the condition of his people. Jack Davis’ family though did not have many resources, were leading a very peaceful and content life till then. They were able to face the general odds of life as a family together. The death of his father shattered their family and it is his experiences at the Moore River Settlement brought to his notice the existing gaps in the system and the discrimination and trauma that the Aborigines face in day to day life. This first hand experiences made him one of the most influential figure in the Australian Aboriginal activism. He also draws rich from these experiences the content of his plays thus documenting the lives and history of Australian Aborigines. Like in his culture, Jack Davis weaves the past, present and the future into his works connecting them to the Dreaming in the present.

Right from his childhood Jack Davis was very intelligent and bold child. There were a number of instances to prove this during his childhood. When he was sent to the Moore River Settlement at the age of 14, he started writing poetry as his expression of protest and self-expression when he came face to face with the exploitation of the Aborigines by the Whites landowners. When law prohibited Aborigines to be on the streets after sunset he was bold enough to disobey the law which had put him behind the bars for four days. It is at the Moore River Settlement that he met a man called Worru who had influenced him through his stories and songs. The character of Uncle Worru is a direct outcome of this influence. In due course of time Jack Davis started learning writing
Aboriginal words and Bibbulmun language. He started exploring all genres of literature like poetry, short fiction, drama, autobiography and critical material. After being freed from the Moore River Settlement, Jack Davis lived on the Brookton Aboriginal Reserve for several years where he learned a lot about his ancestral culture, his people, their life and their language. Jack Davis explored his Nyoongah culture, its people and the language which he documented in all his works. His activism explored wide range of issues like Aboriginal history, Aboriginal culture and its relation to the land, the Stolen Generation, Aboriginal identity in the present, Black-Whites dynamics in Australia, death in custody, racism, etc which reflected in his works.

He published his first collection of poems in 1950s. Some of his works include *A Boy’s Life*, his autobiography, poems like *Day Flight, Land, Soul, the Executioner, The Red Gum and I, etc*. He had always been sensitive to the atrocities committed towards the Aborigines and had been a patron of the Deaths in Custody Watch Committee and his book *John Pat and other Poem* is “Dedicated to Maisie Pat and to all mothers who have suffered similar loss”. His poem John Pat has been inscribed on the John Pat Memorial at Fremantle Prison, plays like *The First Born*(1970), *The Steel and the Stone* (1873), *The Bitter Bit* (1975), *Honey Spot* (1985), *Moorli and the Leprechaun* (1989), *In Our Town* (1990), *Widartji* (1990), *Wahning Country* (1992), *Kullark*(1979), *The Dreamers*(1982), *No Sugar*(1985), *Barungin*(1988). He is the most acclaimed Aboriginal playwright, both nationally and internationally. He was also editor of the Aboriginal periodical *Identity* which helped the Aborigines to understand
their identity in the late nineteenth century. Jack Davis term became crucial in helping Aborigines of that period to define themselves at the point in time that they are then, of breaking the stereotype and giving new meaning to Aboriginality. Shoemaker in his work *Black Words White Page* quotes Keith Smith who asserts:

I don’t mean that we have to go back with our spears and our boomerangs and the nulla nullas and hunt our tucker and do this type of thing. What I mean is that we’ve got to regain the spirit of our Aboriginality so that we can go on to greater things according to whatever a community wants…the spirit, the soul, the Aboriginality of it. You’re an Aboriginal, you’ve got to be proud, you’ve got to know something of your background, know where you come from, where you’re going and what you’re doing, but at the same time you’ve got take that Aboriginality with you. You’re black, you know and you’ve got to respect the black. Nobody can change it. (232)

Shoemaker recognising pan-Aboriginalism of the Australian Aborigines states that:

The concept of Aboriginality encompasses many things: respect for the Aboriginal past and for traditional Black Australian ties to the land, a sense of pride and dignity, and sometimes one of dismay and outrage. An impetus towards action in both the social and political spheres is also involved, ranging from petitions and
demonstrations to the establishment of Aboriginal-controlled health, legal, and housing services. The pan-Aboriginal trend is reinforcing all of these factors and is enabling spokespeople of the Black Australian movement – be they politicians, artists, social workers or writers – to gain a voice and a supportive public.

(233)

This was the key interest of Jack Davis in his plays. He had voiced and represented all the aspects of Aboriginal identity, from past to the present and then into the future, through his plays. Jack Davis had ardently worked for the Aborigines of Australia till his last breath. His services would forever be remembered in giving voice and for the bettering the lives of the Australian Aborigines not only in Australia but on a global platform. He held many key positions as the Director of the Aboriginal Centre in Perth from 1967 to 1971, the first Chair of Aboriginal Lands Trust in Western Australia, co-founded the Aboriginal Writers, Oral Literature and Dramatists’ Association, member of the council of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies and the Aboriginal Arts Board and Chairman of Western Australia Aboriginal Lands Trust. He was also named as a Living Treasure in 1998.

His contribution for the bettering of the condition of Australian Aborigines has been recognised with a number of honours and awards like The Order of the British Empire – Medal (Civil) in 1976, the Bicentennial BHP Award for the Pursuit of Excellence in literature and the arts in 1988, the Swan Gold Theatre Award in 1990, Sidney Myer Performing Arts Award, The Kate
Challis RAKA Award, a number of Human Rights Awards, Western Australia Week Literary Award, Western Australian Premier’s Book Awards, honorary doctorates from Murdoch university and the University of Western Australia and many more.

The greatness of Jack Davis lies in the fact that though he was not much educated in the popular sense of the term, his life experiences and his keen passion to redefine his culture and his people directed his achievements. Jack Davis also had very strong political affiliations and affirmations for the betterment of the Aborigines. After moving back to Perth in 1960 he immediately affiliated himself with the Aboriginal Advancement Council (AAC) and through his services rose up as its President. In 1971 he had become the State Secretary of the Western Australian State’s Federal Council for the Advancement of the Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI). He was also an active participant in the launching of the ‘tent embassy’ outside the State parliament.

Displacement, social, cultural and political, had been the main issues running all through Jack Davis’ plays. The settler has successfully displaced the Aborigines from their own land with alien policies and governance. As all the important aspects of Aboriginal experiences and life are directly linked to their land the Aborigines are also socially and culturally displaced by the settler. The once peaceful environment and life of the Aborigines is now filled with poverty and restlessness.
Jack Davis subtly rejects the western values and notion of civilization in his dialogue. Yagan sings the praise of the Australian abundance in the pre-colonial period and the Yorlahs despise their present situation surrounded in poverty and psychological imperialism. Alec Yorlah is neither happy with the education system nor is he happy about the law and governance. Jamie is very bold to fight for Aboriginal rights and Rosie is bold to face the stark realities of the Aboriginal existence and is determined to give her children a decent living through their education.

Jack Davis does not hesitate to see right through the Aboriginal plight. He uses irony very tactfully. The failure of communication between Will and Yagan regarding usage of resources is a perfect example. So is also his tact is presenting a few of the Whites paradoxes in the play. The military’s indiscriminate acts are justified as acts of self defence. It is also very paradoxical and ironical that the Aboriginals for whom community, land and kinship are centre of their existence in their culture, meet their relatives mostly only in funerals.

The Aboriginal characters in this plays are very intelligent and wise. They can see right through their situation and people. Jack Davis takes his characters from real life characters and experiences in building his works. He draws his characters from different historical figures and from his personal experiences as an Aboriginal Australian. This as well helps him rise above the narrow national boundaries making his characters as much universal as they are idiosyncratic.
Jack Davis distorts time in his narratives so as to bring to life the Aboriginal experiences from the arrival of the Whites on the Aboriginal soil through to the present day. Jack Davis appropriates the language used by the Aboriginal characters very consciously, through which he creates their unique identity through language. All the Aboriginal characters use simple but clear communication. Their language is also sprinkled with Aboriginal vocabulary to give Aboriginal English its own unique flavour. Jack Davis also in tune with the Aboriginal culture in giving the stage directs and costumes. The stage settings are minimalist and so are also the costumes. The depth of Aboriginal culture can be felt in the depth of the Aboriginal characters in dealing with their day to day affairs. Jack Davis builds his female characters strong and high. They stand as epitomes of womanhood, inner strength and resourcefulness. One can observe that they are the ones who become the centre of everyone’s life and being.

Song, dance, music and painting play a very significant role in the lives of the Aborigines. Ceremonies and rituals remind the Aborigines the significance of different aspects of life and nature. All the elements are integral part of a divine scheme for the Aborigines.

Jack Davis exploits different genres like historical narrative, song, dance, storytelling, myth, mythology, memory etc into his plays to bring home his point with certainty and to rewrite Australian history.

He lived a full life dedicated to the betterment of the Aborigines of Australia and died in the year 2000 at the age of 83. His death is a great loss to
the Aboriginal movement. Katherine Brisbane called Jack Davis as Australia’s “most influential black playwright, although he was not the first”. She also stated that he had encouraged and motivated “other Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders to use the stage as a forum for communicating with Whites people. [H]e was always political.”