



Judith Wright's "Bora Ring": Postcolonial and Eco-critical Study

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Abstract: *Judith Arundell Wright was a poet and short story writer. She had thought and worked for the most tortured souls. One is for Australian Aboriginal people and other is their mother Nature. She was keen defender of the Aboriginal land rights movement. She has also campaigned for the Conservation of Great Barrier Reef and Fraser Island. As an environmentalist she portrayed nature profoundly in her poetry. One can discover natural landscape of Australia vividly in her poetry. After colonization the Aborigines lost their land as well as their culture. After arriving at the island the British settlers announced the land as terra nullis, i.e. no one's land where the Aborigines have a large number of groups and different languages. They denied the individual identity and considered them as a single culture. The Aboriginal people lost their sacred ground, Bora where initiation ceremonies took place. Their festival, corroboree is also no more celebrated. Under the rule of the Whites they forgot the stories of Dreamtime. The song lines is also lost which carries the stories of Dreamtime. Their ecocentric life was also destroyed. In "Bora Ring" Wright has bemoaned for them. She recorded that how 'alien tale' engulfed the 'tribal story.' She also honoured their culture through this poem. The Aboriginal people are inseparable from Nature. Their pulse is nature. Urbanisation occupied the island. They are adopting the culture of the rulers. Colonization has changed their life and also of nature. The present paper entitled as "Judith Wright's Bora Ring: Postcolonial and Ecocritical Study" is going to connect the aftermath of Post colonialism and its impact on nature and human beings.*

Keywords: *Post colonialism, Ecocriticism, Bora, Corroboree, Dreamtime, Terra Nullis, Australian Aborigines*

Introduction:

Europeans started sea voyage to discover new land, new countries in the 15th century. They discovered the ways to India, America and many other countries. They entered a country for trading. But gradually they took the sceptre and became the ruler of that land. The exploration of new countries helped them to colonize the land. They created empire and expanded the regions. They exploited the resources of that country and used those resources in their own country. They colonized countries like India, Australia, Africa, Canada, China and America. The condition of these countries was quite similar. After many years of brutal torture and occlusion, these countries became free. But these Postcolonial countries lost their originality. Still these countries are colonized culturally. The White people imposed their language, values, religion and culture upon the inhabitants of that land. This cultural dominance, i.e. Cultural Imperialism is still prevailing upon the third world countries. Postcolonial theory as explained by P K.Nayer : "Postcolonial theory is a method of interpreting, reading and critiquing the cultural practices of colonialism, where it proposes that the exercise of colonial power is also the exercise of racially determine powers of Representation" (Nayar, 2019,

p.154). The narratives of colonizers sometimes become biased. To know about the life of colonized people, it is important to know from their own voice. Edward Said's Orientalism, Frantz Fanon's The Wretched of the Earth are such texts which give a detail of colonialism and explore the impact of colonialism. Colonialism imprisoned people psychologically. The colonizers ruined the natural environment too. Arrival of modern equipments like rail engine, telegraph, and forming farmland and urbanization made the lives of the aboriginal people miserable. They have their own cultural values. But they lost it after colonization. Nature also lost its former shape. It has become an important task to pay attention to nature as modernization is killing nature. (Nayar, 2019). Ecocriticism talks about the study of literature where nature is given special attention. It tries to investigate the relationship between the human beings and the natural world. One can analyze any text through the context of environmental issues. The tribal people are the closest children of nature and their life is fully ecocentric. As Wright has seen the life of the Australian Aboriginal people. The present paper is going to focus on the Post colonialism and ecocritical study of "Bora Ring".

Objective of the Study: The paper is giving special attention to the Australian Aboriginal life and their culture. This paper is going to offer a sketch about/of the settlement of the European explorers. This paper also centres around the loss of the Australian Aboriginal culture. The present paper is going to study about/of lost ceremonies like Bora and Corroboree. This paper concentrates on eco-friendly life of the Aboriginal Australians and their struggle to retain their own land. The paper also gives a glimpse of the present situation of the Australian Aborigines. The paper focuses on the colonial and eco-critical study of 'Bora Ring'.

Methodology: This paper is written in Descriptive method. The Primary source used for this study is the text of the poem "Bora Ring" from allpoetry.com. The Secondary sources are journals, anthology, research articles and online resources.

Discussion: Among the Europeans, the Dutch first reached Australia. Captain Willem Jansz reached the northern coast in 1606 but returned after the murder of his some crew members by the aborigines of Australia. Later Able Tasman, another Dutch explorer reached an island in 1642 which is at present known as Tasmania. He named the island as New Holland. But later it was renamed as Australia which means Southern land. Captain James Cook, the British explorer came to the eastern coast of Australia in 1770. By understanding the fertility of the soil he claimed Australia for Great Britain. After many years, the British government sent the criminals to these islands as punishment. They were the first people who occupied the land. White people colonized Australia. They completely denied the existence of the aborigines. They considered the island as terra nullis, a Latin word which means no one's land. The Aboriginal people tried to fight against the settlers. But they could not subsist at the hand of settlers. This misfortune upon this people continued till 1990s. Most of the people were killed and also died of disease like influenza, measles, etc. The native people of Australia respected their oral tradition and rituals of Dreaming. They have different languages. Within the island they developed their individual culture. But the colonizers considered them as monoculture. They have different rock art and astronomy. But the White settlers treated them as savage and wanted to civilize them. Actually every culture has its own charm, hue, flavour, fragrance and glow. But the colonizers disavowed it. So, it was not wise task of "white man's burden" to educate the tribal. They have their own knowledge and belief system which may not be modern but it was never against the Nature. Aboriginal Culture is always associated with purity, innocence and holiness. The invaders are the destroyer of holiness. They changed the land to a congested city, to a factory and to a farm. Judith Wright wept for the Aboriginal people and fought for them and their dwelling-places. (Bora Rings, 2023)

Judith Wright (1915 - 2000) was an acclaimed non-Aboriginal Australian poet. She was also an environmentalist and campaigner for aboriginal land rights. She dedicated her life to investigate the Aboriginal life and culture. She was born in New South Wales. She was constantly reminded of the condition of Aboriginal people. The theme of her poetry is always nature and its inhabitants, i.e. the trees, rivers, birds, animals, hills and seas. She focused on the flora and fauna of Australian ecology. Another important theme of her poetry is Australian Aboriginal Culture. She had lamented for the aborigines of

Australia. Wright's "Bora Ring" was one of them where she talked about their lost culture. It was published in 1946 in the poetry collection by the same name.

Aboriginal culture of any country is always eco-centric. The indigenous people did not damage the mother Nature. They worship Nature. They show their gratefulness towards mother Nature. Australian Aboriginal people are also not different. Etymologically the word 'Aborigines' came from the Latin words aborigines which mean from the beginning. Now a days, the word aborigines means the original inhabitants of any land who were the first people to live in that land. But the original people were wiped out from their own land by the invaders like the tribes of India by Aryans and the Africans by the White Europeans and the Aboriginal Australians by European settlers.

Judith Wright's "Bora Ring" is an elegy for the decaying culture of Australian Aborigines. They have their own culture and way of life. But the European settlers took their land and evicted the original people. In this poem of sixteen lines, Wright utters the most bitter truth of human history which is the human beings' thirst for the blood of their own brothers. Each word of the poem is explaining their lost culture of and the poet's mourning for that loss.

Wright started her poem with the negative voice which sets the gloomy tune of the poem. The poet laments that "The song is gone". Music, Dance and Story Telling are the three important parts in the life of Australian Aborigines. These are inextricably mixed with their culture. Wright has mentioned these three tradition at the very beginning of the poem. Music is inseparable from the Aborigines. They sang song for religious ceremonies; for good hunting; for well coming rain and for the well-being of a child. They have their own song lines or dreaming track which means a way throughout the land which marks the "route followed by localised creator beings or ancestors in the dreaming" (Wikipedia). British novelist Bruce Chatwin in his book *The Songlines* describes the song line as: "... the labyrinth of invisible pathways which meander all over Australia and are known to Europeans as "Dreaming track" or "Songlines"; to the Aborigines as the Footprint of the Ancestors" or the Way of Lore" (Wikipedia).

The songs also carried forward the story of the creation of the land, how their ancestors came to that land and about how the ancestors preserved the knowledge through these songs. Different clans of different regions could connect themselves through the song. They also preserved the maps in these songs which could help to find new path across the country. But the song is not played any more. After the European settlement they lost this tradition (Barry, 2015)

The indigenous people of Australia also lost another practice that is dancing. They danced in different ceremonies like Bora and Corroboree. But the invaders destroyed everything. Dancing also carried stories. But both the dance and the stories have become secret within the dancers who are probably resting in the earth. For dancing they did not need any well-decorated stage or a social platform. They danced under the open sky and sang with their handmade musical instruments like didgeridoo, a long tube which is made of wood and without finger holes and clapsticks, striking of one stick on another which are very simple and not like modern instruments. The modern instruments annoyed nature by the extensive sound.

The tribal had their own secret stories but those stories are replaced by the "alien tale". Their stories stopped suddenly though the stories were composed to be told and should be continued generations after generations. Actually the Colonial discourses suppressed the indigenous story. The stories of the British settlement had alienated the stories of the aborigines. The stories indicating Dreamtime or Dreaming. Australian aborigines are distinguished from other tribal because they were connected with Dreamtime. According to Chicago World Book entitled *Australian Aborigines Dreaming* is "the age of creation when spirit beings called Dreaming shaped the land and laid down laws and customs." (21) Each story of their lives were interlinked with Dreaming. From dreaming they came to know about the creation of the land, about their forefathers, their arrival in that land, the ways of their life, about different islands, about food, medicine and also about weapons. But after the British invasion the scenario has changed. Tribal people transferred the

secret knowledge among new generations orally in different ceremonies. This belief system is lost. They were killed. This tradition no longer would be continued.

Even the nature is mourning for the loss of the aboriginal culture. The dancing ring is left abundant. The grass is marking those dancing rings, i.e. the Bora Rings. Bora is referring both the sacred site and also the initiation ceremony of the Australian Aboriginal people. Bora Rings were generally constructed in pairs. It had a bigger circle with 22metres in diameter and a smaller of 14 metres. Those rings are linked with a sacred walkway. In this Bora ground the initiation ceremonies took place. When a boy has reached puberty, he has to achieve the status of a man. The boy went through that ring and often it is associated with “scarification, circumcision, sub incision and also the removal of a tooth” (Wikipedia). After this ceremony the mark become sperm anent in his body which indicates his manhood. The boys were introduced to secret knowledge of the ancestors. The women and children were not allowed to enter into a Bora ground. These Bora Rings are mostly found in south-east Queensland and eastern New South Wales. At present among 426 Bora Rings, only 94 Rings are existing. This is the result of colonial expansion in Australia. The White settlers took these sacred ground and made farmland. But the Aboriginal people treated the ground as sacred and reserved it. They did not violate the place. They kept the nature as it was. But the British settlers used these lands according to their own will. Their presence at the island showed the colonial impact and the tribal showed their connection with Nature.

The relation between Natural environment and the indigenous people is expressed in these lines:

“... The apple gums /posture and mime a past corroboree, /murmur a broken chant.”

The apple-gums “murmur a broken chant.”The chant is broken because the Nature is expressing sorrow for these people. The murmur of the leaves reverberates the chanting of Corroborate. The Corroboree has become past. It was the most celebrated festival of their culture. The festival is not only vanished but it also lost its original name,i.e. caribberie. This was a public festival. Such festivals as mentioned in the book *Early People: Australian Aborigines* were took place to honor the “spirits beings and to encourage plants and animals to grow and increase in numbers”(p.28,3009,Worldbook).This event was a path through which one could connect with Dreamtime. Everyone painted their bodies for this sacred ceremony. They wanted to renew their spiritual power and wanted to preserve the knowledge for future generation. They used natural materials like ocher, a soft mineral rich in iron to paint their bodies. They used shells as ornaments. They did not use any kind of artificial materials for decoration. This ceremony is also valuable for political purpose as it was another way to make peace with two tribes. But this festival is not celebrated now. It depicts the abandonment and loss of culture. Their culture was meaningless to the European settlers. As if they woke and forgot that they had once invaded the land.

Hunting is another integral part of their life. But Wright admitted that they forgot their profession. Spears and boomerangs were the weapons for hunting. But the weapons are under the ground. These weapons are now useless. The users of these weapons are exiled from their own land. Actually Wright mourn for Australian Aborigines in each line of “Bora Ring”. The Aboriginal people represented nature and valued nature in every aspect of their life. Wearing a mother Pearl pendant was also linked with the Rainbow Snake which brought rain. It is also the story of Dreamtime.

Wright again was reminded of the dream. She wrote “a dream the world breathed sleeping and forgot”. Here the word dream both connotes the Dreamtime or Dreaming which the Aborigines would never forgot and also a day-dreaming or reverie as the world has forgotten their traditional ways of life. Wright here bewailed that they have forgotten their traditional rituals and values. But an Australian Aborigines should not forget Dreamtime.

The most pathetic line of this poem is “The nomad feet are still”. The present situation of the original people of Australia can be understood easily. The nomad feet were constantly moving from one place to another to

seek new shelter. Their life was not static. But their feet are “still” now. They were killed, abducted and wiped out from their own land. Though they fought with their traditional weapons but they could not cope up with the modern weapons like gun. They were forced back to the jungle. With their eco friendly life has also gone.

The sacred grounds of the Aborigines are almost lost. The remaining grounds are only watched by the riders. They halted only to watch a “sightless shadow” of the broken site of the Bora ground. Under the colonial rule their culture has become a shadow which is formless or sightless. It cannot be seen. As if it does not exist. Their sacred ground, the dwelling places are empty. European settlers are taking their places and making their farmland, buildings and houses. Thus the modern people changed according to their own will. For them the aborigines are not only the sufferer but the Nature is also paying a heavy loss.

Aborigines always expressed their gratitude for taking life saving materials from nature. But the modern people never expressed their gratitude. Rather they excavated the land for minerals, for useful materials. But they never worship nature. Wright truly reminded the “ancient curse”, the first crime by human being. The act of violence which started long ago is still continuing today. One brother has become thirsty of another brother. According to the Book of Genesis Cain and Able were the first two sons of Adam and Eve. Cain, the elder brother and farmer killed Able, a shepherd out of jealousy. Cain’s killing of his brother Able was metaphorically the White invaders ‘murder of the original inhabitants of Australia. Their hands were stained with blood like Able. They have to carry on the curse. (Abrams and Harpham,2012)

The land is beautiful with its indigenous people. The land does not need any kind of artificial artifacts for decoration. But the white invaders spoil their land and destroyed the natural beauty. They completely denied the existence of the Aboriginal people. The White settlers were so shameless that they refused the identity of the Aborigines and took their land. In her work *Half a Lifetime* Wright apologized to indigenous Australians for the inequities and bloodshed of colonization: “To all of the peoples of the old and true Australia on whose land I have trespassed and whom, by being part of my own people, I have wronged, I plead for forgiveness”(296).

Wright’s “Bora Ring” is not just lamentation but also criticism of the White settlers. Wright valued the Aboriginal Culture and their relation with nature. Wright’s poem has a universal tone. Taking land from the natives is not new for the White settlers. In India they took the land from the tribal people, i.e. Adivasis for different reasons. Shanmugam Chettiar in his work “We are the Adivasis” talks about their rights. Wright has not only thought about the suffering of the Aborigines but also has shown ecological consciousness. She emphasized the eco-friendly life of the Aborigines. (Wright, 2023)

Conclusion: Wright’s poetry always focuses on the Australian flora and fauna. Through her poetry Australia get a new shape. Others discovered Australia in a different way. As an environmentalist she wanted to create awareness among people. As a non Aboriginal poet she felt ashamed of the act done by her ancestors. Throughout her life she meditated on Nature. In “Bora Ring” she wanted to show the result of colonization. The colonization destroyed the natives of Australia and also their culture. Their rituals, belief system, Dreaming were eco-friendly. They marked the sacred ground which is similar to conserving the land. They hunted only for necessity. They did never abused the natural resources. They continuously adore Nature. If one looks back at the Ancient Indian culture, people worshipped Nature as Goddess. Even today the ritual is carried on among the villagers. Their relation was like mother-child. Their approach to life was eccentric. Even today we are dependent on nature. But the native people prayed for everything what they took from nature. While the modern people never do. Instead they are using natural resources wilfully and leading nature to destruction. Actually, the Aboriginal people were more ethical than the modern people. The peaceful life became hell after the invasion. No one can compensate their loss. Slowly and silently they destroy a culture and an unforgettable Dream. Now the White people are apologizing what their ancestors have done. Like Wright many Whites also supported the Land Rights movement of the Aborigines. They have become trespassers in their own land. At present the rest of the Aborigines have adopted the culture of

the Whites. As truly Wright remarked that the “tribal story lost in an alien tale.” Wright is not deep ecologist. But she wants the life of the modern people must be ecocentric.

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