

TRAJECTORY OF ABORIGINAL HISTORY AND CULTURE IN SALLY MORGAN'S *MY PLACE*

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The book *My Place*, in true sense, is a tribute to those people who took every effort to make their people realize the modern Australia. At outset of the book, we find the novel is divided into three stories, which explain the past day's memory in the present. The first part of the story of the novel has been told by Arthur Corunna, the second by Gladys Milroy and Daisy Corunna. The book covers a span of time that is more than hundred year's history of aboriginal culture, relationships and indistinguishable rituals. I would like to raise an elementary query for had there been any need to transcribe the history of Australia? I must think that this answer can be given with the words of David Malory who says, "History is not what happened but what is told." So, the answer is this that history can be interpreted, from person to person in their own way of understanding but the real realization can be felt by only those people who have been the real witness to that events. Sally Morgan has been the witness to collect the information, memories and unforgotten sufferings of the days while she was growing in an aboriginal atmosphere. In an interview with Delys Bird and Dennis Haskell, she talks of her memories when she was writing the manuscript of this book which was a daunting task for a writer to carry on the spirit of writing, in limited resources. She spilled her ink to write on both side of papers without break as she had no money to go for any other resources. "Yes, or I'd make notes- initially because I didn't have a tape recorder, because I was broke when I was doing that book, I had young children and no money, a husband who worked cleaning. I used to type both sides of the paper, so by the time you read the one side and got to the other side, oh, it was a real mess. (Delys Bird and Dennis Haskell 1)

In the history, she has harsh memories that she has shared in her writings that is of her race, colour, identity and culture. She believes that they were traditionally different, having disciplined in other culture which was not of the mainstream. So they could not amalgamate themselves with the large section of the people. The drastic requirement of the society was of, to bring them to assimilate with the white people. They did not accept the offer given by the white people as they wanted to preserve their identity. They didn't like to lose it what they had earned through their lineage. When she was asked about the autobiography, she had written in *My Place*, she said, this is not an autobiography only but the white context of society. "Personal in a family sense, in a family context, and *my* childhood, sure, but through learning about my childhood you also learn about my mother and my father and my grandfather and all that stuff. (Delys Bird 5)

Aboriginals were disciplined in an unwelcomed situation where they could not live their life like the white one. So, the kids were asked by elders better to be silent than speaking in public domain. Sally Morgan believes in it. "My silences were embarrassing to mum. She usually covered up for me by telling everyone I was shy. Actually, I was more scared than shy. I felt if I said anything at all, I'd just fall apart. There'd be me, in piece on the floor. I was full of secret fears"(Sally Morgan, *My Place* 8). She has been an avid articulator of psychological experiences which we find in her deliberations when she asserts that her father was emotionally and physically absent from the family. She also believes that the family is not a unit where people live with similar interests but it is an association with which we can share our feelings and emotions. She was not a fortunate child to receive such favours from father's side. "Dad came home for a while a couple of weeks after that, and then, in the following January, 1957, Mum turned upon the doorstep with another baby." (14) Mother was only the caring hand from all the way. She also wished to articulate her feelings specially talking about the cultural amalgamation and she said that in aboriginal community women are more dominant than the men. There is a deep dissimilarity between the sexes. "Dad didn't seem to be very interested in my schooling, either. He never asked me how I was going or whether I had any problems. In fact, the closest contact Dad had with my education was a brutal encounter with my black print pencil". (18)

Historically, Aboriginal writing in Australia was not officially developed by any one before Morgan except David Unaipon's published work in 1924 which was not capable in itself to translate the words into meanings. It was a romantic phenomenon only. White people were interested into writing the history of aboriginal. Aboriginal history was not a simply story of past but it was also related to the emotions of the people who belong to. Sally Morgan believes that the history is the captive of victors. So they cannot write their history as they do not belong to them. History cannot be retold it has its own seriousness that cannot be transcribed by any one. Hence, Sally says,

I want to write the history of my own family...there's almost nothing written from a personal point of view about Aboriginal people. All our history is about the white man. No one knows what it was like for us. A lot of our history has been lost, people have been too frightened to say anything...Thousands families in Australia were destroyed by the government policy of taking children away. None of that happened to white people. (Sally 163-64)

Sally Morgan admired being a voice of the aboriginal people, like her other authors also have given their contribution to the people of their part to feel themselves proud. And they are Colin Johnson (Mudrooroo Narogin), Kevin Gilbert, Jack Davis and Glenyse ward have written literature on black community. *My Place* is a family saga; well-structured text deals with the life of narrator's in particular while aboriginal community in general. The chief cause behind writing this text is too alive the sanctity of community as well hand it over to the coming generation for their perusal and onward transmission. So the text has been a vibrant document for the history. It is also developed in order to imbibe all its sentiments intact. There is another reason of assimilation which aboriginal people do not wish to apply in

their life. White people asked them to assimilate themselves with major group but they denied:

There's so much the whitefellas don't understand. They want us to be assimilated into the white, but we don't want to be. They complain about our land rights, but they don't understand the way we want to live. They say we shouldn't get the land, but the white man's had land rights since this country was invaded, our land rights. Most of the land the Aboriginal wants, no white man would touch... Yet, you find somethin'... valuable on the land the Aborigine has got and whites are all there with their hands out. (212)

Recently I read an article and came to know that there is a prevalent confusion among the people to discover their roots as well as connections from where had they come. There is misunderstanding also with those people who visit the country first or the second time. One cannot identify white Australian as well as Aboriginal from one another. So now the whole discourse has been changed from repressive/ restrictive to open one where people have become the part of one group only.

Culture is actually related to our states of emotions which we want to translate through our individual conditioning. And the conditioning that we create can be developed by our individual experiences. In the case of Australian aboriginal had been able to understand the social and cultural conditioning and therefore they liked to transcend their feelings with other peoples. They do not feel hierarchy of superiority and inferiority in their surroundings. So, I would like to validate my views with independent pleasure which every wants to do. So, gradually they realized this truth to mix with the major group. Hence, I would like to refer Lu and Gilmour who put the culture:

Culture can be a major force constructing the conception of happiness and consequently shaping its subjective experiences... Culture... influences SWB in the way it gives shape and form to the self. Different self views (independent self versus interdependent self) function as regulatory mechanisms when the individual attempts to judge his or her wellbeing. (2004:271-72)

A. D. Hope believes that history and culture of Australia is not what written in scriptures only but it is more than that and may be realized through the flora and fauna of Australia, he says: "A nation of trees, drab green and desolate grey.../Without songs, architecture, history.../The learned doubt, the chatter of cultured apes/which is called civilization over there." (A. D. Hope, 74-75)

The earlier writing of Aboriginal literature was in oral form which can be identified with the oral folks, tales, and bush songs create the native spirit. Therefore, White settlers asked them to transfer their faiths in them as they do not have their own language and literature in formalized manner. We can observe the same condition with the people of African continent when they were also behaved in the same manner as we have with Aborigines. The major cause behind the whole conditioning is of their oral tradition and culture. On return, we can see that the position of assimilation in the country of India was very difficult for the white people because Indian had great cultural roots. They had strong regional languages and sentiments. Consequently, White people could not translate their words into meanings in their

favour. History can be retold but not misrepresented if one has his/her own history. Sally Morgan also believes that aboriginal people should have their own history and culture which should be created by those people only who have witnessed their feelings. Sally Morgan shares her feelings how much it is difficult to recreate your ideas with honesty. Thus:

‘Nan,’ I said carefully. ‘What people are we? She was immediately on the defensive. She looked sharply at me with the look of a rabbit sensing danger. ‘You’re tryin’ to trick me again. Aaah, you can’t be trusted. I’m not stupid, you know. I’m not saying nothing. Nothing, do you hear.’ I suddenly felt terribly sad. The barriers were up again. Just when I thought I was finally getting somewhere. ‘Nan,’ I coaxed, ‘I’m not trying to trick you. I just want to know what people we are, that’s all.’ (*My Place* 130)

And she wants to know about her strictness that she creates:

I found myself coming back to the same old question: if Nan was aboriginal, why didn’t she just say so? The fact that both Mum and Nan made consistent denials made me think I was barking up the wrong tree.(131)

Now, we have Australia in new constraints that are the identity of Multicultural where innumerable number of ethnic groups and cultures are shaping their cultural space with normative subjectivity. Now the subject of Australia is a matter of recognition and desire to live with concern and hope. Aboriginals are also feeling proud to be part of the larger canvass which does not create hierarchy or label to create a binary opposition.

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