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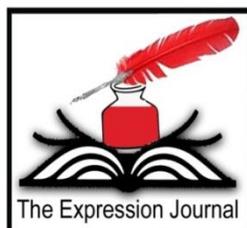
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THE SPACE AS/FOR DEFENCE IN JACK DAVIS' *ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA*

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Abstract

Physical and virtual space in literary discourses got momentum in the postcolonial/ post structural context. It is contextualized and resultingly problematized in production and analysis of co- texts. The new historicists and cultural materialists in the twenty first century helped and contributed much in pragmatically theorizing the concepts of spatiality. Today, space becomes the semantic focus of the work, which can further be elaborated to the acceptable notions and nuances of literary creativity. Time, action and development of thought circumnavigate on the contours of space. Yuri Lotman has given a strong foundation to the semiotic orientation of space in literary and non- literary discourses. Jack Davis is arguably the most famous aboriginal playwright and poet. As an activist, he has unearthed many cruelties unleashed on the pagan tribals by the British Christian invaders. Many Australian poems can be read in the strategic opportunities provided by space studies. This paper is such an attempt to explore one of the important poems by Jack Davis, entitled Aboriginal Australia. In order to analyse the poem with greater detail, we are considering the poem, as sentences. So every sentence is analysed. Those words that have a strong sense of spatial inclination have been handpicked. The words like Others, Yirrakalas', Lake George hills, Warrarra, Murray, governor's face, my enclave, McLarty's run, Australian etc. are extensively considered in the light of space studies, in this paper

Key-Words

Space, Spatiality, Spatial Turn, Australian Poetry, Aboriginality, Other, Heterotopia.

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.....
All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages.

William Shakespeare - *As You Like It* (II. vii. ll.139-43)

The concept of physical and virtual space in literary discourses got momentum in the postcolonial/ post structural context. The space is contextualized and resultingly problematized in production and analysis of co- texts. The theoretical cosmology envisioned by the new historicists and cultural materialists in the twenty first century helped and contributed much in pragmatically theorizing the concepts of spatiality. The term spatiality is a contribution of Edward Soja, the Marxian thinker and geographer. Though he was using the term to theorize urban planning , the concept is applicable to all discourses. Spatial turn is basically a retrospection or turning back what has already happened. In many post structuralist deliberations, space becomes the semantic focus of the work, which can further be elaborated to the acceptable notions and nuances of literary creativity. Time, action and development of thought circumnavigate on the contours of space with a centrifugal attraction to the centre or the space.

It was Yuri Mikhailovich Lotman, the Estonian literary scholar and semiotician, who has given a strong foundation to the semiotic orientation of space in literary and non-literary discourses. "Lotman broached in his literary studies the question of the relationship between space in the text and space of the real world. He claimed both space organizations are governed by cultural stereotypes and conventions, which serve as kind of a 'mediator' between them. However, while additional senses are imposed on textual space by cultural codes, extratextual space uses the reworked ones. (en.m.wikipedia.org)

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Postcolonial poetry, along with other forms of expressions, strongly exhibits a revised sense of spatiality in its core. Hence, we are stating that space and place play significant roles in sociocultural narrative theories of the contemporary world. Earlier the 'space' was something "occupied" by the geographers, but now it is the domain with multidisciplinary potentialities and dynamism. Postcolonial poetry interrogates the seasoned nuances of imperialist psyche. A strong sense of anti-imperialism and resistance is visible in Australian poetry in English from its very origin, though the early writers were convicts and soldiers from Britain. As Judith Wright has observed:

If there were men of a poetic turn among the convicts and soldiers of the first settlement, they had probably no time or inclination to exercise the gift. Mere survival, and a fair share of the rum, perhaps filled the early ambitions of most. (Wright 58)

Jack Leonard Davis is arguably the most famous aboriginal playwright and poet. As an unflinching and uncompromising activist, he has unearthed many cruelties unleashed on the pagan tribals by the British Christian invaders. Adam Shoemaker rightly labelled him as one of "Australia's most influential Aboriginal authors" (Shoemaker 61)

Many of Australian poetry can be read in the strategic opportunities provided by space studies. This paper is such an attempt to explore one of the important poems by Jack Davis, entitled *Aboriginal Australia*. Jack Davis was a Perthian. He spent most of his lifetime there. He belonged to the Western Australian Nyoongah tribe. The Nyoongah words are frequently seen in his plays. His themes include aboriginal issues and their identity along with their rootlessness and alienation. Other prominent themes of Jack Davis are the white settlement and the consequential friction between the settlers and the aboriginals.

Davis' *Aboriginal Australia* is a poem that deals with almost all major themes of his favourite choice. The themes of othering, hypocrisy of the settlers, the animosity, separating the members of the family from one another, mass extermination, cultural effacement, large scale slaughters etc. can be seen in this poem as well. In order to analyse the poem with greater detail, we are considering the poem, as sentences. So every sentence is analysed. Those words that have a strong sense of spatial inclination have been handpicked. The words like Others, Yirrakalas', Lake George hills, Warrarra, Murray, governor's face, my enclave, McLarty's run, Australian etc. are extensively considered in the light of space studies, in this paper. Every word Jack Davis has used has exhibited his excessive sense of commitment and creative politics. He unambiguously picturised the brutalities of the aggressors towards the pristine land and community of the island. Every space that he has mentioned has strong geopolitical implications.

In the first line of the poem the word "other" is used, by the poet. Othering was both a weapon and a strategy in the hands of the colonisers. Othering implicates not only geographical but also cultural high handedness. In all aspects of the word, Australia was the other for the Europeans. As far as they were concerned, it was a place to be conquered. They did not deserve any decent reciprocation from the British part, according to them. Geographically they were the other. Regarding religion they were the other. The aboriginals were pagans, and the colonisers were Christians. Colour of the skin too was different. Language too was different. Way of life, food

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habit, dress code etc. too were different. Those were natural differences. But the colonisers considered the colonised sub human and they treated them like the other. They used the word other as verb, means the British Christian colonizers “othered” them, to massacre and usurp their land and property. In other words their land and space were taken away by the colonisers.

As we said earlier, “Aboriginal Australia” is a reliable commentary about the Euro-Christian scheme of taming the islanders, who were there from time immemorial. The available records emphasize the fact that aboriginals or tribals started settling there, thousands of years back. They were the indigenous people, who were brutally crushed by the colonizers. Jack Davis leads the readers to a place , originally occupied by the aboriginals, later it becomes a space of Europeans to establish their colonial interest. At the start of the poem itself, Davis introduces the word other, which later develops into a philosophy of the aggressors. The word other is used here as a noun, which gives a new sense of assertion from the colonizers part. So the place once occupied by the aboriginal become a space for the privileged.

To the Others

You once smiled a friendly smile,

Said we were kin to one another,

Thus with guile for a short while

Became to me a brother (*Aboriginal Australia*)

Another prominent space in the *Aboriginal Australian* is Yirrkala. It is a town in East Arnhem region, Northern Territory of Australia. The town is very close to Nhulunbuy, the large mining town. In 1963, Yolngu people, an Aboriginal Australian community submitted a representation in the Parliament. The Yirrkala bark petitions were historic because it was considered to be the first traditional document by the indigenous people. But in 1971, the final verdict came. It asserted that the native people has no legal claim in the land and they cannot establish their native title on it.

Jack Davis made a spatial reference to Yirrkala bark petitions of 1963. The federal government usurped the land, possessed by the aboriginals, Yolngu people. The community submitted two bark petitions before the authority. Here, the significance of space gets prominence. It has two levels. The spaces Yirrkala and the Parliament. Yirrkala is the space occupied by the native people and that has been taken away from them. So othering and take over operate here. Same with the Parliament. It is a space usually occupied by the privileged. Hence naturally, the underprivileged may not be given justice. So, the pertinent question arises on the possession of the space. Their representation was rejected. This is one of the instances where the space of the marginalized got usurped by the authority.

...At Yirrakalas' plea denied.

So, I remember Lake George hills, (*Aboriginal Australia*)

Another important episode is the incidents at Western Australia, including warrara or warrva. The colonisers mercilessly invaded and killed the people when the community tried to defend their land. The aggressors unleashed dozens of raids and massacred many people, who belonged to the aboriginal communities. Thus the whole province becomes a space of aggression

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and bloodshed. Between 1830 and 1926, the ruling regimes attacked the people, which cannot be defended by the poor innocent landless people. For this brutal killings, the captains, who led the massacres, were honoured by the Governments. One of the instances of this colonial intrusion can be understood from the words of Irwin, the ruler of the time. The following extract clearly pinpoints the situations that led to one of the bloodiest massacres in Australia during colonial regime.

A detachment of soldiers led by Irwin attacked an Aboriginal encampment north of Fremantle in the belief that it contained men who had "broken into and plundered the house of a man called Paton" and killed some poultry. Paton had called together a number of settlers who, armed with muskets, set after the Aboriginal people and came upon them not far from the home. "The tall savage who appeared the Chief showed unequivocal gestures of defiance and contempt" and was accordingly shot. Irwin stated, "This daring and hostile conduct of the natives induced me to seize the opportunity to make them sensible to our superiority, by showing how severely we could retaliate their aggression." In actions that followed over the next few days, more Aboriginal people were killed and wounded (en.m.wikipedia.org)

I cry again for Warrarra men,
Gone from kith and kind,
And I wondered when I would find a pen
To probe your freckled mind. (*Aboriginal Australia*)

Next instance is the Murray tribe. Here not only the people but the whole tribe is exposed to the brutalities of the aggressors. The whole area becomes a space of unjustifiable atrocities. In these lines, the speaker mourns for the Murray tribe. They inhabited in the area very close to the river Murray. River Murray is the longest river in Australia and has five tributaries. In a military occupation the whole tribe was massacred, leaving no trace. Murray tribe, Murray river and all its tributaries become a space which experienced one of the ugliest forms of intrusion. Thus the space gets prominence in all discourses. Jack Davis foregrounds the place names and tribe names to give emphasize on the spatial significance of certain names.

I mourned again for the Murray tribe,
Gone too without a trace.
I thought of the soldier's diatribe,
The smile on the governor's face. (*Aboriginal Australia*)

The smile on the Governor's face is another significance instance of spatiality in the poem. His face becomes a space that reflects all the cruelties. When others suffer, the Governor is in a jovial mood. His sadistic smile is adding salt to the wounds of the suppressed. The poor innocent people expected justice from the Governor. They expected a solution for their problems. But he simply encouraged the massacre. The Governor thus becomes instrumental for the killings. The colonisers had resorted all possible methods of suppression. They used both sophisticated and un-

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sophisticated methods for exterminating their others. They used guns, pistols, ropes etc. in order to terrorise the unarmed. The poet uses the technique of personification while exposing the cruelties his people suffered.

You murdered me with rope, with gun
The massacre of my enclave,
You buried me deep on McLarty's run
Flung into a common grave. (*Aboriginal Australia*)

The last line of the poem clearly illustrates the vision and experience of Jack Davis. He says that the real Australian story is that of suppression and massacres, whatever may be the coloniser's version are. Thus, the poem *Aboriginal Australia* becomes an epitome of his poetic sensibility.

There are different thinkers who coined new terms and worked on the concept space. Foucault's position in this regard is praiseworthy. Spaces have more layers of meaning, according to him. He used the term heterotopia to describe the multidimensional aspects of space. The multi layered implication of space is clearly illustrated by him on many instances. The reading strategies developed by the thinkers of space studies help much to understand the undercurrents of postcolonial literatures.

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