

RECONCILIATION AND REPRESENTATION OF ABORIGINALITY IN

ALEXIS WRIGHT'S *CARPENTARIA*

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Abstract

Alexis Wright is one of the distinguished aboriginal writers. Carpentaria is one of Wright's novels and it is published in 2006. It talks about cross-cultural way, indigenous minority and empowered non-indigenous. It reflects the antagonistic characters and economic exploitation. Wright deconstructs colonial discourses and moving forward of the indigenous community in this novel. Carpentaria talks about cosmology of indigenous Australians who is colonized by the British. It provides the past and present capitalism of Australia and it breaks the European object arrangements. It challenges the Western dualism and capitalist exploitation of local resources. The novel portrays the ancestral story which ties the characters of aboriginals. It reconceives the challenges of particular settler in Australia. Wright describes the struggle of indigenous women for achievement in unequal social and economic power. She brings the marginalized people life through her characters. She conveys the relationship with land and the issues of sovereignty. Thus, she clearly represents the aboriginals of Australia through her novel, Carpentaria.

Key words: Carpentaria, Aboriginal, Indigenous, Marginalization, Australian literature

In Australian literature, powerful stories express the reconciliation and representation of aboriginality in the novels of indigenous women novelist like Alexis Wright. Indigenous women struggle for their socio-economic power, in order to accomplish the equality. Marginalization is the primary key word in the context of indigenous women writers. The fictions of indigenous represent the aboriginal dislocation of land, place. The identity and separation are the major issues and themes in the writings of indigenous writers. The Contemporary Australian writings focus the land and the identity of the aboriginal people. Aboriginal writings describe the colonial culture and its ideology. Wright illustrates the importance of tradition to know the indigenous. She makes to restore the Australian nation through reclaiming aboriginal land. Her writings dismantle the colonialism by the story of aboriginal.

Carpentaria talks about the culture of aboriginals and provides recognition and representation of aboriginal people. Alexis Wright voices for the indigenous community in order to support repression and rejection which are faced by them. Indigenous writing demonstrates the redress and justice for the indigenous people. Wright establishes new vision in her writing by breaking the colonialism. She attempts to reclaim aboriginal land and rights of their people. She examines the nature of land which provides to understand the political satire. The works of the indigenous writers break the hegemony of power by reimagining narratives. It helps to recover the suffering of indigenous. Wright depicts the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous people which are symbolized to understand the indigenous community.

Wright presents the domination of colonization in her novel, *Carpentaria*. It focuses the colonial past and aboriginal communities. The novel expresses the way of negotiation which is made by

aboriginals in settler colonial nation. She unfolds the political discourse of aboriginal affairs that are represented in her writings. She emphasizes the healing of self and family. She deliberates the suffering of the consequences of marginalized and isolated people. She reveals the colonial establishment over their land. She reconstructs the identity through her protagonist. She explores the post colonialism in her novels. She creates complex context in her novels through her protagonist. Her perspectives are to understand the existing trauma faced in aboriginal culture.

Carpentaria portrays the literary traditional landscape of Australia. It is mainly about aboriginal storytelling and representation of history. Wright's notion is authenticity of place in contemporary Australia. Her characters are ironically presented the division among indigenous spirituality. Her novel aims to centre the hostile relationship between members of the indigenous. She states the indigenous consciousness which elucidate the heritage. It is evident from her writings. She depicts the assimilation and reconciliation of Australia. She tries to bring the country background in her novel. *Carpentaria* is about the dreamtime of the natives. It portrays their land, love, beliefs and myths. Aboriginals of Australian think about their ancient culture. She describes perception of non-aboriginals and the concepts of white in her article. Wright explains:

“We see the world differently, our experience of the world differs from the rest of the population...if Aboriginal writing causes unease it is because it challenges non Aboriginal perceptions of Standard English, or white concepts, values and ways of describing events, places and people.” (On writing 81)

Carpentaria represents the unbreakable oral tradition of aboriginal people. It describes the colonial era and present scenario. This is evident from the character of Elias Smith, the mysterious shipwreck survivor. He has lost his memory where he has come from and could not understand where he is currently. Wright uses the character of Elias to represent the initial colonization and their people. She clearly shows that “no history...no culture, no songs, no sacred ground” (*Carpentaria* 49). Elias does not have connection to the land where she lives. The novel is the exploration of truth and existence, and perseverance of post-colonial Australia. It is a profound of present and past, and reminds a national classic.

Carpentaria is an aboriginal narrative novel which is set in the town of north- western Queensland. Wright's narrative juxtaposes the memory and history. In the chapter “From Time Immemorial”, she exposes different systems of time which exists in one place. It is deliberately expressed:

A nation chants but we know your story already. The bells peal everywhere. Church bells calling the faithful to the tabernacle where the gates of heaven will open. But not for the wicked calling innocent little black girls from a distant community where the white dove bearing the olive branch never lands. Little girls who come back home after church on Sunday, who look around themselves at the human fallout and announce matter-of-factly, ‘armageddon begins here’. (*Carpentaria*1)

The aboriginals generally believe in two patterns of time. They are the daily independent actions and the Dreamtime of an immeasurable spiritual cycle. They believe more in Dreamtime than reality. They live in timelessness being in real and dream world. Before the arrival of Europeans, aboriginals have no written language so they depend on the traditional way of storytelling. Through storytelling aboriginal heritage, myths, folklore stories are passed from one generation to the other generation for thousands of years and even now also. The elder people connect the past and the present and pave the way for the future. They pass their knowledge, skills, and their tradition and also share their personal experience to their aboriginal circle and they have been treated with respect by the other people. The story telling style is evident from the beginning of the novel:

The ancestral serpent, a creature bigger than storm clouds, came down from the stars, laden with its own creative enormity. It moved graciously- if you had been watching with the eyes of a bird hovering in the sky far above the ground. Looking down at the serpent's wet body, glistening from the ancient sunlight, long before man was a creature who could contemplate the next

moment in time. It came down those billions of years ago, to crawl on its heavy belly, all around the wet clay soils in the Gulf of Carpentaria. (*Carpentaria* 1)

For Aboriginal communities all over the world “literature has been an important forum for testifying to past and present injustices and for setting the interpretive framework of such articulations” (Rymhs 108). Aboriginal literature has to play an important role in the process of reconciliation also. According to the noted Aboriginal writer Mudrooroo:

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

It is important to note that most of the Australians still believe in the stereotypes perpetrated by the colonial discourses where the Aborigines are portrayed as “stone age” people. In modern times, the old stereotypes have been recast and the Aborigines are now considered as lazy, drunkard and dirty people who are habitually violent.

One of the important tasks of the policy of reconciliation is to shatter these stereotypes because only then the Aborigines can be accepted in the mainstream society. Wright's novel, however, shows that ten years of reconciliation has not done any good to the Aborigines, because the policy of reconciliation is aimed at reconciling the Aborigines to the prevailing conditions rather than reconciling with the Aborigines. An important difference comes to the meaning of verb ‘reconcile’ depending on whether the verb is followed by ‘with’ or ‘to’:

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

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

It is clear that Stan Bruiser is still living in “assimilation” era where the Aborigines are expected to live like the whites, but that is not all, he brings up the past while talking to the Aborigines and taunts Angel Day about the “times he chased her on horseback down to the creek until her bony legs gave up” (*Carpentaria* 41). He brags about “how he has chased every Aboriginal woman in town at various times, until he runs them into the ground then raped them. He has branded them all, like a bunch of cattle” (*Carpentaria* 41). It is clear that mindset like this can complicate the situation. Henry Reynolds describes an incident where a Torres Strait Islander bashed a white man. The white man is beaten because: the white man has tried to shoot the Islander in the Northern Territory twenty years before. He “kept laughing and joking about it and boasted that he had already shot eight blackfellas” (Reynolds, Why 55). White men like Bruiser keep on bragging about the past because they still think that the Aborigines are inferior to the whites. Thus, Wright represents the aboriginality and reconciliation with the Australian through her protagonists in the novel, *Carpentaria*.

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