

Abandoning the Aboriginals: A Protest from an Immigrant, Jackie Mansourian

Minu A

FIP Substitute

St Cyril's College, Adoor

Abstract

Australia, the land of Alps is a melting pot of different cultures. But the land bearing the strains of multiculturalism is on the path of unification. There are many writers who consider this diversity as enrichment to the Australian literary world. Jackie Mansourian, the Australian writer and social activist is the pride and proud of her land for her immense contributions to the literary field both by mouth and by hand. The paper entitled as “**Abandoning the Aboriginals: A Protest from an Immigrant, Jackie Mansourian**” attempts to investigate the threats to the rich multicultural context of Australia and the steps undertaken by the organization of PEN Melbourne. The analysis has been done in her short story collections with focus on her short story *In The Light of the Moon*. The present study focuses on the reflections of a socially committed writer on the aspects of the Multi cultural policy framework adopted by different governments and the immigration policies experimented in Australia in different times. Being an immigrant Jackie Mansourian is able to express the immigrant's angst through her works. Her works acknowledge the historical injustices and hurt that has devastated communities and the ongoing pain and guilt that this creates for both victims and perpetrators.

Key terms: Multiculturalism, Ethnicity, Race, Culture, Whiteness.

Australia, the land of Alps is a melting pot of different cultures. But the land bearing the strains of multiculturalism is on the path of unification. There are many writers who consider this diversity as enrichment to the Australian literary world. Jackie Mansourian, the Australian writer and social activist is the pride and proud of her land for her immense contributions to the literary field both by mouth and by hand. She belonged to an Armenian family where her grandparents were the child survivors of Armenian genocide in Turkey. She was born in Egypt and later at her

age of six her family migrated to Australia in search of better living conditions. In the early phase of Australian life Jackie and her parents faced racism. It was the time of the White Australia Policy and little Jackie suffered a lot with it. These bitter experiences moulded the humanist in her which later kindled upon her spirit to become a community worker and social activist. She is a writer as well as an activist. She is currently the secretary of PEN Melbourne organization. She has been engaged in various refugee protection campaigns and community works. For her, writing is a way for social work. Through her writing she is trying to convince the world about the necessity to overthrow the worm-eaten antique policies of our social order that always stays for the sake of a privileged minority.

In an era of growing fascism, in an era where writers are being killed for what they have written, Jackie Mansourian stands as a majestic icon to defend the power of spoken word. As Margaret Atwood says, "A word after a word/ after a word is power", Jackie Mansourian has well explored through the power of word and is trying and is trying to give the same power for all writers over the world.

Multiculturalism is a multifaceted term with political and cultural connotation. In Australia the white people who are migrated to the land is never treated as immigrants. On the contrary the aboriginals of the land are often referred to as the second or third generation of migrants.

The word multiculturalism was first used in Australia in 1973 by then minister of Immigration Al Grassby, to denote a fairly broad idea of "the family of the nation" (Grassby 5). The Australian society can be divided into core and non-core periphery. The core consists of white, Anglo, English speaking, culturally similar non-ethnics while the non-core includes all others. The core is essentially white and western, usually known as Anglo Celtic but the non-core consists of ethnic and non-white. The core and non-core peripheries have a binary position in Australian society. David Dutton contends that

multiculturalism in Australia has constructed a single core culture surrounded by peripheral ethnic cultures. This core culture, also called mainstream was postulated as the authentic Australia, homogenous and identifiable, surrounded by the newer ethnic Australians, marginalized in the spatial metaphor of Anglo-Celtic core and ethnic periphery and doubts attended their claims to be real Australians. (Dutton 154)

Jackie Mansourian "In the Light of the Moon" elaborates the effects of multiculturalism on the aboriginals. The white migrants who behave like the indigenous in the land always looted the aboriginals, caught them as slaves and trained them as raiders in order to attack their own people. They were compelled to live in filthy situation. They even won't spare girls. The caught up girls were sexually abused by the white soldiers.

Politically multiculturalism caters the economic needs of the nation. Though it enhances cultural diversity, little importance was given to the life of the aboriginals. Multiculturalism in Australia has constructed a single, homogenous core culture that is white and Western, surrounded by peripheral ethnic cultures.

Ethnicity in Australia has been endangered with the coming of Multiculturalism. “Ethnicity appears to exist always in a marginal, and often negative relationship to the mainstream or hegemonic group” (Gunew 49) Australian society always witnessed dichotomy between the core and non-core group presence. It resulted in the positioning of the ethnics as outsiders in their own homeland. Ethnicity is closely related to race. Although race possessed a biological significance, ethnicity does not. But both these terms are culturally interconnected and acting as a cultural differentiator. In a multicultural country like Australia ethnicity is catch –all term to denote the minority from the majority group on the basis of colour, language, culture or heritage with the introduction of White Australia Policy.

The story reflects how the freedom of the ethnic Australians was curtailed by the white settler and how they were condemned to a minority group. According to Miller and Castles “becoming an ethnic minority is not an automatic result of immigration, but rather the consequence of specific mechanisms of marginalization, which affect different groups in different ways” (Castles 32). This mechanism resulted in the creation of “a political conservatism which preserves ethnic Australians as not quite proper Australians” (Stratton 39).

In Australia there is a strong relation between multiculturalism and migration. A migrant, simply means one who migrates from one place to another. Mark Lopez asserts that in Australia “the term migrant refers to an individual or minority group of immigrant, overseas-born non citizens, and covers recent arrivals and long-term residents” (Lopez 4). But in Australia the color and language decides the immigrants. The simple dictionary meaning of a migrant as someone who migrated to a land other than their own seems to have been scrapped in Australia. Jackie condemns the marginalization of the aboriginals in her story. The story presents the aboriginals as migrants and strangers in their own land.

Jackie Mansourian being an immigrant focused on the stories and the voices of other outsiders like herself, people who were on the margins of Australian society because their heritage was considered different from the core. In her short story “In the Light of the Moon” she portrays the aboriginals as battlers. They are not just fighting against poverty but also struggling with the conflicting demands of their own community inside and the strange newly constructed Australian world outside. The aboriginals have two choices- either abandon their homeland or become part of a poor migrant community in their own land. The story becomes a parable of the stranger, a meditation on the power of strangers, who altered the ways of a settled community and to change the community forever. Instead of the strangers the aboriginals feel an alien by themselves. They are patiently waiting for the strangers to invade their own land. They always have a submissive attitude. This tension pervades throughout the story.

As a writer, she tries to fight for the freedom of aboriginals. Through her stories, she tries to portray the lives of the aboriginal people of the land who were forced to surrender themselves before the clutches of colonial powers. It portrays how lives of girls and women are being haunted by the military and how they sustain the tyrannies including sexual abuse. As a community worker, Jackie Mansourian is the secretary of PEN Melbourne, and through the organization she conducts workshops and other campaigns to bring the indigenous communities forefront in writing.

Works Cited

- Atwood, Margaret. *True Stories*. London: OUP, 1982. Print.
- Castles, Stephen & Mark Miller. *The Age of Migration. International Movements in the modern World*. New York: Guilford, 2003. Print.
- Dutton, David. *One of Us? A Century of Australian Citizenship*. Sydney: UNSW, 2002. Print.
- Grassby, Al. *A Multi- Cultural Society for the Future*. Canberra: Australian Govt, 1973. Print.
- Gunew, Sneja . “Against Multiculturalism: Rhetorical images”. *Multiculturalism, Difference, and Postmodernism*. Melbourne: Longman, 1993. Print.
- Lopez, Mark. *The origins of Multiculturalism in Australian Politics1945-1975*. Carlton: Melbourne UP, 2000. Print.
- Mansourian, Jackie. “In the light of the Moon”. *Pen international* Vol. 58, No.1 Autumn 2007. *Context Africa* 2011: 78-88. Web 2 Feb 2107.
- Stratton, Jon. *Race Daze-Australia in Identity Crisis*. Annandale: Pluto, 1998. Print.