

**ANALYSING THE TRACES OF DIASPORA ENSHRINED IN SALLY MORGAN'S MY PLACE****NANDANA G S**

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Australian aboriginals, the true owners of Australian land lost their authority over their own land due to European settlement in late 18th century. Aboriginal community who lived in Australia were marginalized due to colonial rule. Nearly two hundred and fifty groups of Australian aboriginals were pushed into margins and had to undergo inhumane treatment from Europeans. As a result, aboriginal population got reduced rapidly. As an aftermath of European invasion Australian community was inflicted with various diseases to which they had no resistance. White community had his on way to fight these diseases as he was aware of it. Various diseases and inhumane treatment from Whiteman hardened the aboriginal burden. In Whiteman's version of history, aboriginals never got any authentic representation. For them history was yet another source to justify their ways. In the novel My Place Sally Morgan is attempting to destabilize this and to present the readers with authentic version of history by focusing on Whiteman's ways to aboriginals.

The novel My Place being an autobiographical novel traces Morgan's family history. The plot develops through Daisy's and Gladys's past and present life events. Through this paper a diasporic reading of the novel My Place is being attempted. Australia had to suffer long lasting aftermaths of colonization. Even though they became independent in the year 1901 the aftermaths persisted for a very long time. Sally Morgan, who was born in Perth in the year 1951, i.e., fifty years after independence too had to suffer the adverse effects of colonization. At one point or the other society pin points Morgan for her aboriginal identity. One could see many such instances in the novel. In the novel My Place Morgan's grandmother and mother had to live in a disguised identity. They never shared their aboriginal lineage even with their children for the fear of isolation. In once own country they are not getting enough freedom to exhibit their true identity due to White man's aversion towards aboriginals. Aboriginals, the true owners of the Australian land are the ones who had to suffer the most. The Australian white society considered Aboriginals as inferior to them and gave them no basic rights. Aboriginals had to live in the good old memories of their past. Before colonization they had ultimate freedom. They valued their tradition and practices and strictly adhered to it. However, Whiteman called them barbaric and uncivilized and subjugated them both physically and mentally so as to implement Whiteman's ways. After colonization, aboriginals had no access to their own culture, tradition and practices. They had to live a diasporic life in their own lands, detaching themselves from their roots.

Keywords: Internal Diaspora, Dehumanization, Lack of sense of belongings, Identity crisis, Subjugation, Quest for the Roots

Introduction

Sally Morgan, the half caste novelist from Australia is tracing her family history through the novel *My Place*. Till the age of fifteen Sally Morgan was unaware of her aboriginal lineage. Her grandmother Daisy and her mother Gladys claimed that they are Indians and Sally Morgan believed it. Later, Morgan became suspicious about their identity. This quest for identity led her to their aboriginal lineage. Australia had to undergo intense dehumanization due to colonization. Before the European invasion, there were nearly two-fifty groups of aboriginals in Australia.

Each had their own language, culture, tradition and practices. Europeans considered them to be uncivilized, pagan and barbaric as they could not completely understand the practices of these aboriginal groups. Europeans when came in association with other religious practices they called it pagan or barbaric. They considered Christianity to be superior to other religion and they tried to convert aboriginals into Christianity. Foster homes in which aboriginal and half-caste children stayed was a major source of conversion. Aboriginal and half-caste children were taken away from their parents claiming that, aboriginals are not capable of civilizing these children. Hence, these children were removed from their parents to foster homes, claiming that, it is to educate and civilize them. However, in reality they do not get a proper treatment in foster homes. Children there were dehumanized and were considered as domestic servants. Instead of providing them with education they were trained to be domestic helpers. Girls brought in foster homes had to suffer physical assaults too. Girls in these foster homes were sexually exploited by white man to quench their libido and if ever a child was born, white man would never take their responsibility.

White society considered both aboriginals and half castes as downtrodden. Due to this societal attitude aboriginal and half caste always looked down on themselves. As the powerful group asserted their supremacy over aboriginals and half castes, they became ashamed of their own identity and started concealing their identity from others. They represented themselves as citizens belonging to other nations, as these citizens received better treatment when compared to that of the natives. Living in disguise in ones on land would be the biggest curse one could get and aboriginals had to suffer it for decades, even after colonization. Decades and decades later a little change struck aboriginals too. Now they are letting themselves free from the mental subjugation and attempting to accept their aboriginal identity and to be proud in their identity. The prime example to validate this is Sally Morgan's novel *My Place*. If ever, Morgan was ashamed of her aboriginal identity this beautiful novel would not have emerged.

The primary source used in conducting this research is Sally Morgan's autobiographical fiction *My Place*, which was published in the year 1987. The autobiographical fiction *My Place* emerged from Sally Morgan's quest to find her roots, which her grandmother and mother had hidden from her for fifteen years. Sally Morgan had to undergo inhumane experiences due to her aboriginal lineage, still she was keen about finding her mother's and grandmother's past. Morgan's mother and grandmother always wanted to conceal their true identity from society and from their children. It is in this situation Morgan attempted to trace their family history.

A diasporic reading of the text *My Place* is undertaken in developing this paper. How one look at *My Place* in diasporic aspect could is being discussed. Australia, a country freed from the clutches of European invasion had to suffer its aftermaths for a very long time. Even when they are free from colonial rule, natives could never free themselves from the aftermath of colonization. Race, culture, tradition, language etc. were no longer homogeneous. The homogeneity that aboriginals had could not be retrieved and they could no longer associate themselves to their ancestors due to their multi-racial and cultural identities and hybridity. Natives could no longer be called as natives due to their mixed identity, culture, religion and language. Even when they lived in their own country, they felt alienated and hence the concept of internal diaspora becomes prominent in the novel *My Place*.

Concept of Diaspora in Sally Morgan's *My Place*



The concept of diaspora emerged due to colonization. Diaspora could be considered as an aftermath of colonization. In the field of literature, emerged a genre called diasporic literature. Initially, literary works by voyagers were included in this genre. Europeans set out for voyage as a part of colonization. They had to spend rest of their lives in colonies. Hence, it was through them the concept of diaspora developed. The European voyagers who settled in colonies had to suffer a lot in the new place as they had to stay away from their homeland and roots. Gradually, when the process of colonization started developing, Europeans took slaves from colonies to different places to work in their plantation. Due to this, homogeneity that natives had prior to colonization got destabilized. The concept of homeland and affinity towards one's own country, race, language, people, religion, roots etc. became very prominent.

Initially, the process of migration was forcible. Slaves were taken from colonies to work in plantation and women were taken to be 'ayahs'. However, later on this scenario got changed. Migration became purposeful and people moved from place to another for job, education, in search of their relatives who were taken as slaves and for better living conditions. This change in scenario increased the rate of hybridity. Literary works belonging to this genre started developing. The kind of diaspora that we would focus in the novel *My Place* is different from those stated away. The concept of internal diaspora is given the prime focus.

In the novel *My Place*, Sally Morgan reveals that, till the age of fifteen she was not aware of her aboriginal lineage. This single statement could reveal to us the plight of aboriginals living in White Australia. Daisy (Sally Morgan's grandmother) and Gladys (Sally Morgan's mother) confined their identity from rest of the world for the fear of social trauma. In the novel, there is an instance in which Sally Morgan tackles Gladys to know about their identity.

One day, I tackled Mum about it as she washed the dishes.

'What do you mean, "Where do we come from?"'

'I mean, what country. The kids at school want to know what country we come from. They reckon we're not Aussies. Are we Aussies, Mum?'

Mum was silent. Nan grunted in a cross sort of a way, then got up from the table and walked outside.

'Come on, Mum, what are we?'

'What do the kids at school say?'

'Anything. Italian, Greek, Indian.'

'Tell them you're Indian.' (*My Place*, 38)

From this instance it is evident that, Daisy and Gladys does not want to showcase their identity to anyone including their children. They did this so as to save their children from the demeaning attitude, that they will have to encounter if their aboriginal identity is revealed. In Australia, other nation citizen received better social treatment when compared to aboriginals. Imagine, how hard it would for the natives to live in their own land with a false identity. It is not because of their aversion to aboriginality they disguise themselves in false identity, but to attain a better living condition and protect themselves from the social trauma.



In the novel we could see that, Daisy always tend to speak to Arthur, her brother in their native language. When Jack asked Sally Morgan whether she could speak native language, she replied him that, "No, I replied, 'but Arthur could and Daisy can. They wouldn't teach us (*My Place*, Page 221)." From this instance one could conclude two things. Firstly, aboriginals distanced themselves from their own practices only due the fear of social trauma and secondly, this instance clearly portrays that a person could never distance himself from his language and roots emotionally. If ever aboriginals could do it, Daisy would never attempt to speak her own language with her brother Arthur. Daisy always lived in her past clinching to her aboriginal identity. It is the social trauma that forbids them from speaking their language. Daisy and Arthur never wanted to distance themselves from their roots, however, due to problematic social scenario they are attempting to adapt to the new social structure by disguising in a pseudo-identity. Moreover, they never attempted to pass on their tradition, language, values etc. to the newer generations for the fear of social trauma.

In Australia, white man enjoyed the utmost freedom. Citizens from other nations too had a better living condition in Australia. The government and the society deprived aboriginals from their basic rights. Aboriginals had to live an alienated life, by undergoing all the inhuman practices in their land. Even the Government contributed to aboriginal sufferings. They didn't have the liberty to get educated, to own land or to bring up their children with themselves. Their life was totally controlled by the Whiteman. From Daisy's words these things could be asserted.

But I'll tell you what I'm wondering'. I'm wondering' if they'll give the blackfellas land. If it's one thing I've learnt in this world it's this, you can't trust the government. They'll give the blackfellas the dirt and the mining companies will get the gold. That's the way of it. (*My Place*, 349)

Sense of belongings is very essential for a person to live. In Australia, aboriginals and half-caste could never feel sense of belongings. Aboriginals being the true owners of Australian land, are the ones who should have complete authority in Australia. However, the scenario is very much different in Australia. Aboriginals and the half castes are the ones who were marginalized. They could never find Australia to be their land. They never had a sense of belongings in Australia. Most of the half caste children born does not know who their father was, but would know their aboriginal mother. Most of the time, half-caste children were taken away into foster homes, where they would have to undergo inhumane experiences. These below given extract, from Gladys's experience would indicate to us, the sense of belongings that aboriginals longed for.

I often prayed for God to give me a family. I used to pretend I had a mother and a father and brothers and sisters. I pretend I lived in a big flash house like Ivanhoe and I went to St Hilda's Girls school like Judy and June.

It was very important for me to have a father then. Whenever I asked Mum about my father, she'd say, 'You don't want to know about him, he died when you were very small, but he loved you very much'. (*My Place*, 251)

Being an aboriginal or half- caste is considered as the biggest curse, during the colonial era. The period of colonization and decades after decolonization was the era of utmost sufferings



and dehumanization to aboriginals and half-castes. Whiteman deprived them from their basics rights. Aboriginals could not even keep their children along with them. Whiteman took away aboriginals and half-caste children from their parents and place them in foster homes. Few children, who were removed from their parents never got a chance to know their roots. They lived their lives according to Whiteman's interest. They spoke Whiteman's language and they believed in Whiteman's religion. These children had to cater to Whiteman's interest. Most of these children were removed from their parents for Whiteman to provide them education. However, they received training to be domestic helpers than education. From Gladys's narration about her life in foster home we could validate it.

We had the same routine every morning at Parkerville. They woke us early by ringing a bell. They woke us early by ringing the bell. The air was always cold and you never felt like getting up.

You made your bed, got dressed and swept down the verandahs....Every morning, the boys got the wood for the stove in the kitchen and the older girls cooked the porridge. (*My Place*, 246)

Aboriginal and half-caste children removed from their parents, sometimes never got a chance to their near once and dear once again. Life of Daisy, Albert and Arthur were no different. They all were removed from their parents and never got a chance to see their parents again in their whole life time. From Arthur's narration of his childhood we could really understand the plight of aboriginals.

They told my mother and others we'd be back soon. We wouldn't be gone for long, they said. People were callin', 'Bring us back a shirt, bring us this, and bring us that'. They didn't realize they wouldn't be seein' us no more. I thought they wanted us educated so we could help run the station someday, I was wrong.

When they came to get me, I clung to my mother and tried to sing them. I wanted them to die. I was so young, I didn't know how to sing them properly. I cried and cried, calling to my mother, 'I don't want to go, I don't want to go!' She was my favorite. I loved her. I called, 'I want to stop with you, I want to stop wit you!'. I never saw her again. (*My Place*, 181- 182)

Whiteman had a special interest on foster home, as it was the main source of conversion. All the aboriginal and half-caste children brought there was converted into Christianity without even asking their or their parent's consent. Arthur is mentioning about this in his foster home experience. "The first thing they did was to christen us. Canon Burton, and Sophie McKintosh, I think she was the matron, were our godparents. We were christened Corunna, they didn't give us our father's name. That's when I got the name Arthur." (*My Place*, 183)

These various instances from the novel shows us, how aboriginals lived in their own land. They became a complete outsider in their own land without receiving any of their basic rights above that they could not feel any sense of belongings or connection to their roots in white Australia.

Conclusion



Australian aboriginals, the true owners of Australian soil had to live a diasporic life in their own land. The kind of diasporic life they had to encounter is different from that of the others. The diasporic element Africans or Indians had to undergo was due to the shift from their motherland to other foreign country. However, the plight of Australian aboriginals was different as they had to fight internal diaspora. The story that they had to narrate is that of sufferings, hardships, and struggle for survival, identity crisis and lack of sense of belongings in their own land. The only thing that they could retain was collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location and history. Living an isolated life, detaching oneself from one's own culture, language, practices etc. in one's own land could be the hardest suffering and Australian aboriginals had experienced it for a very long time. Daisy's and Gladys's life under a pseudo identity is the best example to this. Even when Daisy is living under a pseudo-identity her inclination to her aboriginal root is never detached. Her love for nature, consideration to other living beings and the beliefs she caters came from her aboriginal roots. Daisy's habit of speaking her native language to her brother reveals her affinity towards the aboriginal past. In spite of the social trauma that they had to suffer due to her aboriginal identity, their love for their roots is never shattered from their inner selves. The then existed social scenario is the only villain that draws Daisy apart from her roots. This evidently proves the role of Europeans in aboriginal's diasporic life in their own land.

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