
UNIT 1 AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE

Structure

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this unit is to give you a broad overview of Australian literature and then introduce you to some of the problems that are part of any attempt to answer the questions: What is Australian literature? Why is it relevant for the Indian student of English literature? What is the nature of its relation to Indian literature?

1.1 INTRODUCING AUSTRALIAN LITERATURE

Australian literature is a large body of writing that can include early versions and English translations of Aboriginal song sequences or folktales, the memoirs, journals and ballads of early European explorers and settlers. It also includes the more formal works of literature that followed as writing and publishing established its sway on the island continent. Like the literature of any other nation it captures in many ways the growth and development of Australia into the country that we know today.

It can be said that much of what we can include under the category of Australian literature from the early phases of its development was not what would be traditionally considered literature. For example, the oral songs and stories of the Aboriginal peoples of Australia were passed on orally from generation to generation without being written. Even when they were recorded in English versions it was done more with an anthropological intention than a literary one. The idea was to learn more about the culture and values of the Aboriginal peoples from a scientific point of view than to study the aesthetic aspects of these creations. Similarly, the records, memoirs, diaries and journals that are today included under the study of literature were not always meant for this purpose. They were often the private or official records of explorers, administrators and settlers. However, these works are important sources that reveal how the land, circumstances and people of Australia evolved in the thoughts and imagination of the people who lived there or visited it. They show how Australian literature came to be written and the early influences on this body of writing.

The ballads of the convicts and the bush songs belong more to a period when Australian literature began to be an institution in itself. Periodicals like the *Bulletin*, which started publication in 1880, were part of this trend. The ballads and bush songs, which had earlier been mostly part of the folk tradition, now became part of the literary tradition. Writers began to consciously cultivate and develop the forms, themes and figures of the oral ballads and bush songs. 'Banjo' Patterson belongs to this school of writing. 'Waltzing Matilda' a ballad about a swagman – a travelling farm worker in the Australian outback – has become to many Australians of European descent, a kind of unofficial national anthem. This is in part because it

captures the spirit of surviving in a harsh landscape, the pioneering spirit as well as a bold attitude to life and the authorities.

Literature in Australia developed and began to take on many other forms such as the popular short story, the literary version of the fireside yarn. Henry Lawson and Barbara Baynton were prominent short story writers who contributed greatly to the growth and development of this genre during this formative stage. Their writing captured features of the growth of the Australian cultural myths of the Bush and its people. The hardships and spirit of the European settlers and bush people during the pioneering days finds expression in their work.

At this early stage of development it was but natural that the writers who were mainly from among the British settlers would bring to their writing the values and forms of the British traditions of literature. In this sense, early Australian literature was constantly looking over its shoulder at England. This soon developed into a source of tension as some writers felt that the best direction for Australian literature was to follow and maintain British traditions of great literature. Others felt that as Australia was so different from England that it should cut the umbilical cord from the mother country and develop an identity of its own as a nation and this should be reflected in Australian literature.

Australian history and literature do reveal the many tensions that have gone into the making of the Australian nation. These are : the tension between the old country of England, the metropolitan colonial centre and the new country of Australia on the antipodean margins of the British Empire; the tension between the settlers and the indigenous Aborigines; the tension between early waves of settlers and more recent immigrants; the tension between the old language, images and literary forms of British literature and the idiom, images and literary forms taking root in the new environment of Australia. All these tensions shaped the themes and forms of Australian literature.

As in much of the rest of the English speaking world, in Australia the first half of the twentieth century saw the genre of poetry being more popular and the second half saw the novel rising to prominence. A.D. Hope and Judith Wright are the canonical figures of Australian poetry during its heyday. Patrick White, Australia's Nobel Prize laureate, is probably the best known and most taught of Australia's novelists. Their writing began to move away from both a purely derivative imitation of European forms as well as a focus on the people and mores of the Bush. Modern Australia, of the cities began to figure more distinctly in their writing. As the face of the Australian nation began to change, its literature began to reflect that change. Writers like Kath Walker, Mudrooroo, Kevin Gilbert and Sally Morgan have brought the poetry, drama and stories of the Aboriginal peoples to the forefront. There has also been a trend towards autobiographies, biographies and life-stories gaining more and more popularity. The multiculturalism that is being promoted at a political level is being reflected in the diverse voices being heard in the realm of Australian literature. Today there are more women, Aborigines, immigrants whose voices join the exciting confluence that is Australian literature.

1.2 PROBLEMS OF DEFINITION

Having briefly introduced Australian literature let us look at some of the problems associated with trying to answer the question: "What is Australian literature?" How do we define Australian literature? This is not an easy task as different people have different definitions of it in different contexts. The difficulty of defining 'Australian literature' is connected to the problems of giving clear simple definitions to the terms 'Australian' and 'literature', both separately and together. The reasons why these

difficulties arise are because the meaning of these terms keep on changing with time and with different contexts.

Many people take it for granted that literature should be studied with "the 'nation' as a primary context and framework of reference" (Bennett and Strauss, 1). One of the important reasons for this is that the nature and themes of literature are influenced by, and in turn influence contemporary social and political realities. Since for a long time, the category of the 'nation' has been seen as a unit in social, political, cultural and historical terms, the study of literature has been linked to it. The study of literature has thus become deeply related to the way national identity is created and presented. The nature of both the 'nation' and the literary storytelling or 'narration' connected to it, are constantly changing. The definitions and content of both the nation and its literature change as social and political conditions change, demanding similar changes in the way both are presented. This situation is seen in the case of 'Australian literature' as well. In their introduction to *The Oxford Literary History of Australia*, the editors Bruce Bennett and Jennifer Strauss make a comment about the wide and changing range in the presentation of Australia in its literature. According to them the images of the country includes many things. There are images from an Aboriginal Dreaming describing how the world came into existence according to Aboriginal folklore. There are the pre-discovery European imaginings of Australia as *Terra Australis Incognita* – an empty and unknown land. There are also experiences recorded by early settlers, which vary from paradisiacal to purgatorial. More recently the literature has also revealed shifts from the sense of a 'white Australia' or Australia for Australians of Western Europe to the more recent notion of Australia as 'part of Asia'. Many of these representations operate at times well beyond the confines of the 'national'. (4-5)

The land now known as Australia had been occupied for several thousands of years before the British invasion and eventual colonization of the island continent. Often, that part of the land and the peoples who lived there before the colonizers came, is hidden when Australian history and literature is presented as having its 'beginnings' only in the past two hundred years during which the colonizers have been there. This way of presenting Australian history and literature was connected to the legal misrepresentation of the Australian land as being *terra nullius* – an 'empty land' that could therefore be claimed and legally possessed by the colonizers without any consideration for any earlier claims by Aborigines who lived there before. This kind of presentation of the civilization, culture and contribution of the Aborigines as not existing, was a colonial act that for a long time left the Aborigines outside or on the margins of discussions of Australia as a nation.

This way of thinking about Aborigines is increasingly being challenged by and on behalf of the Aboriginal people. The Aborigines are telling their own stories and histories of the Australian nation and making them available for everyone. They are also laying claims to the legal possession of the land. Later waves of immigrants from Southern Europe and Asia, as well as other groups silenced by the powerful colonial version of Australian identity, history and literature are also producing histories and literatures. These versions question the traditional presentation of the Australian nation as a nation created by white colonizers, mostly from Britain. All this is forcing people to take a new look at what has traditionally been considered 'Australian' literature and make it include texts and voices it had earlier ignored.

Within traditional 'white' Australian literature itself, the idea of what constituted the 'Australianness' of Australian literature was a point of debate. This became especially marked as the people of the Australian settler colonies tried to define both for themselves and others the nature of their political, social, cultural and literary relationship with the former colonial centre, Britain. At least two positions became important in the early decades of the twentieth century. One argued that truly great

literature had to follow the rules and traditions of the literary models of British and European literature, as these were universal and eternal. The other position argued that the distinctive features of Australian literature should express the tendency to define 'Australia' without using Britain as a reference point or model. Ian Turner captures the sense of urgency felt at that point in history, to define the Australian nation as different from Britain through literature, when he quotes Nettie Palmer from *Modern Australian Literature* (1924):

Australia was no longer a group of more or less important colonies hanging loosely together...on the ample bosom of Britannia; Australia was henceforth Australia. What that name was to mean it lay in the hands of her writers, above all, to discover. (43)

This sense of urgency was however complicated by the problem of the actual nature of the difference which Australian literature was supposed to present. If Australia and its literature were to be defined in terms of their differences with Britain and its literature, it was not very clear which areas of difference would be focussed upon. Would it be the real and very obvious differences seen in the land or differences in the spirit of the people that were more difficult to define and describe? Either way both sets of differences were constructed and depended on whatever aspect writers consciously chose to focus on – the land, the people, their spirit or a combination of these three. Another aspect of this whole effort of creating a distinct national identity was the two-way pull of wanting to cut loose from Britain while still desiring to retain its respect, interest and recognition. Literature was supposed to perform the function of creating national images that projected a national identity. This national identity was marked by a sense of distinction and a sense of national pride in its differences from the British identity. Australia wanted to be more than just another colony or just an imitation of Britain. Ian Turner quotes T.G. Tucker from *The Cultivation of Literature in Australia* (1902):

If we ever have an 'Australian' school of literature, it will not be because of the fauna and flora and geography and idioms of Australia which may be introduced. These make nothing in art. ... It will be because our Australian atmosphere, our national life, occupations, religious ideas, have inevitably and unconsciously created in our eyes and hearts and intellects some difference in our way of regarding things, so that we perceive strength and beauty and pathos in some new light, and adapt our representation thereto. (43)

As any nation attempts to tell its stories through literature and history, the nature of the identity that the nation wishes to present defines the standards that decide what is considered valuable and authentic within those literary and historical representations. The nature of the target audience of those literary and historical representations will also determine their tone and content. For example, when the writers, who belonged to the group of the European settlers, wrote with the audience in the metropolitan centres of Britain and Europe in mind, for a long time the emphasis was on the exotic and bizarre in the new land. The inverted seasons where summer peaked in December and winter in June, trees that shed their bark instead of their leaves and animals like the kangaroo were presented as points of fascinating interest. Later on, when publication and the primary reading audience shifted to Australia, the emphasis shifted as well. The focus was on creating a white Australian settler identity through the rather repetitive literary creation of characters, themes, and situations that were symbols of that identity. The myths of the Australian Bush and the culture of bush life developed in a big way during this period. Now the boundaries of the reading public and the publishing industry have expanded to include the voices and points of view of previously ignored and marginalised groups such as the Aborigines,

immigrants and women. As a result, there is more diversity in the set of historical and literary representations available in Australia.

Australia – the nation with its many cultural, political and social aspects – and Australian literature – the body of writing that have been used to present some aspects of the nation and its sense of identity – have always and continue to be constantly changing. 'Australian literature' is thus a term used to categorize a constantly changing body of writing and not any fixed set of books or ideas. There is no simple answer to the question, "What is Australian literature?" Just as there are no simple answers to the questions, "What is Australian?" or "What is literature?". Because of these reasons it would be harder still to attempt to define 'Australian literature' in the traditional terms of certain 'characteristic features' or any 'recognised canon' or set of books that are considered 'great literature'.

This block makes no attempt to do either. Instead, an attempt has been made to quickly and briefly discuss some of the changes the term 'Australian literature' has been used to cover within the traditional Australian literary studies programmes. These programmes have focussed on the more widely studied white Australian literary canon, as well as outside it on texts and ideas that challenge the values and standards of the white literary canon. The traditional canon of Australian literature mainly included only white writers of European descent. As a result it made it seem like the only narratives of importance in the Australian continent were white ones – with a leaning towards white male perspectives. Today that is being challenged as Aboriginal, women and immigrant writers assert the importance of their narratives and literary creations. One example of how this is happening is the way life-stories have begun to gain prominence equivalent to that of the novel. This trend was started by the space of Aboriginal and immigrant biographical and autobiographical writing. The block simultaneously attempts to suggest and explain why what has been included under the category has changed and continues to do so. Since the term 'Australian literature' and the standards connected with it are themselves dynamic, our understanding of it must also be flexible and open.

1.3 MATTERS OF RELEVANCE

Postcolonial studies in English departments became important in the latter half of the twentieth century as literature departments began to explore the influence of colonization on history, society, education and writing in the colonized countries. Postcolonial studies have on many occasions tried to show how English studies in the colonies has been a part of a deliberate programme to create colonial subjects who would believe in and follow colonial norms and values. In India, the introduction of English education helped create a class of Indians who could not only help British officers in their work of governing India, but who also were aware of and were expected to believe British values and ideas on culture. Their education in English thus made them very useful to the British in maintaining colonization.

This was a pattern that repeated itself in many colonized countries. It was realized that even after independence, the choice of books and the points of view taught in English literature courses helped continue a kind of mental colonization. As a result of questioning the traditional English literary studies curricula in India and abroad, they were revised to include a wider range of writing in English. This wider range taken from many countries was supposed to expose the student of literature to many different points of view, different standards, values and cultures.

In Australia, the questioning of literary studies programmes that focussed only on British literature was part of the creation of a national identity that wanted to be different and separate from a British colonial legacy. Historically, the emergence of

Australian literature as an academic subject (Dale, 134) began with the inclusion of non-British texts, lectures and postgraduate research starting in the field around the 1920s and 1930s. In the 1940s, Adelaide boasted the first full-fledged course in Australian literature. By the 1970s and 1980s a Chair of Australian literature had been created in Sydney. Scholarly journals, literary histories and bibliographies were being produced as proof of the acceptance of Australian literature as a subject in academic institutions.

During this period, Australian literature as a subject developed in a spirit of trying to cut loose from the British colonial influence. This was similar to other attempts at the national and political level to move away from a British colonial identity. The limits of this trend were reached by the 1990s. At that time as links between various subjects began to be explored, a need was felt for literary studies to go hand in hand with historical and cultural studies as well as to move beyond the narrow limits of a purely national focus.

Traditional English literature courses in many Indian universities after independence, too focussed primarily on British literature from Chaucer to Eliot. American literature and Indian writing in English were included within these traditional curricula as optional papers, mostly at the Masters level. The changes made in the curricula to include the points of view such as those of postcolonial and feminist studies brought in a new body of texts and alternate interpretations of traditional texts.

The introduction of Australian literary studies courses to Indian universities is part of the result of the sudden popularity of postcolonial literary studies at universities. At first, the trend was to include samplings of literature from postcolonial regions such as Australia, Canada, Africa, the Caribbean and the Indian subcontinent under the term Commonwealth literature or Postcolonial literature. One of the main areas of similarity among the literatures of all these places was seen as the British colonial experience. It was not long before it was pointed out that the experience of colonization was different in different regions and places. The nature of British colonization in Australia and Canada was vastly different from that in Africa, India and the Caribbean. For one thing, Australia and Canada were settler colonies where people of British origin came to settle down. In that sense their colonial experience was in many ways more similar to that of the United States of America (which has never quite called itself as postcolonial).

Furthermore, it was felt that the whole postcolonial studies project, while seeming to bring into English literary studies courses books and literatures in English that had till then been outside it, still maintained Britain as the dominant reference point. At this point, the tendency was to move away from the broad category of Commonwealth or Postcolonial literature. Instead English literary studies programmes began to separately focus on specific areas such as Africa, Canada, America, Australia and India while maintaining the postcolonial point of view as one of the contexts of interpretation and criticism. There was also a shift in terms used and it became more acceptable to use New Literatures in English instead of Commonwealth or Postcolonial literature.

When Australian literature studies was taken out of the larger field of postcolonial studies where the primary focus was the nature of the response of Australian literature to and its questioning of the colonial experience with respect to Britain, new angles of study began to emerge. The traditional Australian canon was itself questioned on the grounds that it was preoccupied with the male point of view and was quite closed to the writing of women, Aborigines and new immigrants. At its worst, it was seen to simply substitute Henry Lawson and Patrick White for the study of Chaucer and Shakespeare in the traditional canon. A study of Australian literature that focussed on more local issues such as its relation to Aboriginal writing or the

writing of women revealed power struggles within Australian literature that questioned its values in exactly the same way that it questioned the values of traditional British literature.

As the 'global village' – a phrase coined by the communications guru Marshall McLuhan—becomes a reality, there are opposing trends towards the globalization as well as localization of studies. The universal and the particular are becoming subjects of interest at every level possible. They are not merely seen as opposites but as connected parts of the same system. Any understanding and questioning of the study of the global/universal notions of literature requires a comparative understanding of the specific features of the literatures of as many nations as possible. This is where the study of Australian literature gains significance for the student of English literature in India. On one level, it is a questioning of the traditional focus on British literature. On another, it also includes a criticism of the politics and some of the problems with categories such as Postcolonial and Commonwealth literature. Finally, it makes us aware of a body of writing that reveals interesting power struggles of its own. In short, the focus has shifted from British English literature to literatures in English. Just as there is a shift from English with a capital "E" to world englishes, so also the study of world literatures in English has become important within academic institutions.

1.4 JUXTAPOSITIONS

The literatures of India and Australia can be compared and contrasted in many areas. Two such areas are the similarities and differences in the postcolonial situation in both countries and how both countries deal with cultural diversity. As discussed before, the idea of postcolonialism is itself quite controversial and raises many questions. This not a bad thing on its own. Like many other concepts, the idea of postcolonialism often assumes for purposes of argument that the postcolonial situation is or has been more or less the same everywhere. This is often justified as being for the purpose of opposing the forces of colonialism more effectively. However, once colonialism has itself been opposed, it becomes necessary to find what aspects of 'postcolonialism' need to be examined and questioned.

It has been argued that as studying aspects of postcolonialism became popular and fashionable, the field of 'postcolonial' studies began to continue certain negative trends of colonialism in new ways. This is known as neocolonialism. One way this happens is when the study of postcolonialism keeps Britain and British colonialism at the centre of almost all discussions. Even when they are being analyzed from other critical perspectives, British writers like Shakespeare, who are considered the major writers of British literature and the English language, are at the centre of most arguments. The only difference is that in a traditional curricula they were praised and now they are analyzed from different critical perspectives. While it is crucial to examine and criticize colonialism and make an analysis of its effects, there is a need to eventually move away from just discussing the colonizer and colonised. Also, it is not a solution to just move from praise to criticism or merely reverse the order of importance.

Another criticism of some types of postcolonial studies is that their arguments and discussions seem to assume that colonialism is a historical phase that is over. This kind of an assumption does not take into consideration aspects of colonialism that continue to affect society, culture and politics even today or new forms of colonialism that now hold sway. Simplifying the concepts of colonialism as well as postcolonialism for the purpose of studies and analysis tends to make it seem as if 'colonialism' as well as 'postcolonialism' are the same in all contexts and situations. Distinctions are not made between different degrees to which people in a colonial

situation played along with or resisted the colonization. Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge point to an instance of this when they comment that many postcolonial theorists, such as Bill Ashcroft and Helen Tiffin of *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) fame, "do not sufficiently recognise the differences between 'settler' colonies such as Australia and colonies like India which were colonised by a foreign power" (xii). According to Mishra and Hodge this perpetuates wrong points of view that merely assumes that the colonizer and the colonized were against each other in all situations.

This is not to argue that one context is more or less truly 'postcolonial'. It is merely to recognise some of the problems of assuming that the word 'postcolonial' is always used to refer to the same thing or that the colonized always opposed the colonizer. It is also to stress the results when these differences are ignored. It would be a mistake to celebrate the ways in which white Australian literature opposed Britain without realizing the role that white Australian literature has played in pushing Aborigines and their experiences to the background. The same principle applies to the difficult relations between the better-known canonical texts of Indian writing in English or texts available in English translation and untranslated writing by Dalits and literature in the regional languages. The latter have often been ignored or pushed to the background by the 'postcolonial' framework in English departments which has given maximum coverage to texts available in English, most often by expatriate writers. These are then used to study how the postcolonial spirit is reflected in 'Indian literature'.

'Multiculturalism' became a popular public and political slogan in Australia from the 1980s when the entry of immigrants from Asia began to change the population profile of the island continent. Though the first settlers were also culturally a mixed group, coming mostly from Anglo-Saxon and Irish backgrounds, cultural and racial differences became more obvious within the population when in the post World War years the entry of immigrants from South-Eastern Europe and then later from Asia began. The policy of multiculturalism became a way to controlling the wide variety of socio-cultural values and differences that came into contact with one another.

On one hand, this focus on multiculturalism gave a great boost to Aboriginal and immigrant culture, art and literature. On the other, in the process of creating a space within the larger framework of Australian culture for so-called alternate cultures and practices, there was also a tendency to take only some aspects of those cultures – like specific art forms or food – and 'sell' them as different from 'mainstream Australian culture'. This kind of marketing promotes certain kinds of difference while at the same time always making clear that it is not quite part of the mainstream. It leads to a very subtle kind of marginalization. This face of Australian multiculturalism has also at times drawn attention away from tendencies towards conservative right wing nationalism and beliefs that Australia should be for 'white' Australians.

In India, questions of cultural pluralism were taken for granted for a long time, as the main focus of most discussions on culture was on the impact of British colonialism. The existence of social and cultural divisions, be they religions, caste or class, was blamed on the British colonial policies of 'divide and rule'. Today, there are developments in the social and political fields, such as the rise of right-wing versions of nationalism in India, which are making us think about our claims to cultural tolerance and pluralism. In this context, looking at the Australian situation may help throw light by comparison and contrast on how the practice of cultural pluralism has hidden the many ways in which the voices of women, migrants, dalits and adivasis have been ignored in social, cultural and political fields, as well as in the area of literary studies. The diversity of languages in India and the politics of translation and marketing within an academic/publishing context wherein Indian writing in English, especially that produced by expatriate Indians has gained a sort of importance over

writing in the regional languages and writing by groups such as Dalits or tribals, too become interesting points of study.

Thus though both Australia and India can be broadly classified as postcolonial nations with multicultural social frameworks, a more detailed analysis reveals similarities and differences that can be used to question the reasons behind these frameworks and their ground level implications.

1.5 LET US SUM UP

Australian literature is a term that should be used with awareness of its limitations and the political implications of what it includes or leaves out. The changing body of writing the term has been used to refer to is relevant to the Indian student of English literature because many aspects of it provide a valuable tool to compare and contrast Indian literature against.

1.6 QUESTIONS

1. Explore some of the limitations and possibilities of using the term 'Australian literature'.
2. Discuss some criticisms of the idea of postcolonialism in relation to Australian literature
3. Compare and contrast some aspects of Indian and Australian literature, making clear why such comparisons may be useful.

1.7 WORKS CITED

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UNIT 2 AUSTRALIA – LAND AND HISTORY

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 A Question of Beginnings
- 2.2 Shaping the Course of History
- 2.3 Acknowledging Aboriginal Ownership
- 2.4 Early Settler Images of the Land
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.6 Questions
- 2.7 Works Cited

2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit discusses certain aspects of the issue of land and history in Australia. It is hoped it will help to answer questions such as: When does one begin to take into account the history of 'Australia'? How did the nature of the land shape the course of Australian history after colonial settlement? How have questions about Aboriginal claims to the land changed the way the land and its history are thought about? What do early white settler images of the land reveal?

2.1 A QUESTION OF BEGINNINGS

When one starts to tell the story of a nation where does one begin? According to some theories in geology, Australia was part of a large land mass called Gondwanaland, a million years ago. Besides Australia, this land mass joined together what are today the continents of America, Asia and Africa. Therefore, in a way, India and Australia were 'connected' even in those days. With time the land mass moved apart and Australia became an island continent.

The first aboriginal settlers were supposed to have reached the land around 50,000 years ago. William Jansz, a Dutchman who sailed along the West Coast of Cape York Peninsula is considered to be the first European to reach the island continent in the antipodes. The first British sailors to the continent were shipwrecked there in 1622. In 1688 and 1691, the Dutchman William Dampier explored the continent and sent back bad reports of the miserable aboriginal people and the hostile land.

Captain James Cook landed at Botany Bay, which is near present-day Sydney on April 29, 1770. His reports of the land were better. He claimed the land for the British monarch King George III and called it New South Wales. Over ten years later, it was decided to make New South Wales a penal colony to keep British prisoners in. On January 26, 1788 the first fleet of ships carrying convicts from Britain landed at Sydney Cove. Other colonies of the British Empire on the Australian continent came up in the nineteenth century – Tasmania (1825), Western Australia (1829), South Australia (1836), Victoria (1851) and Queensland (1859). Each of these six colonies were separate and given powers of partial self-rule by the British Empire until 1901 when they decided to come together and form a federation which came to be what we now know of as the country of Australia.

The Bicentenary 'celebrations' of 1988 raised in a significant way questions about how the beginnings of 'Australia' as a nation have been portrayed in history, literature and popular culture. The celebration of January 26 as Australia Day or Foundation Day (which we in India celebrate as Republic Day) and of 1988 as the Bicentenary of the arrival of the first settlers have evoked reactions that have revealed the problems about assuming that there can be one simple national identity for

Australia. On the one hand, the Bicentenary was a commemoration, for the white settlers of British origin, of Governor Arthur Phillip's landing on Australian shores with the first fleet of convicts and the beginning of British colonial settlement nearly two hundred years ago. On the other hand, to the Aborigines it "commemorated a white invasion of Aboriginal lands and the destruction of so many Aboriginal people and their traditional way of life" (Lohrey, 150). As far as the Aborigines are concerned, the day historically holds next to no positive meaning for them. There is nothing worth celebrating in an event that was to eventually lead to the destruction of their cultures, civilization and relationship with the land. What is 'Australia Day' to the former group of British origin, is to the latter group of Aborigines 'Invasion Day'. To the former, it is marked by the need to create the myths of national foundation and beginnings that justify their presence on the island-continent. To the latter, it underscores the beginning of a history of loss and the need to question those myths of the Australian nation.

The choice of the arrival of Governor Phillip in 1788 over the constitution of the federal Australian nation state in 1901 is significant. In some ways, the discussion over identifying the actual beginning of Australia is very similar to the debate in India as to whether our nation is over 5,000 years (if we go back to the Indus valley civilization) or just over 50 years (if we take 1947 as the starting point). The choice reveals the nature of the foundational moment that was sought to be presented. Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra comment:

The Bicentenary took as its starting date the first invasion by the British in 1788, not the founding of the state of Australia itself, which happened in 1901, only 87 years before the 'Bicentenary'. There is here a characteristic Australian move in regard to history. On the one hand time is stretched out, to give a longer history to the nation than it has. But then that double century was drastically shortened and emptied out in the celebration, reduced to two moments juxtaposed: the pioneering moment, in which heroic blue-coats gazed at the empty land, and the contemporary moment, filled with cheering spectators. (ix)

Hodge and Mishra point out two areas worth noting about this choice in telling the story of the Australian nation and the making of the Australian national identity. The first is that in this choice, '[t]he decisive event was the act of invasion, not the gesture of independence' (x). This choice is one aspect that shows that Australia's 'postcolonial' status is different, especially in relation to countries that 'fought' for their independence. The British monarch still remains the titular head of the Australian state. The referendum held in the second half of the year 2000 on whether Australia should become a Republic or stay under the British Queen, decided in favour of monarchy.

More important about the way the history of Australia has been told for a long time is the way in which beginning this story with the arrival of the British, ignores the histories of the Aboriginal peoples that lived on the continent before 1788. Ignoring those histories erases the nature of the colonization of the Australian land. Traditional white histories present the arrival of the British as a peaceful and benevolent settlement. This justification of colonization by arguing that it was part of the 'white man's burden' to bring civilization and culture to the rest of the world is being questioned and revised. New histories attempt to show how colonization was racist in its thinking and led to the invasion of Aboriginal lands and the systematic destruction of Aboriginal cultures. Both of these became areas of contestation during the Bicentenary celebrations and continue to be so.

When Arthur Phillip claimed the territory of Australia as a British possession, he did so on the principle of *terra nullius* – 'empty land'. The land was declared uninhabited

and annexed to the British Empire. This allowed what was an act of violent conquest to be presented as an act of peaceful settlement. It also removed any obligation on the part of the British settlers to negotiate a treaty with the existing Aboriginal population. It is estimated that at that time, the Aborigines had been in occupation of the land for at least 40,000 years. With the arrival of the British, a period of dispossession, disease, and the destruction of indigenous cultures began for the Aborigines.

With the invasion and later colonization of Australia, land came to be under the control of the British Crown, with the colonial governor as the administrator. He controlled settlement, land purchases and leases. Ex-convicts and free settlers were leased land for development. The actual owners of the land – the Aborigines – were completely ignored in this process. The material and deep spiritual significance of the land within Aboriginal traditions was not understood or taken into account by the discourses of Australian nationhood – legal, historical or cultural.

Part of the social and cultural justification of this can be traced to racist ideas in anthropology that presented the Aborigines as inferior to the British colonizers. It was therefore argued that there was no need to treat the Aborigines as the equals of the colonizers. Even in official documents, the Aborigines were regarded as either non-existent or half human. In some cases they were regarded almost like dogs, with all the negative connotations that such a connection can carry (Ward and Robertson, 334). Ross Fitzgerald quotes one such passage that shows how in some cases the Aborigines were portrayed in this way.

Like his own half-wild dogs, the black could be frozen into shivering immobility or put to frenzied flight by people or things that provoked impressions of terror, or moved to yelps of delight or to racing round, or striking grotesque poses, or to expressing frantic excitement by any sort of clowning when what might have been menace proved, instead amusing or brilliantly productive. In his bushland home he lived in such insecurity that his immediate response to any situation of surprise was almost a conditional reflex – instantaneous: to strike, to leap aside, to fall and roll. Like his dogs, too, he would be cowed by direct and confident stare into a wary armed truce, but would probably attack with fury if an opponent showed signs of fear, or ran away, or fell disabled....(72-73)

The British colonizers who considered themselves torchbearers of culture and civilizational values used their perception of the Aborigines to justify their inhuman treatment of them. The report of the National Inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, which came out in 1980, exposed Australia's shameful history of racial control and cultural genocide or destruction. It dealt with the testimonies and records of the Stolen Generation of Aboriginal children who were separated from their families and brought up in white orphanages or foster homes in an effort to assimilate them so that they become part of mainstream white Australian values and culture. The stories of this generation, which are part of a biography revolution in Aboriginal writing, have revealed how hidden histories can question the motives behind and the ways in which national identities have been imagined and sold to the public. The history of massacres during frontier conflicts between the Aborigines and the white settlers is bad. So is the even more terrible history of the cultural genocide committed at the level of government policy. All of these things place a question mark on the nature of the culture and civilizational values that the settlers were so proud of.

It is thus not surprising that until recently any writing that dealt with Australia documented primarily the history of the white people in Australia. Such histories recorded the experiences of the settlers from their point of view and gave the wrong

impression that before the coming of the Europeans, there was nobody living in Australia, hence the idea of the land as till then unknown and empty -*Terra Australis Incognita* (unknown) and *Terra Nullius* (empty).

2.2 SHAPING THE COURSE OF HISTORY

From the very outset, the land played a very decisive factor in shaping the history and literature of what came to be known as Australia. Dutch sailors reached Australian coasts as early as 1623, and the British explorer William Dampier reached the west coast of Australia in 1688. However it was in 1770 that Captain Cook reached the east coast of the continent and claimed possession of Botany Bay on the eastern coast for King George III. Trade and commerce were the original purpose behind Britain's desire to establish a colony in the Antipodes – which means on the other side of the world in relation to Britain. However, according to Ian Turner, Lieutenant James Cook reported of New Holland, as the land was then called: 'the Country itself so far as we know doth not produce any one thing that can become an article in trade to invite Europeans to fix a settlement upon it' (14).

The focus of the colonial plan thus shifted away from trade to other uses of the land. The overcrowding of British prisons and the loss of the newly independent American colonies made it necessary that a new place be found for deporting British prisoners. The unproductive yet vast nature of the land in Australia made it seem perfect for this purpose. As a result, the culture and ways of the Penal System became a part of the early history of New South Wales and Van Damien's Land (now known as Tasmania) from 1788 when Captain Arthur Phillip landed at Sydney Cove and became the first Governor of the colony of New South Wales.

The transportation of convicts continued for a little over half a century, during which Ian Turner documents that "150,000 men and women came to Australia in chains"(14). As a result of the policy of transportation, most of the people that came to live in these colonies in the early days from Britain were a mixed crowd coming mostly from the lower classes of the British society of those days.

They were mainly illiterate peasants, workers, vagabonds, professional criminals, transported for thefts or crimes of violence against the person; but among them were a few (English, Scots, Irish, Canadian) transported for such 'gentleman's crimes' as forgery, embezzlement, or abduction (Turner, 14).

Besides the jailed, the rest of the population consisted of the civil and military officials who took care of the administration of the penal colony. The wealthy aristocracy who in Britain were the producers, consumers and patrons of literature did not find much representation in the social framework of that period. Furthermore, in those early years the concern and effort of the few in the colony who had, to whatever extent, enjoyed the cultural benefits of education and higher social status, was directed first towards survival and then to making a fortune.

It was inevitable then that most of the written output of the upper classes during this period was restricted to journals, letters or other pieces that held descriptions of the strange sights and experiences encountered by these new residents of the island continent. Turner comments on the way the land and historical situation shaped the literature of this period:

Those who, in those first years, wrote of the antipodes were concerned mainly with the prestige or profit to be won from satisfying that intense interest in the novel and the picturesque, the history of the earth and the origins of man, which was a major product of the Enlightenment. And there

was much in the new world that was novel and curious – the landscape, flora fauna, the Aborigines; but those who set out to depict these strange phenomena saw the land through English eyes. They looked at it as visitors, excited by the unfamiliarity of what they saw...; but they did not look yet as exiles, overwhelmed by the unfamiliarity and possessed by the intractability of the land – that was to come. (15)

Changes became visible in white Australian society as free settlers began to replace members of the Penal System as the ones who set the socio-cultural pace of this Antipodean British colony in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. Realizing the potential of the land to sustain sheep rearing, large holdings of land were devoted to the pastoral enterprise directed at an export market that satisfied the demands of the British textile industry. This trend initiated by the officers in the New South Wales Corps soon started a series of explorations that led to the founding of other settlements at places like Melbourne, Adelaide and Swan River. Until the economic depression of the 1840s the growing pastoral industry resulted in the establishment of towns. The gold rush of the 1850s too caused more clear changes in the population patterns as waves of immigration washed the shores of Australia in search of the precious yellow metal.

The gold rush began in 1851 when a discovery near Bathurst was made public. Soon gold was found in large deposits in Victoria at Clunes, Ballarat and Bendigo. Later discoveries in Queensland led to immigrants and people moving there as well. The news of these discoveries caused the workers within Australian colonies and immigrants from outside the island continent to come pouring in. Turner says, "Within the two gold decades, the population of the Australian colonies grew fourfold"(23). Till that time close to fifty percent of the population was of convict origin or descent. In the final analysis, the gold rush phenomena gave Australian colonies, capital and labour from overseas. This newfound prosperity, according to Turner, gave "a sense of permanence to the occupation of the land; the startlingly rapid, yet solid, growth of the colonial capitals provided a new pivot for colonial society"(25).

This consolidation of the colonies had two faces. On the one hand, the pastoralists assumed the leisured lifestyle of the powerful landed rural rich. Turner comments on them, "Socially, they were the most conservative stratum of colonial society; they aspired to a prestigious education and culture, but not to the searching of science or the storm of creative art"(25). The only things that roused them were threats to their property interests from land reformers in parliament. On the other hand, in the cities, intellectual and professional pursuits began to flourish. Libraries, universities, museums and galleries found their place in the city landscape and brought with them a heightened refinement of tastes and culture. However, Ian Turner notes that in the more practical atmosphere of the colonial middle-class society, subjects like law, medicine and the natural sciences had more takers than the liberal arts, classics and mathematics (26).

Growing literacy across the board also produced a growing demand for popular literature. However, the small size of local audiences forced the early Australian writers to publish only in magazines and newspapers in Australia; they had to look to publishing houses in London for publication in book form. According to Ian Turner, this was not a big issue with these writers as most of them were British-born and sought to write for the larger audience in Britain that enjoyed the exotic flavor of their works. Among this early group of writers who wrote about Australian life and landscape, **Catherine Spence** occasionally made the cities her theme, **Marcus Clarke** wrote about the Penal system, while **Boldrewood** made the Bush the setting of his work. Imitation of the English literary tradition and a desire to become a part of it marked their writing. As a result their influence on urban Australian culture was

very little, the newly literate people of the bush however responded very well to whatever was particularly Australian in this writing.

By the 1890s the concept of Australian nationhood began to become more concrete as the ideals of socialism, unionism and nationalism began to spread. The possibility of the six colonies being perceived as one nation began to emerge. In 1898 the Australian constitution was approved by referendum. Isolation and distance began to cut the umbilical cord from the Old World. By the 1900s, when most of the people of the continent's six colonies were native-born in Australia, the movement for federation caught on and gave a new angle to nationalism. In 1900 the British Parliament passed an Act to constitute the Commonwealth of Australia and all the states joined the Federation. 1901 witnessed the proclamation of the Federal Constitution as well as the first national election, leading to the opening of the first Federal Parliament on May 9. This was also the year the 'White Australia' Policy was enacted as a legislation that would prohibit permanent settlement by non-Europeans. Ian Turner quotes **Henry Lawson** in 'Jack Cornstalk' (1901):

And I said to him, 'Jack!' as he gripped my hand fast,
'Oh, I hear that our country's a nation at last!' (36)

By the 1900s the publication scene in Australia too had changed. Many of the writers of this period were born on Australian soil. Their ties with the metropolitan centre were not that strong, nor was their orientation to cater to the tastes of the British reading public. Besides *The Bulletin*, *The Worker* and other papers that published their work, the publishing house of Angus and Robertson started publishing the books of Australian writers regularly from 1895, starting with **Banjo Patterson's** *The Man from Snowy River*.

The spread of railways, a State education network, faster communication networks and mechanization of farming ended the isolation of the bush communities and narrowed the cultural gulf between the urban and rural areas. "There were still (as indeed there remain today) many differences of response and taste; but the bush community, aided by universal literacy, was passing from active creation of a hand-tailored culture to passive reception of the ready-to-wear urban commodity" (Turner 38). Soon many writers began to reflect these trends by churning out more predictable narratives of adventure, humour or romance to supply the new breed of Australian paperback publishers such as the New South Wales Bookstall Company. Though the assertion of the nation and faith in social reform still surfaces strongly in the work of the writers of this genre and period, the middle-class origin and higher educational background of these writers made them turn to the cities for their intellectual environment.

The Australian participation in World War I (1914 – 18) and the tragedy of Gallipoli – where many soldiers from Australia and New Zealand died fighting a European war under the British banner—were important in the nation's formation of an identity different from that of Britain. The great world Depression that darkened the interwar years left nearly one-third of the Australian workforce unemployed by 1931. World War II (1939 – 1945), which brought the theatres of war closer to the Antipodes due to the threat from Japan, too was another watermark in the nation's history. It accelerated industrialization and opened Australia to both alliances with America and an awareness that it was part of Asia. The Vietnam War of 1965 brought together these trends and heralded the repercussions they would have for the nation and its construction of a national identity. The influx of immigrants from Southern Europe and Asia that followed in the postwar years set the stage for a change towards a more multicultural paradigm of national consciousness and social policy.

2.3 ACKNOWLEDGING ABORIGINAL OWNERSHIP

Most of the histories of Australia written in the past neglected the experience of Aboriginal peoples, women and members of other ethnic or racial minorities. They ignored the fact that the so-called 'settler society' was in actuality the product of white invasion and dispossession (Davidson, 24). The Aborigines were not considered official citizens of Australia and their numbers were not even counted in official censuses. It was assumed that they were a part of the population that would soon be extinct or become fully assimilated into the white population. Selective Immigration policies sought to ensure that Asians would not be admitted into Australia or allowed to settle down there in substantial numbers. One of the early acts of the Australian colonial government was to introduce the 'White Australia policy' which controlled the right of settlement for Europeans only. This policy was supported by all the groups and parties within the political spectrum and reflected the predominantly white population profile they wished to maintain for the island-continent.

Aboriginal land had been forcibly taken by the State-Federal government without compensation from the time of the arrival of the colonizers. Aboriginal people were physically and often violently removed from the land they had previously freely roamed and kept segregated in government reserves or church missions. Their children were forcibly taken away for adoption by white foster parents or placed in institutions that were supposed to guide them towards the goal of assimilation – becoming part of mainstream Australian culture and thinking. They were denied land rights or titles – they could neither own nor till the land. It was then argued by some government officials and policy makers that Aborigines were not advanced enough to be granted freehold land. The racist attitude of the response of Mr. Ken Tomkins – the Queensland State Minister for Aboriginal and Island affairs—when asked to comment on the Aboriginal struggle for land rights in October 1982 is quite evident:

Blacks do not understand freehold tenure and are not used to a lot of money. They live out in areas where they don't use it much. They catch birds and goanas and fish and this sort of thing The women do not wear 'very expensive dresses' and neither do the men. The fact that they drink a lot now doesn't do them any good. They just can't do it. Years ago when they didn't want to drink they were very good people' (Ward and Robertson, 340-41)

Meanwhile the Aborigines had begun to organise against the official government policies of paternalism – which assumed that the Aborigines as a race needed to be taken care of like children—and assimilation in the 1950s and 1960s. The movements for land rights and empowerment were led by leaders like Charles Perkins from the late 1960s onwards. Soon this mobilization began to bear fruit in terms of social reform, greater civic rights and a greater public awareness of Aboriginal issues. On 10 May 1962, the national vote was given to Aborigines. In 1962 the Institute for Aboriginal Studies was established and in 1965 reforms such as the establishment of the Aboriginal Welfare Conference was put into force. The 1967 referendum granted citizenship rights to Aborigines, allowing them to be counted for the purpose of the national census. There was however strong resistance, to this kind of social reform that empowered the Aborigines, from vested interests in the state governments of Queensland and Western Australia, as well as from mining companies and the landed rural population. This was because in these regions it was felt that these kinds of reforms would ultimately lead to the land being returned to Aborigines. Since farming and mining were very important in these areas this was a big threat to the white people involved in these businesses.

Despite the racial prejudice that has been directed towards them, the Aborigines have continued to fight for their ancestral land. Some have even taken legal action. The high watermark of the land rights movements was the Mabo judgement (Mabo vs. Queensland) resulting in the historic decision of 1992. Before 1992, there had been no legal recognition of pre-existing rights of the indigenous peoples of Australia to their lands and resources. The High Court's decision granted land title or claims to the Aboriginal Torres Strait Islanders in the Mabo judgement. This decision strengthened the legal position of native title against action by the State and Territory governments. The provisions of this judgement firmly provided "against removal of the indigenous peoples from their land other than with their free and informed consent, after agreement on just and fair compensation and where possible, with the option of return" (Nettheim, 42). As a result of this High Court decision, the Native Title Act of 1993 was enacted by the Australian federal Parliament, which set out among other things, to recognize and protect native title.

The High Court's decision was significant in many respects. **Firstly**, it corrected the wrong perception that Australia did not belong to anybody before the coming of the white man. **Secondly**, it will serve as a guide and beacon for any future cases concerning native land and compensation to the Aborigines for the wrongs inflicted on them. **Thirdly**, it brought the issue of land ownership in Australia into sharp focus. This has had far-reaching influence in the legal, political and economic spheres in Australia. Since the landmark High Court decision in the Mabo case of 3 June 1992, the fallacy that Australia had been an empty land prior to 1788, was laid to rest and the Native Title Act of 1993 put in the law the recognition of native title or claim to the land.

This has not failed to have its repercussions in the field of cultural production and history writing in Australia. Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra comment in their preface to *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian literature and the postcolonial mind*:

The study of Australian history and literature in schools and universities was able to marginalise Aboriginal history and silence Aboriginal voices, acting in parallel to the repressive government policies that attempted to 'eliminate' the 'Aboriginal problem'. This pattern has now been broken. Aborigines are at last being written back into the history of Australia. In literature and art, Aboriginal creativity is being recognised and valued as a major component of Australian cultural production. Recent histories of Australian literature can now be expected to have a (small) section at the end devoted to Aboriginal writers. Cultural justice, however belated, now seems to have come. (xiv)

2.4 EARLY SETTLER IMAGES OF THE LAND

The nature of the land strongly influenced the course of settler history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It also left a mark in the cultural consciousness of the new arrivals to the land. The land became the most prominent thing against which the identity of the settlers could be constructed. By the end of the nineteenth century, myths of the new land had taken formal literary shape in Australia in the writing of the early settlers. The experience of the settlers and the weekly *Bulletin* fuelled the formation and establishment of the myths that linked the land and the early white settlers.

According to John Rickard "the function of the myth was to idealise the men and women who confronted the environment" (65). He details two different variations of the myth linked to the land at two connected periods of the history of white settlement. **First**, the traditional 'Australian legend' highlights the life of the shearers and migratory workforce of the Outback (the Australian word for a remote settlement

in the interiors of the land) recruited from the convicts or their descendants. According to Rickard, in the versions of this legend that have found their way into ballads and stories, the image of the travelling bushman was an idealized personification of the environment's ability to transform the convict attitudes of disrespect for authority and crime into democratic and collectivist ideals that eventually earned him the status of a cultural hero (65). Rickard notes that, most often, this was a male centered legend. **Second**, by contrast, the later pioneer legends focused on the life of settlers attempting to make a part of the land their home. These incorporated women to a greater extent, even though the focus remained on men and their lives. Another point of difference with the bushman legends was that later became the odds against which the pioneers struggled and overcame to establish their presence in the land.

The early writers also had to invent ways of presenting the vastly different environment and atmosphere of the island-continent. The seasons there were reversed with summer peaking in December and winter in June. The flora and fauna too seemed so different from anything in the metropolitan centre. Antipodean inversion thus became one device for transmitting the land's alienness. Rickard quotes **Marcus Clarke** as having written thus in 1874:

In Australia alone is to be found the Grotesque, the Weird, —the strange scribblings of Nature learning how to write. Some see beauty in our trees without shade, our flowers without perfume, our birds who cannot fly, and our beasts who have not yet learned to walk on all fours. But the dweller in the wilderness acknowledges the subtle charm of this fantastic land of monstrosities. ... The phantasmagoria of the wild dreamland called the Bush interprets itself, and he begins to understand why free Esau loved his heritage of desert-sand better than all the bountiful richness of Egypt. (66-67)

John Rickard argues that it was a simple change to move from presenting the alienness of the land to depicting a certain alienation or distance from it. **Henry Lawson**, who had a major hand in developing the popular image of the Bush, according to Rickard, celebrated the spirit of the white bush folk but depicted the outback as bleak and unrelenting. Another aspect of this early depiction was that the celebration of the bush was at the expense of the city. The ballads of **Banjo Paterson** and the bushman's bible the *Bulletin* encouraged the construction of this opposition. The Bush and its mores were seen as authentically Australian.

The Australian legends, Bush lore and pioneer myths have in recent times been open to much criticism on the grounds of being sexist because they focussed mainly on the male point of view and did not inscribe the reality of contact between the settlers and Aborigines. They have also been seen as no longer satisfactory symbols to represent the Australian identity in the era of multiculturalism.

These images, however, are an important barometer of the times and socio-cultural environment that produced them. For example, John Rickard argues that the celebration of the pioneers was a way to replace the convict as victim by focusing on the settler as the agent of progress and national consciousness (72). He feels the emergence of this myth did not, therefore, so much reflect social reality as a historical socio-cultural need to change a cultural identity and construct a more favourable one. He also points out that its romanticizing of the past involved a kind of falsification through selectively presenting things. For example, in assuming a tradition of alienation from a harsh environment the myth structure ignored the different variety of environments actually encountered by the early settlers, from the bays and inlets of Sydney Harbour to the deserts of Central Australia. Like the larger narratives of history and literature, cultural symbols and myths too can be read both with and

against the grain to reveal much about the society that produced and perpetuated them.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

The land and history of Australia are inseparably linked. The connection of the two has been actual as well as discursive. The outcome of the links have had results that are political as well as socio-cultural. Be it in history, the law or legends, the way the land has been presented is very important in the context of Australian studies in general and the study of Australian literature in particular. In all these cases it is important to read the discourses as they are presented as well as to read between the lines and against the stated intention of their texts.

2.6 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss why the question of beginnings is an important one in relation to Australia's construction of history.
2. Discuss the position of the Aborigines with regard to the land and writing of history in Australia.
3. What do some of the early settler myths and legends about the land reveal?

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UNIT 3 AUSTRALIA – PEOPLE AND CULTURE

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Cultural Background to British Settlement
- 1.2 Cultural Control of Aborigines
- 1.3 'White' Australia
- 1.4 Cultural Fissures – Internal and External
 - 3.4.1 Breaking Free of British Moulds
 - 3.4.2 The Anglo-Saxon /Anglo-Celtic Divide
 - 3.4.3 City and Bush
- 1.5 Multiculturalism – Policy and Practice
- 1.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.7 Questions
- 1.8 Works Cited

3.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit will discuss the socio-cultural backdrop in Britain, which shaped the nature of British colonization in Australia. It will look into the reasons behind Australian policies that sought to construct a national identity through policies that sought to control the cultural influence of Aborigines and immigrants. It will also attempt to hint at some of the cultural divisions that are part of white Australian society and can be used to question its presentation of itself as a homogeneous group. Finally it will look at some of the ideas and implications of the policy of multiculturalism in the changing Australian context.

3.1 CULTURAL BACKGROUND TO BRITISH SETTLEMENT

During the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, England and the rest of the British Isles was undergoing rapid socio-cultural changes because of the beginning of the Agrarian and Industrial Revolutions. In keeping with certain agrarian reforms of the time, known as the Enclosure System, people with small farms and land holdings were forcibly removed from their property. Their land was then given to aristocrats and the landed gentry allowing the consolidation of land holdings and the application of economies of scale to farming. It was argued that it would be more profitable to farm one large farm holding than it would be for several small holdings to be farmed separately. The people dispossessed by these developments were driven to the towns in search of employment and often ended up providing cheap labour to the industries growing there. The social displacement produced by the combined effect of the Agrarian and Industrial Revolutions had profound socio-economic and political effects. It led to the overcrowding of industrial towns, unemployment and other accompanying social evils. Crime was soon on the increase and English prisons were bursting at the seams with convicted criminals.

It was during the same period that England was also emerging as a great naval and expansionist power. When Australia was 'discovered' by Captain Cook, the British government decided to establish a colony at Botany Bay – the site of Cook's first landing. Eventually, this colony served several purposes with respect to the colonial centre. Primarily, it served as a penal colony that helped clear the over-crowded prisons in Britain. Delys Bird in 'The 'Settling' of English' posits:

The British Government's 1786 decision to establish a penal colony at Botany Bay was the outcome of an ongoing debate about how to deal with

extreme overcrowding in English gaols. That situation had been exacerbated by the loss of the American colonies as a dumping ground for the English 'criminal' class after Independence. The decision was bolstered by imperial objectives: a desire to thwart French colonial advancement, the need to establish a southern trading post, and the recognition of the advantages of having easy access to New Zealand flax and Norfolk island pine for ships' ropes and masts. Settlement of the South Land was represented in English according to a range of discourses – of discovery, economic interest, defence, natural history and science, law and punishment and so on – and justified by Enlightenment and religious imperatives. Late eighteenth century colonisers believed their God-given duty was to improve the natural landscape of the new world by making it productive; in addition its indigenous inhabitants would be Christianised and civilised. (23)

There was also another social agenda at work in the whole process of British colonization. On the completion of their jail terms, the ex-convicts were given the option of settling in the colony under government assistance. In *A Spirit of Play: The making of Australian consciousness*, David Malouf calls this government plan to settle the former convicts in Australia as the outcome of the "need to balance deterrence, or as they would have called it, terror with the opportunity to reform. Botany Bay was not just a dumping ground for unwanted criminals; it was also an experiment in reformation, in using the rejects of one society to create another" (12). The former convicts were given land to develop; some provided itinerant or permanent labour to the then thriving wool industry as shepherds (drovers) and shearers, while still others worked in the stations as drivers or carters. This group of individuals and their hard, adventurous lives became part of popular myths that formed the cultural legacy of the Australian legend of the Bush.

This whole British exercise in empire building and experiment in social reform had terribly negative effects on the lives of the Aboriginal people who resided in the land before the arrival of the British. The social and cultural effects on the Aboriginal communities bear witness to another face of the cultural nature of European colonization. The nature of their dispossession or loss was founded on various cultural assumptions. According to these beliefs, the Aborigines were seen as a dying race in accordance with social Darwinist ideas. Darwin believed in the survival of the fittest. It was believed that the Aborigines as a race were not developed enough to survive alongside the British. Another approach was to seek to paternally protect them by bringing them to the fold of what the colonizers saw as the enlightening values of civilization and Christianity. British settlement was portrayed as benevolent and the spotlight was turned away from a violent history of frontier conflict and cultural destruction.

Racist ideologies continued even though in the second half of the nineteenth century Aborigines became an important source of labour, especially in the pastoral industries of northern Australia. The racist ideology was employed to justify the lower wages paid to Aborigines as well as their segregation on reserves and missions which would provide a supply of cheap labour dependant for their livelihood on work in local stations and farms.

After the initial establishment of the penal colony, the arrival of free settlers and the exploration of lands beyond Botany Bay, a phase during which the cultural fabric of the colony was both made strong and transformed, came into play in the second half of the nineteenth century. This was the period during which the tainted legacy of having started off as a penal colony was sought to be distanced from, as cultural lore changed its focus from the former convict turned bushman to the newly arriving free pioneers.

According to Hancock (89-90), this period was dominated by **three themes** that reflected the changing social and cultural models of white Australian society. The **first** of these was the dramatic growth of economic activity resulting from the expansion of the pastoral and mining industries and of the growth of urban centres. This progressively changed the cultural focus from the outback to the newly growing towns and cities. This cultural shift from a rural agrarian or pastoral way of life marked by hardship and the pioneering spirit to an industrial urban one marked by opportunities and a higher standard of living came to be gradually reflected in the settler literature and popular culture of the times, in the thematic change from the bush to cityscapes. The 'gold rushes' of the 1850s provided some stimulus to this growing trend towards urbanization, especially in Victoria, but the important factors behind the sustained economic boom of 1860-90 were migration, British capital investment and active colonial participation in the development of public works, pastoral farming, mining, small scale manufacturing and urban affairs.

The **second theme** was the growth of responsible and democratic government. All the colonies sought to govern their affairs independently from British government supervision. Efforts in this direction ensured that by 1901 a federal constitution giving key powers to the states was enacted. There was also a clear interest in the concept of an Australian identity distinct from the metropolitan British or European centre. This attempt to invent and popularize a distinctive nationalism formed the **third theme** dominating Australia's history in the latter part of the nineteenth century. With it was established the various attempts to make a discrete cultural identity which used the Australian nation space as a reference point. Davidson (24) comments on how historians taking the cue on the need for a national identity have 'manufactured our past'. He says:

In Australia, without the taints of a superior world-culture in our midst, there is a more general acceptance that the nation has been invented.

As discussed earlier, the identity sought to be established was marked by traces of what it sought to exclude and ignore. The historical legacy of having been a British penal colony, or the unpleasant conflicts and encounters with the native Aborigines were dealt with by employing neutralizing cultural tactics such as romanticizing or undermining their significance. The culture of the penal colony became material for romantic ballads and stories while the stories of the conflict between the Aborigines and settlers were hardly considered worth telling. The policies created to manage the Aboriginal population in the twentieth century were similar to policies created to control the population changes resulting out of the entry of immigrants from various backgrounds. Both were part of efforts to shape a national identity through cultural policies. As waves of immigration washed the Australian shores and brought together a mixture of people from different backgrounds, the nature of the identity sought to be manufactured had to change. The quest of new arrivals to the island-continent, to be included in the attempts to make an Australian identity, ran at odds with the traditional 'White Australia' policies that had initially controlled immigration and settlement. The changing social and cultural relationship between the Aborigines and new immigrants was clearly revealed in government policies directed towards containing and controlling cultural difference.

3.2 CULTURAL CONTROL OF ABORIGINES

Henry Reynolds in *Frontier: Aborigines, Settlers and Land* outlines some of the ways of thinking that determined the cultural response of the newly arrived settlers to the Aborigines. According to him, many of the early settlers were of the opinion that the elimination of the Aborigines would be a positive development (58-62). A counter opinion came up in the 1830s when a small group of humanitarian officials and

members of the church sought to protect Aboriginal people and culture from the destructive results of settlement (83-88). Attempts at conversion to Christianity and British notions of civilization, however, had the actual effect of increasing the decline in numbers of Aborigines and were met with pockets of Aboriginal resistance that reinforced the belief that the Aborigines were obstinate and hard to help.

However, by the second half of the nineteenth century both these trends had developed into rather oppressive modes of cultural destruction albeit sometimes from a paternalistic attitude. These were made worse by social Darwinist ideas, which became popular in the 1860s (109-123) and argued that the Aborigines were a dying race that the process of natural selection would lead to extinction. It was during this period that the Aboriginal population began to be tapped for the purpose of providing cheap labour to pastoral stations. Government reserves and church missions inadvertently became suppliers of this highly exploited labour force.

According to Stephen Garton in 'Aboriginal History', the early years of the twentieth century was marked by the emergence of more unified native policies (193-95). He says, at that time a theory of eugenic that "argued that western civilization was being undermined because the unfit (the poor, drunks, lunatics and lower races) were breeding at a faster rate than the fit"(193) became popular. The comparatively high birth rate of Aborigines and the problem of children of mixed descent began to be addressed through new 'protection' policies. 'Full-blood' Aborigines were segregated in government reserves and many children of mixed descent, especially those with fair complexions, were taken from their parents and sent to orphanages or foster parents in an effort to urge their assimilation with the white population. Garton comments on this supposedly liberal paternalism:

In this framework the Aborigines were the students or the children while white reformers were the guardians or fathers who would educate the Aborigines and facilitate their assimilation into wider society. ...While the assimilationist position was humanitarian, it denied Aborigines self-determination. (195)

The policies of assimilation reached their high watermark during the 1950s and 1960s. They resulted in the 'Stolen Generation' of Aboriginal children whose stories documented in autobiographies, research efforts and reports of bodies such as the Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission question the reality of what has been constructed as Australia's history and culture. Debates about racism and its place in the colonial enterprise—which had till then claimed to have been a civilizing mission – that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century have shown these cultural policies in a very bad light. The need for the Australian nation to redefine itself has been underlined.

3.3 'WHITE' AUSTRALIA

Another unpleasant aspect of Australia's cultural policies is found in the 'White Australia' policies employed to regulate the racial nature of immigration. As settlements expanded and the wool industry grew particularly in the 1820s, the demand for farm hands and other workers became more urgent. From 1830 to 1850 many migrants, especially with government assistance from Britain, moved to Australia. During this period there were many men in Britain who needed jobs and such migration helped solve their unemployment problem. Most of these migrants were men of Anglo-Saxon or Anglo-Celtic descent and the migration policy favored British subjects. **David Malouf** accounts thus for this policy:

The idea grew up that if we could only keep ourselves pure in a contaminated world – morally pure but racially pure, too – it would one day be our privilege as a nation, to carry forward into history the British ideal. (78)

As an outcome of this policy, therefore, white Anglo-Saxon British people formed the group, which was most encouraged to migrate to Australia during the early years. However, with the discovery of gold and the ensuing gold rush, the pattern of migration changed. Europeans and Americans were allowed to come to Australia to look for gold, look for jobs, to set up business or even to settle. Within the space of a decade, the Australian population doubled. Even at this point, the demographic composition of the population remained mainly and comfortably 'white'.

However, by the 1890s, this wave of migration had almost stopped due to the great economic Depression. With the shrinking supply of white labour, the Australian colonial government looked for labour elsewhere. It was only then that non-Europeans, non-white colored workers, mostly of Asian origin, were allowed in to provide cheap labour in the sheep farms inland, in the sugar plantations of Queensland and in the building industry. Restrictions were however, put on their settling in Australia.

The white Australian working class far from appreciated this change of policy to allow non-whites to immigrate to Australia. The working people feared that coloured immigration would bring about lower wages and a fall in the standard of living. The following prayer of waterside workers who lived through the Depression years in the port town of Melbourne, clearly describes the hatred and violence caused by the struggle for too few jobs:

The Lord above, send down a dove,
With wings as sharp as razors
To slit the throats of bloody scabs
Who cut down poor man's wages
(Ward and Robertson, 72)

Discussing the same theme Lowenstein in *The Immigrants* places this fear in the context of the unique position and geography of Australia. She explains it thus:

This fear of strangers, this dislike of people who are not white and Anglo-Saxon, is an important strand of our history, and economic factors were not its only cause. Our isolation in the Pacific, a huge land with a tiny white population surrounded by people of totally alien culture and way of life, has helped to make us paranoid. We have felt surrounded, convinced that the hungry people of Asia have their eyes on our empty deserts. Cheap labour therefore was a threat to living standards and coloured cheap labour affronted the ideal of a free homogenous white Australia. (5)

Thus it is from this circle of fear that we can trace the seeds of racism and discrimination being sown in Australia. The perception that Australia belongs to and was built by white Anglo-Saxon British people continued to dominate the writings of this period. Bennett and Strauss argue that the European settlement, the traumatic consequences of black Australians, the discovery of gold, large scale white and non-white immigration to Australia, Australia's involvement in the two World Wars and in the Vietnam War were some of the major significant events in Australian history. '[E]ach of them had immediate and long term influences on Australia's thinking and writing about themselves, and at each of these points Australians asked themselves difficult questions about hope and despair, power and marginality, love and death' (4).

In the post World War years, the influx of immigrants from South Eastern Europe and Asia became more pronounced. This contributed to about half the growth of the population. The justification for the large immigrant intake was that it was in the interest of building the nation's economy, the population and defense. Immigration became a form of nation building. 'Populate or perish' became adopted at the level of policy change. Initially, the cultural effect of this was sought to be controlled by setting up policies that shamelessly recommended that both Aborigines and new immigrants assimilate into mainstream white Australian culture. More recently, multiculturalism was adopted as the containing strategy for controlling the cultural diversity of Australian society.

Official Australian policies have of late been reduced in force because of the realization that there is a need to add to the labour force and intellectual resource pool of the nation. With increased economic globalization and the formation of strategic trade regional blocks, Australia has realized it has much to lose by not seeing itself as part of Asia. While Australia's metropolitan cities have for the most part incorporated these waves of immigrants with a willing acceptance of the inevitability of a cosmopolitan mix of cultures, white cultural nationalism has from time to time reared its head. Most recently in the passion that Pauline Hanson (political leader) was able to whip up when her One Nation Party recommended a more selective immigration policy and a less compromising stand towards the Aborigines. The more dominant discourses in Australia have however moved away from this standpoint and seek to give rise to cultural frameworks that are more inclusive and open to difference.

3.4 CULTURAL FISSURES-INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL

3.4.1 Breaking Free of British Moulds

Land and language have been the two major rival determinants of written literature in Australia.... A sense of exile may, through the perspective of distance, sharpen appreciation and assessment of the homeland, but it can also be an inhibiting factor in coming to terms with the new circumstances.

The contrast between gloom and hope runs roughly parallel to the contrast between colonialism and nationalism in the first century or so of settlement. Language, with its often unrecognized cultural biases, tended to pull the settlers back towards British values. The land, with its many phenomena unnameable in the English language, tended to pull them towards a sense of national uniqueness. (Goodwin, 1)

In 1788 white settlers, who sought to set up a British penal colony in Australia, brought to the Antipodes the English language, printing technology as well as assumed ideas about culture and literature. The realities that faced them in the new land defied and stretched the conceptual boundaries of the language, culture and literary models the white settlers had previously been working within. These tensions were heightened in later periods of the history of settled Australia by internal divisions within the white settler community itself, as well as the contact between the indigenous cultures of Australia or non-English speaking immigrant cultures and the white settler cultures.

Many early white settlers in Australia tried to create a copy of British culture. The island nation in Europe formed the model for the island continent in the antipodes. Literary and other artistic creations became an effort to translate new unfamiliar Australian realities into more familiar British cultural terms.

Underlying the seeming stability of the early areas of settlement, there was the loneliness of exile, and buried still deeper, fear of the Australian unknown – dark uncertainties which they sought to dispel by...recreating familiar social patterns and forcing the environment into familiar images and moulds. (Turner 20)

However, the initial tendency to turn back to British cultural values and forms had eventually to give way to the creation of new or modified ways of cultural expression that were better suited to meet the new demands of experiences in the new land. With the felt need for a distinct Australian identity that stepped out of the shadow and moulds of a British colonial identity, there was an attempt to define identity in terms of difference and uniqueness. Language, literary forms and other cultural products were to be roped in for this endeavour.

The cultural values that gained importance in the frontier outback owed much more to the demands of survival in that environment than to anything drawn from their British legacy. The celebration of mateship with its resonances of courage, competence, hospitality and the lack of social pretension was born out of the need to confront the realities of a travelling life in the Bush. The Bush achieved the status of a national cultural legend for the white settler community as it fostered cultural values all its own that initially manifested itself artistically through ballads and narratives. These, though orally transmitted at first, came to be canonized in white Australian literature as unique and almost symbolic of the life and spirit of settler Australia. On one level, this was an attempt to establish ways of linguistic and literary expression in a cultural framework seen essentially as distinctly Australian whatever its roots may be in a colonial British legacy.

According to Ken Goodwin, the need to shape language, literary and cultural forms to reflect changing Australian realities and images projected for public consumption still remains. As a matter of fact, the demand for a more flexible and adaptive model and patterns of writing are increasing in the face of multiculturalism. He avers:

Australia still contains substantial numbers of advocates for cultural colonialism (the 'cultural cringe'), who emphasize commonality with and derivativeness from Britain. They exist alongside vociferous nationalists – advocates, for instance, of republicanism and a new flag – and those who reject both colonialism and nationalism in favour of either internationalism (that is, emancipation from the pull of both language and land) or of personal withdrawal and self-identification (that is, emancipation from all social pressures, expectations and categories). (Goodwin, 2)

To these socio-cultural groups within the white community, Goodwin adds Aborigines and non-English speaking migrants. "Both groups have cause to express a sense of alienation from land and from language. Both have lost their homelands and both are required to use an alien language" (2). Since their voices and discourses are being promised a hearing within the national space, it becomes imperative, that not only the British, but also the traditional 'white' Australian moulds too must be broken free of.

3.4.2 The Anglo-Saxon/Anglo-Celtic Divide

The initial white settler communities included a high proportion of convicts, administrative officers and settlers of Irish origin. As a result, the cultural and political tendencies of this community revealed itself quite clearly in the early literature of Australia. The strains of Republicanism and the desire for a cultural identity that cuts loose from the British umbilical cord too has its strongest roots here.

To those of Anglo-Celtic descent, Australia represented an opportunity to break free from the colonial legacy that chained Ireland to Great Britain. To those of Anglo-Saxon origin the primary impulse was to continue the British heritage in the new land. Culturally, this manifested itself at times as two distinct trends in literary output and political ideas.

Ian Turner argues that while upper class literature and art tried to copy British models, the convict ballads and narratives that constituted the oral literature of the settler community “carried a defiant challenge that had in it as much of Irish protest against oppression as of the usual criminal’s sense of persecution.”. Turner goes on to give an example of his position by quoting:

I’d rather range the bush around, like dingo or kangaroo,
Than work one hour for Government,’ said Bold Jack Donahoe. (20)

The myth of ‘White’ Australia would seek to construct an appearance of uniformity in the early white settler community that populated Australia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This was of course a deviation from truth, which like most attempts to make a single uniform social block ignores divisions and internal differences. The cultural divide between those settlers of Anglo-Saxon descent and those of Anglo-Celtic or Irish descent was most pronounced in its manifestations during the early phase of Australian settlement. Later, the external threat from new waves of immigration pushed differences to the background. However, recent debates like the referendum in 2000 to determine whether Australia should officially become a Republic, doing away with the Queen of England’s titular position as head of state, can be traced back in part to impulses in this initial divide.

3.4.3 City and Bush

Besides a tension seen in early Australian literature between British values and Irish values, there soon developed an opposition between the cultures of the city and the bush. Once the settler communities began to tap the agricultural, pastoral and mineral potential of the Australian land, urbanization was only a matter of time. According to Ken Goodwin, a division between the cultures of the city and the bush began to reveal itself in the literature produced in the latter half of the nineteenth century. “The expression ‘Sydney or the bush’ is the result of an urban choice for the easier life of the city and contempt for the discomforts and lack of pastimes in the bush”(3).

This division or dichotomy has historical roots and present-day cultural impact. As early settler communities were predominantly based in the country, the earliest legends and folklore of white Australia focus on the socio-cultural values and traditions of that background. The popularity of Bush ballads, the figure of the roaming Bushman and the pioneer legends, as cultural symbols, add to the conception of the Bush and the country an aura of the authentically Australian. This was especially important at the time when the main impulse was the construction of a national identity built around distinct ‘white’ cultural symbols and myths. The city, however is slowly taking that place in the cultural consciousness as the cosmopolitan face of multicultural Australia is being projected over its more conservative rural counterpart, which has, in any case, come a long way from the images immortalized by traditional Bush lore. Russel Ward writes about this change in ‘The Australian Legend’:

Up to 1900 the prestige of the bushman seems to have been greater than that of the townsman. In life as in folklore the man from “up the country” was usually regarded as a romantic and admirable figure. The attitude towards him was reminiscent, in some interesting ways, of that towards the “noble savage” in the eighteenth century. ...in general, he had more influence on the

manner and *mores* of the city-dweller than the latter had on his. The tide turned somewhere between 1900 and 1918. Even today the tradition of the "noble bushman" is still very strong in both literature and folklore, but at least since the publication in 1899 of *On Our Selection*, it has been counterpoised by the opposing tradition of "Dad and Mum, Dave and Mabel".... Since the early days of federation the capital cities have grown rapidly both in prestige and their relative share of state populations, and bushmen are now usually willing to be taken for city-dwellers where formerly the reverse was the case. (183)

3.5 MULTICULTURALISM – POLICY AND PRACTICE

Australian history in the second half of the twentieth century has been marked by several government policies to control the cultural features of the social makeup of Australia. From 1947 to 1964 the official policy was one of assimilation and during 1964 to 1973 it was one of integration. Both these policies stressed the need for people from other cultural backgrounds to adopt the cultural practices and values of the politically powerful white mainstream society. In 1973 under Prime Minister Whitlam Australia was declared a multicultural society.

Multiculturalism is a policy that is used to manage effectively the reality that there is much cultural diversity in Australian society. In a multicultural society certain basic values of civil society are given importance along with the assurance that specific ethnic and cultural values and practices will be respected. The Constitution, political system and legal system are above these specific cultural aspects, however. In Australia, Multiculturalism has had two phases. In the **first phase** organisations built around non-English speaking groups were encouraged. Ethnic broadcasting – radio and television – was started. Interpreter services and education programmes for migrants were also started. The **second phase** dealt with the way government and other organisations were structured with the aim that inequality and social disadvantage be removed.

The Prime Minister's statement on 'Multicultural Principles' issued in 1995 defines the policy dimensions of Multiculturalism. The opening part of the text is a list of statistics that are used to explain the need for a multicultural policy of control and reads:

Multicultural policies respond to the need to manage Australia's diversity in the interests of the individual and society as a whole....

As a multicultural society, Australia is unique among the nations of the world. Australia's indigenous communities are extremely diverse and pluralistic. There were around 750 indigenous languages in Australia at the time of permanent European settlement in 1788. Since that time people from every corner of the globe have made Australia their home. The 1991 census shows that: 42% of our population were either born overseas or have at least one parent who was born overseas; 23% were either born in a non-English speaking country or have at least one parent from such a country; workers from non-English speaking backgrounds make up some 15% of the total Australian work force; and 17% of the Australian population speak a language other than English at home. It has been estimated that some 21% of Australia's 800,000 small businesses are owned and operated by people whose first language is not English.

The actual 'Multicultural Compact' reads:

We share this land with the first Australians who hold a unique position in our society. As a result of immigration we also share a wealth of cultures, histories and traditions. What unites us as a nation is our common identity – our first loyalty – to Australia.

Australia expects certain commitments from all members of the community, regardless of their background:

- to share an overriding loyalty to Australia, its interest and future;
- to accept the basic structures and principles of Australian society – the rule of law, tolerance, equality of opportunity, Parliamentary democracy, freedom of speech and religion, English as a national language, and equality of the sexes and races; and
- to acknowledge the right to express one's own culture and beliefs involves a reciprocal responsibility to accept the right of others to express their views and values.

In return Australia promises "equality of access, opportunity and participation in the social, political and economic life of Australia", "fair and equitable" responsiveness to "cultural diversity" at the institutional level, recognition of "the potential contribution of all Australians" and "opportunities for all Australians to acquire and develop proficiency in English and in languages other than English" in order to foster "cross cultural understanding". The three cultural policy dimensions of the compact are "the development of a more inclusive national identity" to allow the expression of different cultural identities, equal access to social justice and fostering "productive diversity" in the work place.

Multiculturalism is itself not a simple concept or practice. For example, in the three settler communities emerging predominantly out of British colonialism – America, Canada and Australia – three different models of multiculturalism are supposed to be in practice. The '**melting pot**' version of the USA works towards the eventual inclusion of differences into a broadly common American cultural framework. The cultural '**mosaic**' model of Canada sees differences as remaining discrete and distinct while still coexisting functionally. Australia claims to have a '**salad bowl**' variety of multiculturalism, wherein differences remain distinct yet adding flavor to the loosely connected whole.

The policy began to officially take shape when in 1988 John Howard initiated the 'One Australia' debates. These led to the formulation of the National Agenda of 1989—a forerunner of the 1995 Multicultural statement. Kay Anderson says, "Multiculturalism is an officially endorsed set of principles designed to manage ethnic diversity"(69). Anderson continues that on the theoretical plane of policy-making, multiculturalism seems to mark a significant shift away from the closed cultural orientation that was a legacy of the racist model inherited from colonialism:

Multiculturalism is a harmonious metaphor for fashioning the concept of nation. In its emphasis on 'equality of respect', 'the equivalence of cultures', and 'the benefits of cultural diversity', it can be made to signal a distinct break with the classically racist policies of the period in Australian history to the end of World War II, and the assimilationist project of the post war period. Both of those ethnic management strategies had embedded Anglo versions and visions of 'Australia' as captured by the slogan of 'white Australia.'(75)

On one level, multiculturalism seeks to move out of this model that expects everyone to adopt white values and culture. However, discussions about cultural pluralism and relativism or the seemingly innocent idea of ethnic difference move away from race

but still trade in images and biased ideas that are often built on Eurocentric interpretations of clear cultural difference, otherness and alienness. This tends to lock the agenda in an essentialist model of thinking that assumes that certain characteristics are essential features of a particular race while pretending to use the ideas of multicultural inclusion. Difference becomes both biased and commodified at the institutional level, and therefore easier to accommodate, neutralize or ignore.

The Bicentenary celebrations threw this up most clearly. The dominant narrative remained that of British settlement; other narratives when included were subordinated to it. Loyalty to the Australian nation makes any attempts to argue positions that completely overthrow the dominant narratives of its establishment a problem.

For Aborigines, however, celebrations of white settlement were not events to rejoice in. While celebrations were meant to be a commemoration of national unity and achievement, for Aborigines, they symbolized the invasion, conquest and dispossession of their land. (Garton, 203-204)

Within such a framework, the idea of multiculturalism and within it of white 'Reconciliation' with the Indigenous peoples of Australia are seen as exercises directed towards either conveniently putting a history of dispossession aside through gestures that are for appearances only or attempting to adopt an Indigenous past for Australia as it moves slowly towards becoming a republic.

Equally a problem is the inclusion of Aboriginal writing and diasporic writing in literary histories of Australia or Australian literary studies programmes for the sake of appearance. That said, their token inclusion has allowed hitherto silenced voices to be heard and is eventually allowing those voices to question and renegotiate the very nature of their inclusion.

3.6 LET US SUM UP

The cultural sphere of Australia has been and continues to be witness to ongoing changes and displacements. None of them are static, but each passes on a historical and cultural legacy that manifests itself in the literary production of the nation and its construction of a national identity. As one reads Australian texts it is important to be aware of these tensions and displacements.

3.7 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the different trends that were part of the cultural backdrop to the colonization of Australia.
2. Discuss the nature of colonization with respect to the Aboriginal population, explaining the points of view that argue that it is either a 'benevolent settlement' or a 'racist invasion'.
3. Discuss the possible reasons behind and results of the 'White' Australia policies.
4. Critically discuss some aspects of Australian multiculturalism.

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UNIT 4 LITERARY BEGINNINGS – ORAL LITERATURE

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Oral Literature – A Contradiction in Terms
- 1.2 Aboriginal Traditions
- 1.3 Colonial Traditions
 - 4.3.1 Convict Traditions
 - 4.3.2 Bush Traditions
- 1.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.5 Questions
- 1.6 Works Cited

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This section will introduce certain aspects of the oral traditions within the Aboriginal and early settler communities. Two broad aims of this section are to show the need to broaden the traditional boundaries of 'Literature' to include oral traditions and to show how they have influenced the more conventional forms of written literature in Australia.

4.1 ORAL LITERATURE – A CONTRADICTION IN TERMS?

The fact that the phrase 'oral literature' seems like a contradiction in terms tells us about the assumptions that have become connected with the word 'Literature' in academic and cultural discussions. Though in most cultures the narrative traditions that eventually developed into written forms have had a very strong oral aspect, the inclusion of literary studies at different levels of education, with the emphasis on the printed word, has often led to this aspect being ignored. This has been felt even within literary studies programmes, especially in relation to genres such as drama and poetry. A purely text-centred focus in these cases takes away much from those aspects of these forms, which deal with performance and the spoken word.

Literature has also become in certain circumstances a term implying superiority in relation to popular cultural forms. Oral forms such as Aboriginal song cycles, colonial ballads and bush songs are often seen to fall outside the scope of literary studies on the grounds of their oral nature as well as their origins in folklore or so-called popular culture. Just as new ways of thinking about culture has questioned the constructedness of divisions like high culture/low culture, it has also questioned the importance given to the written word over the oral. Cultural studies programmes now see the need to include as many aspects of cultural production for a more complete picture of the ways in which people have expressed themselves.

In the study of Australian literature, oral forms are of great importance. To overlook the existence of Aboriginal song cycles passed on from generation to generation, simply because they do not fit conventional literary paradigms would be similar to the colonial act of dismissing Aboriginal cultural values simply because they were not easy to understand from the point of view of European models of civilization and culture. To bypass the rich popular tradition of convict ballads and bush songs that was born during the early phases of colonization would be to lose sight of some of the dominant influences that came to be part of some of the early written forms of the island-continent and its cultural consciousness. Just as the boundaries of 'English

literature' have been widened to include more than the literature of the British Isles, there is also a need for the range of 'literature' to become more flexible and inclusive.

4.2 ABORIGINAL TRADITIONS

Any search for starting points will be dependent upon what is thought of before hand as a 'beginning' for the purpose. In the article 'White on Black / Black on Black', Adam Shoemaker identifies as one of the problems in any attempt to search for literary beginnings with respect to Aboriginal writing, the question of whether we adopt the traditional parameters of Literature being primarily "poetry, drama and verse" or "consider Black Australian writings to encompass any meaningful inscriptions: petitions (in any medium), diaries, letters, song lyrics, transcribed oral narratives, message sticks, sermons, carvings, rock art, body markings, drawings, speeches, articles and submissions"(10). He recommends the latter, more open definition. The point however, remains that the framework used shapes and conditions the nature of the product. In the case of Aboriginal culture and literature, the models of reference have most often been imposed from outside. Shoemaker says:

The historical dates which constitute what is known as 'chronological time' have often been used to imprison Australia's indigenous people. Terms such as 'prehistory' and 'preliteracy' carry with them the strongest possible sense of a time before – and a time after. Of course, these dividing lines have been imposed retrospectively upon Black Australians by those who are not members of that culture. Such arbitrary demarcations also imply that the past begins when it is recorded in legible script, not when human beings began to commit stories to memory.

What cannot be ignored is the fact that scores of Aboriginal verbal artists have told and re-told tales which defy datable chronology. (9)

Instead of joining the "tyrannical quest for 'the earliest poem' or the 'first letter in English'", Shoemaker states the need to "explore the signposts of *all* indigenous Australian literature"(9).

Ken Goodwin says that the rich oral tradition of the Aborigines may be as old as the existence of human language in Australia, which he puts at "some 40,000 years"(8). According to him this tradition includes in its fold long song cycles often of a sacred nature, briefer communal songs and narratives. The themes may be sacred, concerning public or contemporary events, dealing with topics such as love, marriage, birth, death and war or telling mythical tales of the beginning of the universe. "Much also concerns the right relationships that human beings must have with the land, its creatures, relatives and others in the clan, and the spirits: some of it is concerned with sacred sites, some of it with secret symbols whose meaning is known only to the initiated"(8), catalogues Goodwin as he tries to provide a brief overview of the subject.

The oral traditions of the Aborigines had deep spiritual and communal meaning and were often associated with the mythical time of the Dreaming. The Dreaming is an English term used to capture what is expressed in different Aboriginal languages using different words with slightly different meaning within different Aboriginal cultural frameworks. In very simplified general terms it refers to the collection of ancient narratives of creation and the beginning of cultural practices, beliefs and values within Aboriginal communities prior to British colonization. The customs of the Dreaming include a way of talking, seeing, knowing and socio-cultural practices which are in themselves as mysterious and beautiful as any poetry. These oral traditions, just like other Aboriginal art forms, were not primarily aesthetic but had

specific functions within the social network of the Aboriginal communities. They were born of the close relationship cultivated by the people living on the land, travelling through it, naming it and constantly making new songs and stories to tell what the land presented or meant to them. The oral tradition was also the primary way of passing on the communal treasure of knowledge. Take this translated example from the Pilbara district of Western Australia.

Sit with dignity and talk with composure!
No small talk! Elaborate on this:
What means more to you: The silly splinter that went in?
Or the spirit from heaven – which you really are –
To wait in the waterhole?

(Cited in Shoemaker, 12)

Mudrooroo Narogin in *Writing from the Fringe* is of the opinion that the importance of this oral tradition lies also in the fact that “it describes Aboriginal lifestyles before the invasion”(6). To put this tradition into a framework that may be more easy to understand for western thinking, Mudrooroo adds “the surviving fragments” of this tradition “are important to Aborigines and others as a classical literature. In future it may serve as the basis for the written literature. They are as important to the Aborigines as the *Iliad* is to Europeans”(7). In a later edition of this book, *Indigenous Literature of Australia: Milli Milli Wangka*, also points out the importance of these oral records in reconstructing Aboriginal history. Epics such as the *Djanggawul* from Arnhem Land, and the *Wati Kadjara* epic, for example, reveal how Aboriginal communities who came to the land and became its inhabitants, completely disprove the *terra nullius* proposition.

Let us rest on our paddles, brother,
Let us rest, for I am tired.
What is happening there, brother,
My body aches with tiredness.
I worry because of our sacred emblems;
I am tired because we threw them away.
Now we are close to the shore;
Now our journey, our paddling is over.
We land on the beach at Port Bradshaw.
This is our country, plant our flag here,
We have arrived, O brother. (17-18)

Adam Shoemaker deals in ‘White on Black / Black on Black’ primarily with Black Australian writing in English and discusses some aspects of the nature of English influence in early Aboriginal texts in the language. In translation, Aboriginal song cycles appeared first in the works of anthropologists such as T.G.H. Strehlow’s *Aranda Traditions* (1947) and *Songs of Central Australia* (1971); Catherine and Ronald Berndt’s collaborative work in *Djanggawul* (1952) as well as Ronald Berndt’s *Love Songs of Arnhem Land* and *Three Faces of Love* (1976). These song cycles belonged primarily to the public domain of Aboriginal society, as most sacred songs were either to be performed only in the midst of the initiated or were restricted on the basis of gender. As a result, the song cycles made available for translation consist of a very small segment of a rich tradition of Aboriginal lore.

Shoemaker goes on to show the other problems that limit the attempt of making Aboriginal oral forms available for an audience basically familiar with the English language and written medium. In presenting Aboriginal song cycles in English and in the form of written texts, yet another series of cultural translations come into play.

Public song cycles – which involve all members of a community – have intrinsic relationship with travelling and journeying (both in the geographic and the mythical sense); they showcase music dance, mime and storytelling skills in a way to which no English transcript on the page can do justice. (11)

Shoemaker argues that when these songs are then reprinted as excerpts in anthologies and collections, such as Rodney Hall's inclusion of the Wonguri-Mandijigai 'Moon-Bone Song' in the *Collins Book of Australian Poetry* (1981), they are often placed at the beginning of such collections "as if they were a preface to the contemporary world of Australian writing, mired in the past"(11).

However, these song cycles are very much a part of the cultural heritage and framework of Aboriginal Australians even today. The rhythms and the patterns of these traditional song cycles are even employed to put across issues of contemporary importance in the texts of Black Australian writers such as in Mudrooroo's cycle of 35 poems in *The Song Circle of Jacky* (1986).

On Nadoc day a youthman strangled in a cell:
Who killed him; who were his murderers?
'Not I,' said the cop, 'I only took him in.'
'Not I,' said the town, 'I never spoke his name,
It's no fault of mine that he had to die –
We treat them as we would our own,
There's no racism in our town. (46)

Shoemaker also cites (12-13) variations on the translated songs that exist in the form of dual-text material published in an Aboriginal language and English. Examples of this can be found in *Tom Petrie's Reminiscences of Early Queensland* (1904) and the more recent *Stories of Obed Raggett* (1980) which is in Pintupi/ Luritja and English.

These Aboriginal traditions also found their way into the Jindyworobak movement that became important between the 1930s and 1950s. The Adelaide based group that started this movement had at its forefront **Rex Ingamells** who adapted the Aboriginal word 'Jindyworobak' which means 'to annex' or 'join' to name a movement that tried to mark a break from colonial traditions that focussed on Europe by associating itself with Australian Aboriginal ones. Ken Goodwin says the movement used the term 'Jindyworobak' in particular and traces of Aboriginality in general, as indicative of a 'distinctive Australian quality in literature' (Goodwin, 134). Ken Goodwin quotes Ingamells as averring: 'From Aboriginal art and song we must learn much of new technique; from Aboriginal legend, sublimated through our thought, we must achieve something of a pristine outlook on life.' (134) This movement tried to adopt Aboriginal traditions to develop a distinctly Australian tradition that drew inspiration and materials from the land and the cultural creations of the Aborigines. The movement tried to move away from the colonial legacy of British and European models and language in literature through an almost romantic glorification of all things Aboriginal. The superficial adoption of Aboriginal themes, words and motifs for a 'postcolonial' cultural agenda that only redefined the relationship between white members of the colony and the metropolitan centre has been criticised. Shoemaker comments in *Black Words White Page*, "their usage of the ostensible trappings of Black Australian languages was indicative of a kind of souvenir mentality" (57).

4.3 COLONIAL TRADITIONS

The oral traditions that arose during the early phase of colonization sprung from the social environment of the penal system and that of the pastoral stations in the bush. Many times the latter was a continuation of the former as former convicts, on completing their sentence, were encouraged to settle on the land or serve as travelling

labourers linked to local stations. Speaking of the period till the 1850s, Ian Turner says:

The conquest of the land had been half a century of violence: many men had been destroyed, and some had destroyed themselves. But, so far, few had paused to write it down. For the new colonial upper class, the act of possession was necessarily the transplantation of a culture: except for the works of description, designed to satisfy or whet the metropolitan appetite, the journals of the first colonists and the explorers, and the uniformly derivative poems of nostalgia or hope, there was as yet no literary response. The colonies held few attractions for men of literary culture or pretence, and what power of imagery and words the accounts and journals had was incidental to their main purposes of conveying information, awakening interest. It was in the unwritten literature of the lower and further out segments of colonial society that there came the first distinct – and distinctive – imaginative response. (22)

These colonial oral traditions were very much a part of the popular culture of the new colonies of Australia. The characters and environments they described however passed into the more formally recognized 'literary' traditions as well and were soon used to symbolize the 'distinctly Australian' in literature and what was projected as national culture.

4.3.1 Convict Traditions

The ballads created by the convict community made a vibrant and colourful oral literature that captured this group's response to the natural and social environment of the penal system and Australia. The genre was a natural continuation of the folk ballads and narratives that the lower social classes of British society and those of Irish descent produced in the colonial centre. Edgar Waters in 'Ballads and Popular Verse' traces them back to the broadside ballads of the metropolitan centre (293-4).

Life within the Penal System provided the themes that were dealt with in these oral pieces. Ian Turner elaborates:

The ballads of the convicts expressed their situation: at first the sentiment was nostalgic, and sometimes mock-repentant, with an ironic acceptance of the moralizing of their judges and goalers; later (say by the 1820s although it is impossible to date the ballads precisely), the nostalgia disappeared, and the spirit was hatred and defiance of the authorities, fear or bravado for the brutalities of the System, admiration for those who bucked it (notably the successful escapees), and a bitter humour which set out to subvert the moral values of their betters.(16)

Waters documents (294-5) how in the second half of the nineteenth century many of these ballads and bushrangers were regarded as "treason songs" by officials and though there is no evidence of a formal ban, the performance of these ballads in public places could result in a night in prison. Two of the most popular ballads of this period, which are still extant are 'Bold Jack Donahue' and 'The Wild Colonial Boy'. The opening stanzas and chorus of the latter run:

'Tis of a wild Colonial boy, Jack Doolan was his name,
Of poor but honest parents he was born in Castlemaine.
He was his father's only hope, his mother's only joy,
And dearly did his parents love this wild Colonial boy.

Chorus

Come, all my hearties, we'll roam the mountains high,
Together we will plunder, together we will die,
We'll wander over valleys, and gallop over plains,
And we'll scorn to live in slavery, bound down with iron chains.

He was scarcely sixteen years of age when he left his father's home,
And through Australia's sunny clime a bushranger did roam.
He robbed those wealthy squatters, their stock he did destroy,
And a terror to Australia was the wild Colonial boy.

The challenge and treason written into these verses presents its central figure in the same cultural light as the literary and folklore traditions that surround a figure like Robin Hood.

4.3.2 The Bush Tradition

The bush fraternity of Australia was a loose nomadic community that reached its creative peak in the thirty years of the post-gold rush outback boom. It inherited something of the pre-gold tradition as well. Hugh Anderson quotes a 1923 issue of the *North Queenslander Register* which says that almost every cattle run had "...generally someone who could turn out bush jingle of a sort. Some of these verses were remarkably good, and it has to be regretted that most of them are now forgotten"(34). Anderson also quotes Edward Sorenson, who had spent his life in a variety of bush occupations and contributed regularly to the *Bulletin*. Sorenson felt that the isolation of life in the outback was responsible for the popularity and spread of this forceful tradition: "'With nobody to talk to and seldom anything to read, the solitary bloke either yarns to himself or turns to writing. Very often he does both.'" (cited in Anderson, 35).

The colonial traditions of ballads and bushsongs may have had a strong anti-establishment tone at the original time of their creation and popularity. However, with time and the change of social environments in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, these very pieces and the characters they immortalized became very much a part of the establishment's sense of cultural identity. Early colonial writers such as **Alan Lindsay Gordan**, '**Banjo**' **Paterson** and **Henry Lawson** drew on these traditions in their verse and prose writing. The *Bulletin* school of writing, started in the 1880s, saw the bush and its cultural creations as an ideal source to tap in the literary creation of a characteristically Australian identity. Ian Turner writes of the output of this ballad community:

It was eclectic as to sources: it drew its melodies from the popular songs of drawing-room or music-hall, or from folksong (commonly Irish), and created its texts by parodying, or by re-writing the more 'literary' productions of the homestead, or by the creation of rough verses of its own. Its language was, however, all its own – colourful and not uncommonly lurid. It had two kinds of 'hero': the bushranger, whom it revered...and the 'flash' bushman, whom it cut down to size. Its characteristic attitudes, as evidenced in its yarns as well as its ballads, were admiration for daring and resourcefulness; dislike for the law and the squatter; contempt for the cocky-farmer, the new-chum, and the coloured races; deflation, not unmixed with wry self-recognition...and a sardonic spitting in the eye of fate. This was a living, unlettered, popularly created literature – the last in Australian history – and it was of considerable importance, because so much of its spirit, even its language and style, passed into more formal literary expression in the 1890s (30-1)

4.4 LET US SUM UP

The oral traditions of the Aborigines and of early colonial settlers in Australia are a store of information about the cultures and peoples that created them. Both streams of oral traditions have been adopted at different instances to project within a more traditional literary framework, the notion of a distinct Australian identity in opposition to the Eurocentric colonial literary legacy.

4.5 QUESTIONS

1. Why is an awareness of oral traditions significant in the study of Australian literature?
2. Discuss some of the problems involved in studying Aboriginal oral traditions within a conventional English literature framework.
3. Explore how the anti-establishment oral tradition of colonial ballads was eventually adopted as symbolic of authentic 'Australianness' within its literary tradition.

4.6 WORKS CITED

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UNIT 5 EARLY LITERATURE

Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Provisional Demarcations
- 5.2 Colonial Writing
- 5.3 Women's Writing
- 5.4 Aboriginal Writing
- 5.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 5.6 Questions
- 5.7 Works Cited

5.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit, we shall briefly sample the early English literary works in Australia and their themes from the colonial period. We shall also try and find out whether these works are/were inclusive or exclusive with respect to the various sections of Australian society and if so, how these groups were portrayed in the literary discourses.

5.1 PROVISIONAL DEMARCATIONS

For the purpose of this section, Australia's literary history has been divided into three: the **first** deals with the early colonial writings, which were mostly dominated by white males. These consisted of travelogues, poems, bush tales, yarns and ballads. They mostly described the experiences of various people, the heroic hardships endured by the convicts, ex-convicts, settlers and government officials in the development of Australia. The **second** section deals with women's writings that tended to tell the white woman's story and her experiences during this period. The **third** deals with Aboriginal writings. Aboriginal writers give their own version of events during the conquest and occupation of Australia by the white colonizers. In their literary works, themes about dispossession, economic deprivation and racism are covered. These literary works give us glimpses of Australia from the establishment of the penal colony to the present as seen, experienced or presented by various authors. It is through these writings that we see how Australia has been trying to come to terms with its past and the struggle to build a multicultural society.

5.2 COLONIAL WRITING

The journals, diaries and letters of early voyagers, explorers and settlers were the first pieces of writing to be inspired by European contact with the Australian continent. Of these documents of initial contact, according to Delys Bird, the accounts of William Dampier published as *A New Voyage Round the World* (1689) and James Cook which respectively provided a picture of the land as "degraded and barren" and "as offering a fertile future" established "the terms of a dialectical paradigm ... moving between ... prison and paradise, gloom and optimism, that shapes much colonial writing" (23). Excerpts from Cook's account of April 20, 1770 in the Macmillan Anthology tells one side of the beginning of the story of Australia's colonization:

The weather being clear, gave us a good view of the country, which has a very pleasing appearance: it is of a moderate height, diversified by hills and vallies, ridges and plains, interspersed with a few lawns of no great extent, but in general covered with wood: the ascent of the hills and ridges is gentle, and the summits are not high. We continued to sail along the shore to the

northward, with a southerly wind, and in the afternoon we saw smoke in several places, by which we knew the country to be inhabited... (16)

Literary writing traces its origin to 1800 when the first printing press was imported for use in the production of government orders. In 1802, the first books: *New South Wales General Standing Orders* and *The Road to Botany Bay* were produced. Thereafter, the colony's first newspaper, *The Sydney Gazette*, was published. The gazette served as a forum for people to express their experiences by way of poems, ballads, plays and short stories. Ken Goodwin while analyzing the writings of this period notes that "the question of relationships between the governing class and the governed" (14) was central to several of the plays of this period. For example, in the works of Charles Harpur (1813-68) and other early novelists we see a graphic description of the experiences of the convicts. They deal with the depiction of guiltless convicts, harsh overseers, brave bushrangers, and brutal police and magistrates. **David Burn's** (1799-1875) earliest play, *The Bushrangers*, is based on the exploits of Mathew Brady, a notorious leader of a bushranging gang of escaped convicts. Its aim was not so much to glamorize bushranging but to expose the Governor's oppression of free settlers such as Burn. In 'A Captain's Lament on the Death of Captain Logan' we catch a glimpse of some of the dilemma and agony of being a convict:

Our overseers and superintendents –
These tyrants' orders we must obey,
Or else at the triangles our flesh is mangled
Such are our wages at Moreton Bay.

Much of the writing of this period contained the idea that Australia was a vast empty land and that it is the convicts and the early settlers of European stock who developed the land. This gave them the right to call themselves 'pioneers'. Here, attempts at re-creating history in a way that simply denies the indigenous Aboriginal presence in Australia can be noted. Laurie Hergenhan in his observations notes that "the suppressed lack of an indigenous history" (xi) – the idea that for Australians, history is what was initiated or happened overseas – is a colonial legacy. Instead of being a weakness or cultural handicap, this myth of Australian emptiness has driven many writers: **Lawson, Clarke, Richardson, Keneally** and others before and after them, both to claim and re-create an indigenous past as a way of being independent and distancing from a history forced from the outside and modeled on to Eurocentric narratives. Mary Gilmore, for instance, re-writes the past and suggests in 'Old Botany Bay' that the convicts were the first pioneers:

I was the conscript
Sent to hell
To make in the desert
The living well;
I split the rock;
I felt the tree
The nation was –
Because of me.

While looking at the understanding of this period (1855-1915), Shirley Walker observes that "it is interesting that there is little suggestion of love or passion in the male poetry of the period. Moreover the stock perception of the typical Australian required a re-assessment of the past: the rehabilitation of the convict and the bushranger to bring them to an historical relationship with the popular image"(165). Russel Ward (1965) in 'The Australian Legend' proposes this historical relationship when he suggests that the values of 'mateship' originated in the close bonds between fellow convicts.

As we see in Gilmore's 'Old Botany Bay' the guilt shifts from the convict, no longer the villain, to the system itself (imposed on the colonies by the British). In novels like **Marcus Clarke's** *His Natural Life* (1874) and the short stories of **Henry Lawson**, the suffering of the convict is justified in metaphysical terms – he becomes a Christ-like figure who gives his life for another.

The image of Australia that emerged from this self-determining process was an indigenous one, centered upon the bush. By the 1880s, Shirley Walker (165) observes that the bush had become a label for both the landscape and a social reality characterized by egalitarianism, collectivism and 'mateship'. Central to this idea of the bush was the dignity of physical labour, the elevation of the bush worker as a hero, and the celebration of radical nationalist values, which were presumably to be found in their purest form among the bush workers. The *Sydney Bulletin* established in 1880 and edited by J.F. Archibald encouraged writers such as **Gordon, Paterson** and **Lawson**, and it served as an influential instrument for the expression of national ethos. Its snappy paragraphs, verses, ballads, anecdotes and short stories, all of great vigour and authenticity, helped to mould a group myth about the nature of Australians and their society.

The writers of the 1890s wrote against the social context of a growing awareness of a sense of nationhood, unionism and socialism. Ian Turner comments:

The first thing about the writers of these years was that the tone of voice was unselfconsciously, unmistakably and often 'offensively' (as Joseph Furphy said) democratic, lower-class Australian – and this was possibly the first time in any literature that this had been the dominant tone. Not that there were no gradations: Lawson characteristically saw the country from on foot, and his feet were mostly hot and tired and blistered, while his contemporary, and a better balladist, 'Banjo' Paterson, saw it from on horseback; Lawson's future was unlike anything that had gone before, while Paterson's was a return to an idyllic pastoral beginning; Furphy wrote of bullock-drivers, Edward Dyson of miners and city workers, Miles Franklin of remote feckless station-owners, 'Steele Rudd' of small selectors grubbing a living out of a back-breaking farm. But there was a sufficient community of language and sentiment to link all these, and many more, with what was fresh in the nineties air.... They rejected old-world models, both literary and social; they spoke the vernacular, and spurned romance. They shared a humour whose central element was an ironic understatement which seemed designed to make more manageable the manifold difficulties of the lives they knew. Their view of human nature was optimistic: there was pathos, even horror and despair, in their work, but not tragedy, for defeat when it came (as it often did), came from without and not within. And in all this they were close to their people and their time. (Turner, 34)

The Bulletin published these writers and had an agenda to lampoon and shame the hypocrisy and imitativeness of Sydney society. Turner quotes J. F. Archibald's comments on the city of Sydney in *The Lone Hand*, (1907):

It was a Cant-ridden community.... Sydney, socially, limped in apish imitation after London ideas, habits and manners. Politically and industrially it was the same.... Sydney invited revolt from existing conditions, and *The Bulletin* was the organ of that revolt. (35)

The *Bulletin* writers of the 1880s and 1890s were also the first to exploit the Bush tradition as a sort of cultural alternative to metropolitan values. By their time Ross comments:

.... almost a hundred years after its foundation, Australian society and culture had changed considerably. The rigid structure of the penal settlement had broken down as a result of the emancipation of convicts, free immigration, the growth of a native born population and the extension of settlement to other centers around the Australian coast. (11)

In the cities—particularly in Sydney and Melbourne – cultural circles evolved around periodical journals and literary groups. The *Bulletin* writers drew on vernacular sources – the ballad and the yarn; they introduced the ‘Australian’ voice and language into literature, and therefore gave their readers that shock of recognition which occurs only in transplanted cultures when the double vision they instill is suddenly resolved into a single familiar image (Ross 13-14).

The principal writers of the Bulletin school, as Shirley Walker puts it, were also heirs to both a populist tradition and a cosmopolitan one. As Graeme Davison has pointed out, many of them were urban dwellers, closely connected with radical movements such as secularism, republicanism and land reform. These according to him would have promoted the same egalitarian ethos, which Russel Ward maintains was derived from the conditions of early settlement.

Literature of the period however, depicted racist tendencies and ideas. Most Australians at that time wished to exclude other races from the island continent’s social fabric, as these were seen in derisive terms. Australia’s white Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Celtic (to include the Irish) make-up, as Walker observes, “was always emphasized, racial purity was a national obsession and violence to minorities such as Aborigines was endemic”. According to David Malouf in *A Spirit of Play*, this belief in racial superiority and exclusiveness resulted in deliberate attempts to eliminate Aborigines. It was one way of effecting a white Australia policy. Malouf continues, “As the *Bulletin* put it with its usual brutal candour: ‘Australia for the Australians – the cheap Chinese, the cheap nigger, and the cheap European pauper to be absolutely excluded’”(105).

What is characteristic of the literary writings of the colonial period is that most of the writers were men. This was because firstly, the convicts and the early settlers were mostly males. Secondly, the first migrants to Australia were mostly men. “Mateship”, an expression of male solidarity, vigorously excluded the woman, often delegating to her the passive virtues of stoicism and endurance.

5.3 WOMEN’S WRITING

However, one of the first female writers of this period to gain prominence was **Catherine Spence** who migrated with her family from Scotland to South Australia. Jane Austen was a strong influence on her literary output. Her novels dealt with the problems of white female immigration. She thus has the distinction of being the first woman novelist to write about Australia and the first to deal with women’s problems. Her first novel, *Clara Morison, A tale of South Australia during the Gold fever* discusses from a woman’s perspective the social, financial and moral issues of the time in Adelaide (Goodwin, 20-21).

The male writers of this period showed an inclination to portray men as heroic, hardworking, and thus responsible for Australia’s growth and development. The women were, as a result, often depicted as subordinate, weak and dependent upon the men for protection and their livelihood. In some of the plays, poems or novels of this period the Aborigines were presented as “half human, stupid, amoral, and unworthy of consideration”.

Later in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, we see women writers such as **Judith Wright, Beverly Kingston, Ruth Teale, Kay Daniels, Barbara Baynton, Elizabeth Jolley, Helen Garner, Kylie Tenant, Christina Stead, Katherine Susannah Prichard, Sally Morgan and Glenyse Ward** narrating their experiences in the Australian society. In his review of women's writing in Australia, Hawthorne (114-122) critically looks at their place in the larger Australian society and argues for its consideration as central rather than 'marginal' in the understanding of an emerging culture in Australia.

In his review of individual writers, Hawthorne describes how **Barbara Baynton's** short stories show the extent, to which it is possible for men to go in order to humiliate women, and suppress any outcry against that behaviour. Barbara Baynton was the daughter of a carpenter and, although at the end of her life she mixed in upper-class circles, it was not until her marriage to a wealthy seventy-year old doctor that she no longer had to sell bibles from door to door to secure a living for herself and her young family. In their 'Introduction' to Barbara Baynton, Sally Krimmer and Alan Lawson write that each story in *Bush Studies*:

has an inexorable progress towards a dire conclusion – death, rape, rejection or some combination of these – and the progress itself is in the form of an ordeal which serves to heighten the victims (and our) perception of his or her vulnerability

The story 'Squeaker's Mate', for instance, tells of the poverty of bush life and the cruelty of Squeaker (the man) to his mate (the woman). The title of the story portrays a male-centred social environment wherein the woman's identity revolves around her social relationship with the Squeaker. It is also an implied criticism of the male-centred cultural vision of 'mateship'. This discursive bias extends along the realm of work as well.

However, when a tree falls on the woman, breaking her back, the Squeaker's cruelty towards his mate reaches new proportions. But the woman whose name, Mary, we learn only towards the end of the story, despite her immobility, has her revenge. It is evident that Mary knows precisely her powers and also the mind of her oppressor. Once disabled, she knows, too, that waiting in silence is her most powerful weapon. She finally does demonstrate this power at the end of this extraordinary story.

In Barbara Baynton's stories, Walker observes, "the bush is grotesque and actively malevolent, inhabited by sinister and predatory creatures, both male and female. The victims mostly are raped or murdered or left, broken-backed to die when their usefulness is over". The bush society is far from the egalitarian caring community of Lawson's dreams where people toil and bake and suffer and are kind. One of its most grotesque female manifestations is the wretched old hag begging for money for drink at the roadside shanty in 'Billy Skywonkie':

She pointed to her toothless mouth (the minion of which seemed to be to fill its cavernous depths with the age-loosened skin about and below). A blue bag under each eye aggressively ticked like the grills of the fowls.... Alternatively she pointed to her mouth or laid her knotted fingers on the blue bags in pretence of wiping tears. Entrenched behind the absorbed skin-terraces, a stump of purple tongue made efforts at speech. When she held out her claw, the woman understood and felt for her purse....

Images such as this should be set against the sentimental versions of pioneer womanhood that reinforced the narrow male tradition.

Similarly, **Mary Murnane's** *Uphill All the Way* (1980) documents the hardships suffered by women in domestic life, childbearing and sweated labour, the vicious double standards of colonial society and most disturbing of all, prostitution of convict and Aboriginal women and the removal of children conceived by them. Feminist histories such as **Anne Summers' Damned Whores and God's Police** (1975) and **Miriam Dixon's The Real Matilda** (1976) challenge the idealized images of women. Dixon sees the distinguishing feature of Australian society to be its contempt for women and traces this to "our formative decades" with their violence and brutality towards women and widespread prostitution of women (Walker, 168).

5.4 ABORIGINAL WRITING

Adam Shoemaker includes in the early phase of Aboriginal Australian writing in English (14-17), journalism exemplified by *The Aboriginal or Flinders Island Chronicle* published between Sept 1836 – Dec 1836 in Tasmania and public petitions, the most famous of which he regards the bark petition presented by the *Yirrkala* people of Arnhem Land of 1963. The publication of **Kath Walker's** poetry, the plays of **Jack Davis** and **Kevin Gilbert** and the novels of **Colin Johnson** (later known as Mudrooroo) after the 1960s strongly proved the literary presence of Aboriginal voices. Since then there has been no looking back.

Among Aboriginal writers as well, the initial pattern of publication brought to prominence more men writers than women. In more recent times, Aboriginal women have gained ascendancy in this field of telling their stories. **Ruby Langford** in her novel *Don't Take Your Love to Town* describes her life as a travelling worker in Queensland. As an Aboriginal woman, we read about the ordeals she has to undergo in order to earn a living. She also gives a brief description of her life, and the gradual disintegration of her Bundjalung community and Aboriginal culture, and their deliberate dispersal to the towns and cities by the colonial administration. She describes:

I felt like I was a living tribal but with no tribe around me, no close knit family. The food gathering, the laws and songs were broken up and my generation at this time wandered around as if we were tribal but in fact living worse than the poorest of the poor whites and in the case of women, living hard because it seemed like the men drank and gambled and disappeared. One day they'd had enough and they just didn't come back my women friends all have similar stories.

From her work we get a vivid glimpse of racist Australia in the late fifties and early sixties.

Similarly, *My Place* by **Sally Morgan** and *Wandering Girl* by **Glenyse Ward** are two other autobiographies, which document the experiences of Aboriginal women in the Australian society. In her book Sally Morgan describes how the Aboriginals are mistreated and discriminated against and her own self-discovery of her roots as an Aboriginal. In *Wandering Girl*, **Glenyse Ward** describes the life she led as a slave girl in a farm during the 1960s. From her book we get an idea of the general perception of whites towards the Aboriginals. They were meant to be invisible, silent and nameless:

Soon as I opened the door all the chatter and laughter stopped. You could Hear a pin drop as all eyes were on me. All of a sudden, some poshed-up Voice with a plum in her mouth came out of the crowd, 'Tracey dear, is this your little dark servant?' I just stood there smiling. I thought it was wonderful that at least people were taking notice of me. There were sniggers and jeers for everywhere. I turned to the lady who did all the talking and said,

my name is Glenyse. She was startled; she said 'Oh dear, I didn't think you had a name' (Hawthorne, 119).

These writings mirror the experiences of the Aboriginal womenfolk and their circumstances in a society that has been dominated for a long time not only by white male administrative officials but also male writers. What is significant is that the black experience in white Australia had not been told before from a black person's perspective. From the time of the invasion to the nineteen seventies or eighties, the black presence in Australia had either been ignored or deliberately distorted by white Australian writers. The emergence of these black writers has to an extent filled this lacuna and corrected the biased distorted picture of the Aboriginal history, presence and experience in white dominated Australia.

5.5 LET US SUM UP

The early literature of Australia is marked by the changes in the cultural environment that produced it. The perspectives of this Unit and the way it has been arranged are just one way of looking at the writing of this period. As you become more familiar with Australian literature yourself, other perspectives should inform your awareness.

5.6 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss some of the reasons why the early colonial writing may have been dominated by male writers.
2. Discuss some aspects of women's writing in Australia.
3. What has Aboriginal writing contributed to Australian literature?

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UNIT 6 THEMES AND TRENDS

Structure

- 6.0 Objectives
- 6.1 Thematic Strands
- 6.2 Recent Trends
 - 6.2.1 Hybridity
 - 6.2.2 Diasporic Voices
 - 6.2.3 Authenticity Debates
 - 6.2.4 Theoretical Perspectives
- 6.3 Let Us Sum Up
- 6.4 Questions
- 6.5 Works Cited
- 6.6 Select Bibliography

6.0 OBJECTIVES

This Unit hopes to deal with some notable or often discussed themes in Australian literature as well highlight what are considered some recent trends in the field and the theoretical points of view that have been used to understand them.

6.1 THEMATIC STRANDS

Approaches that focus on literary themes and trends usually focus on some aspect or point of view. No such approach can be complete, since they are by their very nature and purpose selective. This applies to the following sections on thematic strands and recent trends in Australian literature as well. Only limited aspects of a few perspectives have been presented and the rest is left to the adventurous student moving out into the territory of Australian literature.

Brian Kiernan in his study of Australian literary history, divides its characteristics and themes into three sets. He explains and describes them thus:

The first two sets of characters are conventionally evolutionist and synthesise much nineteenth century discussion which emphasized the difficulties encountered by a pioneering society, and which speculated that climatic and other environmental factors would mould the people and their culture. The third set relates to national character and its expression through literature and their relationship to historical experience and social institutions. (19)

It is clear that his perspective focuses mainly on Australian literature in relation to the white colonizers and their ongoing attempts to tell the stories of their nation as they thought of it. Many of the early perspectives on Australian literature are biased by this tendency. This was and is part of a way of thinking that gave importance to the white colonial experience in Australia and made its ideas the important ones socially. These days this kind of thinking is being challenged and questioned in a big way by the very groups of people whose voices, ideas and interests were ignored by it – the Aborigines, recent immigrants, women and others. There have been two responses to this criticism. One is the superficial and token inclusion of writing coming from these groups without really dealing with the issues and problems connected with the ways in which they were left out or are being included. The other is more critical and deals mainly with the point of view of the specific group or groups whose cause it is taking up against the more traditional colonial perspectives.

Later writers in this field, like Ken Goodwin, include Aboriginal and immigrant writing, but almost like a token gesture. The work of Aborigines and immigrants is often clubbed together in a final chapter that deals with 'other writing' in Australia. The emphasis however, remains on the points of view largely containing the discussions and issues that concern the white colonial experience.

Ken Goodwin mentions the dominance in early Australian literature of themes like "the search for identity by a wanderer or explorer, the establishment of a habitation and family line, the quest to recover the past, the sense of being an outcast, and the threat of impending violence"(3). According to him, the quest theme shows itself as both connected to the land and the human spirit, especially in the novels of **Joseph Furphy, Christopher Brennan, Xavier Herbert, McAuley, Patrick White or Randolph Stow**. He comments: "The exploratory quest to discover what lay at the heart of the continent – a quest not completed until the early twentieth century – provided a natural metaphor for the exploration of the country of the mind"(3).

Goodwin also points out that as in the prairie literature of Canada and the frontier literature of America, the land becomes a symbol and a myth in itself. "The urge to settle the country, to tame the frontier, to acquire such tracts of land as the Old Country could not provide and to found a dynasty was both an historical fact and a literary commonplace"(3). There were however differences in the way this same theme was treated. While success graced these endeavours in popular romantic novels, the novels of **Henry Handel Richardson, Brian Penton and Patrick White** were marked by what Goodwin refers to as "ironic incapacity by nature or human genetics"(3).

The quest for the past evinces itself in historical novels such as *His Natural Life* by **Marcus Clarke** from the 1930s onwards as well as in the poetry of **R.D. FitzGerald, Judith Wright, Thomas Shapcott and David Malouf**. This theme is "associated through the operation of memory with the attempt to align chronological and experiential measurements of time or to escape entirely from the dominance of chronological measurement"(Goodwin, 3)

Goodwin notes the preponderance of the outsider figure in many strands of Australian literature. He says, "The outcast figure may be a runaway convict, a bushranger, an Aboriginal or a new migrant"(4). This can be seen for instance in early settler genres, for example in escaped-convict novels like *His Natural Life* (1874) by **Marcus Clarke**, bushranger novel such as *Robbery under Arms* (1882) by **Rolf Boldrewood** also known as (a.k.a.) **Thomas Alexander Browne**. The same applies to the presentation of Aborigines – in white literature, for example in, *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1972) by **Thomas Keneally**, *Capricornia* (1938) by **Xavier Herbert**, *Poor Fellow my Country* (1975) by **Xavier Herbert**, and *A Kindness Cup* (1974) by **Thea Astley**. The outsider figure also finds manifestation in works by Aboriginal writers, such as in *Wild Cat Falling* (1965) by **Colin Johnson** and *The Day of the Dog* (1981) by **Archie Weller**. Diasporic or immigrant writers have also figured in this position from the presentation of the 'new chum' of the white literature of the 1890s to the non-English speaking newcomer in the work of recent ethnic writers. Thus in a sense, according to this model the experience of the white colonial is presented as being copied by the Aboriginal or diasporic writer at the level of theme.

Goodwin also traces the theme of violence in Australian literature in writers as disparate as **Patrick White, Thea Astley, David Ireland, Roger McDonald, Colin Johnson and Archie Weller**. "Its presence is often associated with a sense of the absence or fragility of culture, a sense that culture is never here and now but always elsewhere or at another-time"(4). Goodwin also sees as stylistic characteristic repetition (4-5) and sees this as linked with a preoccupation with a sense of void,

boundlessness and timelessness which "can represent either absence of cultural landmarks or a return to the void of Nature or the loss of self-identity or a mystical union with the divine."

As can be seen from the above discussion, the themes Goodwin chooses to focus on are drawn mainly from white Australian writing. When other groups are mentioned as in the case of Goodwin's treatment of the use of the outsider figure, it is to trace parallels with the dominant white use of this figure. The differences in the way groups like Aborigines and immigrants explore themes of identity, the past and their relationship to the land are areas that should be rich sources of insight.

The other response has been to give importance to marginalized discourses and often employs them in ways that question and challenge the accepted ideas of mainstream thinking and writing. Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra's work falls in this category. In the *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian literature and the postcolonial mind* they have employed Aboriginal texts and perspectives to destabilize the construction of Australianness, of literary canons and myths that inform popular culture. For example, in the Preface they take apart the symbolic figure of Australianness, the Bushman. They argue that the figure "encodes a class, race and gender identity which classifies women, Aborigines and new migrants as 'unAustralian'"(xv). At the same time, in demographic terms the bushman never occupied more than fifteen percent of the population, even during the high water mark of settlement in Australia. Therefore to say that this stereotype is the 'typical' Australian is a deviation from truth with interesting political implications of exclusion within the nation space. What emerges out of such and similar efforts is a multitude of perspectives, each marked by change and open to resistance.

6.2 RECENT TRENDS

6.2.1 Hybridity

As discussed in earlier sections, after the first World War the Bush, the Outback and Aborigine became cultural myths and symbols for a whole generation of Australian writers writing in the inter-war years. They came to represent the uniqueness of the continent in relation to the rest of the world. "To define is to distinguish, and seeking to define Australia, most writers turned instinctively to the bush" (Turner, 44). At one level, this was one way of resisting the fact that industrialisation had led to the replication of Europe in Australia, to a practical extent that was almost a denial of the uniqueness sought to be projected. At another level, the cultural/ intellectual values of the land irked some Australian writers with its materialism and lack of the finer aspects of culture. Furthermore, the idea of 'Australianness' remained firmly trapped in boundaries connected with white Australians. Referring to the Jindyworobak movement, Ian Turner states also that "the use of Aboriginal language and imagery remained a cult; for most, the Australian nation meant the Australian common man"(45). Slowly this has begun to change as within the hybrid multicultural framework images have begun to acquire a layer of cultural meaning, which transforms them.

A hybrid refers to anything of mixed origin. The word hybridity used in relation to Australian society points to the fact that there are now many different influences in that society that shape the writing, the thinking and the very existence of the people there. These influences and points of view must be taken into consideration when studying Australian literature.

Susan Lever writes, "In a diverse, multicultural, fragmented society there can be no complete and all encompassing visions"(330). Literature, cannot in this situation "

form part of the cultural binding of society"; instead, according to Lever, literature and other cultural products "now are marketed as other products, so that they are not only for children or adults, but for women, feminists, Aborigines, migrants, gays, lesbians, liberals or, even, for men" (330). All these fragments taken together, separately or in various combinations throw light on some of the various perspectives which inform Australian culture. Though as students of Australian literature one may choose to focus on a few selected aspects, one must be aware of and open to the insights of other points of view.

6.2.2 Diasporic Voices

The post-World War influx of immigrants into Australia, mostly from Southern Europe and Asia has made its own contribution to Australian literature. Ken Goodwin comments, "While all white Australian writers are migrants or the descendants of migrants, those who come from non-English speaking countries commonly express feelings of alienation, loss and rejection akin to those of Aboriginal writers and the more disaffected of early British and Irish immigrants"(267).

According to him, some writers with a diasporic background, such as **Judah Waten** and **David Martin**, have merged into the so-called mainstream of Australian literature. Their writing however, was marked by and portrayed the tensions of a diasporic existence. Judah Waten's semi-autobiographical protagonist in the short-story 'Mother' says of his mother:

...She was preoccupied with my sister and me; she was forever concerned with our future in this new land in which she would always feel a stranger.

I gave her little comfort, for though we had been in the country only a short while I had assumed many of the ways of those around me. I had become estranged from her. Or so it seemed to Mother, and it grieved her. (113)

Others have chosen to foreground their diasporic or immigrant status in various ways, be it in the choice of subjects, themes, language of expression or place of publication. **Dimitris Tsaloumas**, **Pino Bosi**, **Angelou Loukakis**, **Sergei Liberman**, **Banumbir Wongar**, **Rosa R. Cappiello** and **Fontini Epanomitis** can be listed among the later group. More recently, writers belonging to the Asian diaspora have been making their literary presence felt as well. **Yasmine Gooneratne** of Sri Lankan origin, the Bangladeshi **Adib Khan**, **Satendra Nandan** of Fijian-Indian origins and the Malaysian born **Beth Yahp** can be counted among their ranks.

Though most of these writers have chosen to draw primarily on their diasporic experiences, a writer like Banumbir Wongar (a.k.a. Sreten Bozic) who is best known for his writing on Aboriginal themes, such as in *The Track to Bralgu*, has shown that the diasporic status need not be a confining boundary. The way ideas like 'authenticity' and 'identity' are thought about in relation to voice in the context of writers from marginalised groups is evinced in the fact that Wongar was for a long while assumed to be a writer of Aboriginal origins.

6.2.3 Authenticity Debates

The question of the 'authenticity' of cultural identities and the way in which society constructs them has arisen quite strongly within the scene of Australian literary production in the 1990s. The debates about the legitimacy of works such as Helen Darville's *The Hand that Signed the Paper* (1994), Leon Carmen's temporarily successful attempt to pass in the literary world as a female Aboriginal writer by the name of **Wanda Koolmatric**, and the questioning of the 'authenticity' of the

Aboriginality of **Mudrooroo**, **Archie Weller** and **Sally Morgan** are part of such a socio-literary environment troubled at times by niche marketing.

The Hand that Signed the Paper, published in 1994, dealt with "the complicity of Ukrainians with the Nazis during the Second World War and the question of the guilt of their descendants" (Bennett, 250). It was marketed as being the work of **Helen Demidenko**, a young Ukrainian-Australian writer and received prestigious literary prizes such as the Australian Vogel award in 1993, the Miles Franklin award in 1995 and the Australian Literature Society's Gold Medal. In 1995 when it was revealed that the Australian-born Helen Darville who was of British origin had actually authored the book, the controversy that followed threw up debates about 'authenticity', 'identity' and 'appropriation of voice'. Did someone who was not really Ukrainian have the right to discuss such a sensitive issue? Was using the voice of a Ukrainian protagonist or assuming the identity of an Australian-Ukrainian morally and creatively right? What do you think?

Similar issues were thrown up in the realm of Aboriginal literature, when it was revealed that Mudrooroo was actually of African-American stock and not of Aboriginal. This was especially disturbing because Mudrooroo had made substantial contributions towards carving a space for Aboriginal writing in English within the academia and publishing sector. A series of such controversies were to follow suit that involved attempts to question the degree of Aboriginality manifested in the persons and writings of Sally Morgan and Archie Weller. In most of these arguments the discussion always came back to questions of authenticity and identity. What are the features of an 'authentic Aborigine'? Is it a question of purity of blood? Is it connected to having been through traumatic experiences because one was thought of as an Aborigine? Does it have to do with the kind of themes or subjects one writes about? These are really very difficult questions to answer because the writing of groups like Aborigines is not just for the sake of producing a piece of literature. It is deeply linked to the politics of creating a place for Aboriginal people and culture in modern Australia. This politics has been connected to questions of identity for a long time because in the beginning Aborigines were discriminated against on the basis of their racial identity.

The success that **Leon Carmen** - a white Australian male—had in passing himself off as a female Aboriginal writer to prove that niche marketing favored minority writers too reinforced these debates. Bennett comments on the implications of these developments:

From one point of view, these exposés represented a necessary honesty, an insistence, as it were, on correct advertising and fair trading. From another point of view, they may suggest a backlash against a period of 'politically correct' social engineering during which minorities, or apparently silenced groups in the community – the young, migrants, Aborigines, for instance – were emphasised, and subsidised to encourage their work. (251)

Another thing brought to light by these issues was the way literary and social labels are created within discourses of the nation, popular culture, the publishing industry and academic/literary circles. The politics of exclusion and inclusion, which are part of terms and categories, may at one level be of significant political importance for groups trying to build representations of themselves that challenge and replace former stereotypes. At another level, they tend at times to rigidly define the boundaries within which literary creation is done and marketed. Issues of identity construction and representation, as well as the nature of authenticity, appropriation or assimilation will continue to be important as long as the identity politics is part of the Australian social setup. You may find that in India we can see a parallel situation in relation to

Dalit literature. What is Dalit literature? Who is a Dalit writer? Can a non-Dalit write Dalit literature? These are some of the issues related to identity politics.

6.2.4 tical Perspectives

Australia has been home to quite a few developments in the field of theories linked to literature – its study and interpretation. The most significant of these include theories linked to postcolonial and culture studies. Culture studies, which began in Britain in the 1960's subsequently moved to the US and are now thriving in Australian universities. Much work is being done in these two fields at Australian universities, so ideas are constantly being challenged and changed. Below I will be just briefly dealing with two texts that became very popular when postcolonial and cultural studies were gaining importance as fields of study.

The Empire Writes Back by Ashcroft et al was an important piece of postcolonial theorizing which sought to draw parallels between the writing of literature in various former colonies of Britain in areas such as formation of literary canons, themes and the subversive use of 'english' to represent a postcolonial reality. Though *The Empire Writes Back* drew a bit of criticism after an initial positive reception because of its tendency to gloss over differences in postcolonial situations in the search for parallels, it still remains a significant contribution to postcolonial theorizing.

Cultural studies opened the frontiers of literature allowing it to be informed by historical and cultural points of view as well as modes of research. This has meant that history and culture have ceased to be merely contexts in the study of literature and have become co-texts, insights from which are connected to those from the literary texts. This meant that literature stopped being studied only in terms of literary features. An effort was made to place literature and writing within larger contexts and alongside the writing and ideas from the historical, social and political fields of society. Simon During's *Culture Studies Reader* is a significant contribution to this field. Let me also refer you back to MEG-5, your course on Literary Criticism and Theory, where you were introduced to Cultural Studies.

6.3 LET US SUM UP

Hybridity and difference mark the nature of literary production in Australia today just as its multicultural social composition is being emphasized. The themes and trends discussed in this section reflect to a certain extent the degree to which the construction of identity at the personal, community and national levels have influenced the world of Australian literature.

6.4 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss some thematic strands in Australian literature.
2. Discuss the role of history and culture in literary studies.
3. What do recent developments in Australian literature reflect?

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6.6 SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

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