

Solution of Social Problems Through Plays With Reference to Selected Australian Plays

D. Mahalakshmi (9498055355)
Assistant Professor
Department Of English
R.V. Govt. Arts College, Chengalpattu
maha31jan@yahoo.co.in

Literature as we know is the reflection of life. Literature has many genres; of all the genres the most powerful genre is the play because it is the only way through which we can reach the audience. Play uses action, dialogue, symbols and signs to convey its messages.

The early plays were performed to entertain the audience, but the role of play have changed from its traditional way, because now play are performed not only to entertain but to expose the hidden truth of an individual person's life or the whole community.

A play has the power to make the audience imagine the supposed place where the action is taking place. The audience is able to imagine the events and scenes happening in different place sitting in a single place.

There are many playwrights who have tried their hand in tragedies and comedies and sometimes both. But the playwrights who came after the colonization wrote on the effects of colonization on the colonized countries and their people. These issues include racism, caste oppression, suppression, alienation, displacement, nostalgia, identity, feminism, etc.

There are literature of different countries and one such important country which created a history is the literature of Australia. The colonization had a great impact on the Australian people. The natives of Australia were called as the aborigines who were alienated from the mainstream society for various reasons. Australian literature includes writers who have written novels, short stories, poems and drama.

The drama of Australia is different from other genres in Australian literature. The history of Australian drama began with the oral tradition they used to pass on their oral tradition, rituals, stories from one generation to other orally.

Indigenous Australian used to perform Corroboree which is a traditional dance of the aborigines which had some aspects of theatre. At Corroboree they intersect with the Dreamtime

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through dance, music and costume. The European theatre came to Australia in 1788 with the first fleet of European settlement. The drama of Australian was similar to English style.

The first theatre in Australia began in the penal colony which was the place of punishment for the convicts and the first play was performed in the prison for the entertainment of these convicts. The most important thing to be noted here is that the actors who acted in the play were the convicts themselves. Some of the authority believed that this kind of performance in the colony would create a mess and there won't be any discipline among the convicts. So the theatres were closed and no license were given.

The earlier theatre was closed because the behaviour of the audience was very bad and it was reported by the audience that while people were busy watching the play, their houses and properties were robbed by the burglars. So, to protect the people and their house from burglary the performance came to an end. Later came many businessmen, laymen, merchants etc. who tried to get licence to open a theatre.

It was after the Gold rush during the 1850's that many immigrants took place in Australia and people started sponsoring for the establishment of the theatres. Theatre became very popular in Australia and many playwrights came to the limelight. The important playwrights of the early period were David Williamson, Patrick White, Louis Nowra, etc.

Among the indigenous playwrights Jane Harrison, Andrea James, Tammy Anderson, Jack Davis, Louis Essen etc. The playwrights focussed on the issues happening in the society like corruption, theft, harassment etc. and few of them focussed on the marginalization of the colonizer over the colonized. Among them we can find the works of Jack Davis, Louis Nowra, Jane Harrison and others as a tuning-point in the history of theatre.

“No Sugar” by Jack Davis spoke about an aboriginal group who have developed their own dialect and are kept in a refugee camp by the authority. The play focusses on the marginalization of the white govt. and the struggle of the Millimurra family to resist and fight back with them to get their rights.

MARY: No! My friend went last Christmas and then she came back boodjarri. She reckons the boss'ssons used to belt her up and you know, force her. Then they kicked her out. And when she had that baby them trackers choked it dead and buried it in the pine plantation.

JOE: What? You dinkum?

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MARY: That's true. (62)

The family fights for their rights and finally it achieves the rights but by losing one of their family members. The play is about the love, the trauma of the family, harassment of the women in the hands of the white, memory of their hometown, the life in the bush, their native language and their struggle to create their identity.

NEVILLE: Doctor Aberdeen examined the natives camped at Government well. And found them to be 'rotten with scabies', and as a result of – ah well, various submissions, it's been decided to transfer the entire native population to the Moore River Settlement. (47)

The aboriginal family was considered to be polluted and unclean. The authority decides to move them to another place. They are even denied the basic ration in the camp. The play brings out the struggle of these aboriginal family to survive in their own place.

Jane Harrison's "Stolen" play is about the life of five aboriginal children who belong to the stolen generation. The play brings out the impacts of stolen generation. The children who are brought to the home recollect their experience in the home. They struggle, resist and fight with the white authority to create their identity.

Among the five children Sandy and Jimmy is taken away forcibly by the authority. Shirley stands firmly after becoming a grandmother that she won't allow her grandchild to be taken away by the authority. Anne is the most blessed child who is adopted by a white family but when she realises that her parents are alive, she longs to find them and is caught between two worlds.

Her identity is questioned by her own self. Ruby is the most pathetic character in the play who fails to resist back and fights for her rights and ends up in asylum. Jimmy tries to find his mother but fails and dies at the end of the play. Thus, the play brings out the trauma of the Stolen generation of these children.

JIMMY: They kept saying she was dead.....

Echo of voice-over saying" your mother's dead".

.....but I could feel her spirit. Mum was alive and I waited and waited for her to come and get me, to take me home. I was just a little tacker, for God's sake..... dear Mum, forgive me. I have sinned. I've been a thug and a thief – but I've never stolen anyone's soul.... Oh, Mum, why couldn't you have lived a bit longer just

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so I could meet you? I waited so long. Brothers, don't give up fighting. Don't let it happen again. Someone's gotta fight. I just can't no more. They stuck a knife into me heart and twisted it so hard. Prison don't make you tough, it makes ya weak, ya spirit just shrivels up inside. I'm going now, to be with my mother. I can't fight. I'm punched out. My only wish is that we go to the same place. Willy Wajurri.(34)

The play thus focuses on the impact of stolen generation and how the characters struggle to create their own identity in the mainstream society.

Louis Nowra's play "Radiance" tries to bring out the life of three half -sisters who struggle in a male society and their resistance. In the play the three sisters get united in their mother's funeral. Cressy and Mae in the play bring out their experience and agony in the hands of white male and how they used them merely as an object of sex. Nona lives in her own world of imagination. She imagines a black prince to be her father and she enjoys life with the male friends.

The role of the mother is very vital in the play. Though she is not present in the play physically but through the characters memory the playwright keeps her alive. The three sisters represent the life of their mother. Mother believes that Harry wells loves her and as a token of love he has given her the house.

In the same way Mae who loves a married surgeon steals money from the nurses' fund and is punished. She feels more embarrassed when she finds the surgeon and his wife standing as a witness for his crime. She feels dejected and comes back home and takes cares of her sick mother.

Cressy who takes singing as her career stays abroad, does lots of shows but is not happy as she ends up with private personal drama. The experience is traumatic, and it suggests a mind that is disturbed. She develops hallucination and believes that someone is there with her in her room. It was during the end of the play we find that Cressy and Mae reveal the truth of their life and their hatred towards Henry wells who harassed not only their mother but abused her. Later Cressy tells that it was he who raped her and Nona was the outcome of that incident.

The life of three sisters' changes and the pain and agony of their life is brought out in the play. Finally, they decide to burn the house and set fire to it. Their happiness is seen through the following lines:

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MAE: (shouting out) can you see it Harry! That's your house, Harry. Can you see it? It's going to be ashes, Harry. Burn, baby burn! (she is dancing in the mud now. then to CRESSY) Isn't this the best bonfire you've ever seen?

CRESSY: (Quietly lost in thought) yes yes, it is. (48)

The playwright become the voice of the aborigines and brought out the truth of suppression and the impact of colonization on their life which have been hidden so far from the main street society. It brings out the life of three half-sisters who visit their home for their mother's funeral. The hidden truth of the members is brought out as the plays moves on. The play thus becomes the voice of the family as well as the whole community.

Thus, play is the most powerful genre which has the power to bring out the hidden issues to the society and create an awareness among the non- aboriginal people about the life of these aborigines. Play become a voice for the suppressed and helps them to fight and create their identity in the society.

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