



Exploitation Of The Australian Aboriginals And Women In *Windmill Baby*: A Study

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ABSTRACT

Under the authorities of the white people in colonized Australia, both the Aboriginals and the white have their own stories to tell. The Aboriginals as men and women commonly experience exploitation in the hands of the white and in specific cases; even the white women became the victims of exploitation on the cattle stations, run and managed by the white men. The Aboriginals are restricted from being idle. In case they don't work, they are not entertained to stay on the stations. They are not paid wages for their work. Due to the cruel treatment the people on the stations receive from their white bosses, there are many painful memories of their lives associated to the cattle stations. The cattle stations are like graveyards, filled with memories. Series of deaths are found to occur on the cattle stations for various seasons.

David Milroy's *Windmill Baby*, the winner of Patrick White Award (2003) serves as an album to the memories associated to an abandoned cattle station. Old Maymay, the narrator of the story accounts to her audience, the exploitation that the Australian Aboriginal men, women, and the missus – a white woman and the wife of the boss undergo on a cattle station. Pain, suffering, insult, love, loss, death, and cruelty are found to occur in the play due to the way the residents are treated. The present paper focuses on the exploitation that the people have undergone on an abandoned cattle station.

KEYWORDS: Australian Aboriginals, Cattle station, Exploitation, Half-blood, Windmill Baby, David Milroy, Death, Abandoned.

Exploitation is the most common experience of the Australian Aboriginals in the penal colony of Australia. All age groups of the Aboriginal communities in Australia suffer under the dominance of the White Australians. It is not exaggerating to state that starting from a just born baby to an Aboriginal just about to die taste the bitterness, consequent of the colonial rule over them. Women in particular bear more pain caused due to colonisation. Being woman, the female has to go through many stages in her life as a girl, teenager, woman, wife, and mother. These stages in a female's life are so delicate that they must be dealt with great care. If not careful in dealing with those stages and if they are aggravated through meddling, the damage caused goes out of control to such an extent that their consequences cannot be mitigated and treated. Considering the lives of women in Australia, one finds that not only the Aboriginal women but even the white women in certain cases are affected with respect to their womanhood and undergo hardships.

The present paper deals with the exploitation that the Australian Aboriginal men, women, teenagers along with a white woman undergo on a cattle station, in the hands of a white boss. Through David Milroy's *Windmill Baby*, one can find and understand the living conditions of the Australian Aboriginals and the subjugation of women on "An abandoned cattle station in the surreal Kimberley landscape of azure skies and red dirt" (back page, *Contemporary Indigenous Plays*).

If European settlement in Australia has radically transformed the lives of all Aboriginals, it is the women who have faced most severe changes. Aboriginal women have been ensnared in a double bind of European ideology: they are considered inferior because they are Aborigines and they are considered inferior because they are women.

The role of ideology in the subordination of women has been more than adequately covered elsewhere. However it is important to recognise that the notion of male superiority, and with it an acceptance by both men and women of the 'naturalness' of women's inferior position in society, was introduced with European settlement. Subject to a two pronged attack by the use of racist and sexist ideology, Aboriginal women have been systematically debased by European Australia." (Bradley, Carol. 144, 45)

Exploitation can be understood as the use of people, resources or things unjustly for one's benefit. When the exploiter tries to exploit, he or she is least bothered about the concerns of the exploited. The

exploited are treated insignificant. As the consequence of exploitation, the exploited meet with disastrous and pathetic future while some even meet with death.

Windmill Baby (2005) is a play by David Milroy (1957-) who belongs to the Yindjibarndi and Palku tribes of Pilbara. He had been the first artistic director of the Yirra Yakin Aboriginal Theatre for seven years from 1995 to 2003. He is both author and director. He is the winner of Myer Award (2002), Patrick White Award (2004), and Equity Guild Award (2005).

Windmill Baby is a mono drama presented on stage by an old woman named Maymay. The lady in her seventies uses flashback technique, plays different characters and uses different voices to represent each of them. She visits the abandoned cattle station after fifty years and narrates the story to her audience. The action is accompanied by a live guitarist on stage. The play *Windmill Baby* was first produced by 'Yirra Yaakin Theatre Company' in February 2005. Since then, it also had international tours.

David Milroy uses the play as an instrument to give a clear picture of exploitation and its effects on the lives of the Aboriginals including the half-blooded and white women who break the law and sleep with the Aboriginal men. In a cattle station where the story takes place, a new boss takes charge. He is a white man who is cruel in dealing with the people of the station. The boss and his wife stay on the station along with some Aboriginal men and women. The Aboriginal women are engaged in the homestead works while both men and women are involved in the stock related works.

“On the missions as well as on the pastoral stations, women gained positions, not only equal to, but often superior to men—in terms of political power – and they did so without their white masters realizing that this was happening. Women were taken into the station homesteads not only as mistress but also to manage the kitchen and care for the children. They learnt to speak English, to use Western goods and to understand the different value systems of their conquerors. Aboriginal men, on the other hand, rarely entered the homesteads but were relegated to the camps and sent away for long periods of time on bush or stock work.” (Gale, Fay. 386)

The plot of the play accounts pathetic conditions of the Australian Aboriginals living on a cattle station. As presented by David Milroy, the cattle stations appear to be the sources of painful experiences of the people living on them. The old boss gets transferred and a new boss takes up charge. He is inhuman in

treating the people of the cattle station. Young Maymay and her husband Malvern Starr along with Wunman – a crippled Aboriginal, Sally the homestead cook, Aunty Darballa a wise old woman, the boss, Mary – boss's wife referred to as the missus and others live on the station. The boss spares none of the residents from working in spite of their disabilities, ill health and other conditions. The crippled Wunman needs to take up gardening in order to cultivate vegetables and flowers, for the people of the station. Jim-Jim Malvern's assistant gets horned by a bull and he is to be replaced by Maymay. Though Maymay is pregnant with her first baby, the boss forces her to accompany Malvern in droving. This results in pre-matured delivery and death of the newly born baby. Mary and Wunman have to forego their half-blood child, 'Windmill Baby' as their sleeping together is unlawful and the love that is generally considered pure in other cases is now seen as unworthy and immoral because of the difference in their skin colors. The agony and pain of separation experienced by Wunman both from his loved one, the missus and the symbol of their love, the Windmill Baby highlights the exploitation, misery, the intensity of pain and psychological trauma people undergo under the white men's control. Maymay's family, Wunman and others are exploited because of their Aboriginality. This specifically underscores human exploitation leading to a number of deaths on the cattle station.

The play emphasizes on death faced by four Aboriginals – Twoman, Ruby, Wunman and the Windmill Baby. Twoman and Ruby die at the time of their birth. Twoman dies because he takes much time to come out of his mother's womb. His mother is probably weak enough to deliver the twin babies – Wunman and Twoman. Ruby dies due to her being born premature. Her mother, pregnant young Maymay is compelled by the boss to travel long distance on droving to replace Jim-Jim. Just like any other new parents, Malvern and Maymay have their own plans and joys to be fulfilled with respect to their expected child. As they would be the parents to their first born child, they are excited to select a name for their baby even before it is born. Malvern finalizes a beautiful name for the baby, in case it would be a girl. The baby gets the name, 'Ruby' while still in its mother's womb. But they could not enjoy the pride of being parents to their first born baby, Ruby as it dies at the time of its birth. The reason as evident from Malvern's words is the boss who sends Maymay on droving while she is pregnant. Though it is the time she actually needs sufficient rest, she has to go on droving along with her husband Malvern. Their outward journey lasted for

six weeks. Such a long journey as a drover is not safe for a pregnant woman and the baby in the womb. Maymay is not treated with care and it leads to the death of Ruby.

Wunman dies while in his twenties. His death is caused because of the severe agony he undergoes as a rejected person. He spends time in his garden, on the previous night of his death and pours out his heart to young Maymay and Malvern.

OLD MAY: That night I sat with Wunaman in his garden for one last time.

WUNMAN: You know, Maymay, the missus read to me about Eden. She tell me my garden is just like that one. Everything comes up green and it's a proper happy place. [*Pause*] And you know, there was two fellas who loved each other but things went wrong for them because they broke the law. Maybe one was black and maybe one was white. What colour love, Maymay? Maybe the color of rainwater or red like that pretty ring you lost. But I don't think it's just black and I don't think it's just white. [*Pause*] Malvern tell me I got to cross the river. I know that's what I gotta do. Before I go, I want you to promise me that one day you'll bring that Windmill Baby to me. Make sure you keep that promise, Maymay. Make sure you keep that promise. (*Contemporary Indigenous Plays*. 224)

Unlike any other father who enjoys the pride of a child's birth, Wunman could not enjoy those moments. He knows that he could not see his child, the Windmill Baby when it is born because he is supposed to leave off for the mission before its birth. Heavily burdened by the pain of separation, Wunman lands into a pitiable situation and undergoes intense psychological trauma. Being rejected, Wunman could not stay on the station and at the same time, he could not join the mission. Unaware of the life over the mission, Wunman fears the Catholics. He hears about them through the boss who quiet often threatens him saying that he will be sent to the Catholics on the mission. Though forced to leave the station, Wunman couldn't leave because the birth of the Windmill Baby is expected soon. As the one who fathered the half-blood child, Wunman perhaps desires to see it born and experience that joy of fatherhood. But his Aboriginality stands on the path, hindering his feeling of pride and enjoyment with his child. Unable to bear the rejection, pain and struggle that Wunman encounters he seems to undergo severe psychological stress that leads to his death.

The Windmill Baby meets with death two days after its birth. The Windmill Baby is rejected by the doctor because of its Aboriginality and thus is removed from its mother immediately after its birth. Following the doctor's instructions Maymay tries to take him to the mission. The mission is located on the other side of a flooding river. In the process of reaching the mission, Maymay and the Windmill Baby have to cross the river. After two days walk with the Windmill Baby on her shoulder, Maymay attempts to cross the flooding river. At that time, the Windmill Baby is carried away by the flood "in the swirling darkness" (226). In the light of *Windmill Baby* it looks like the occurrence of death is quiet common among the Australian Aboriginals, caused due to the exploitation that they undergo in the white dominated Australian society.

Malvern the drover is many times threatened of physical punishments by the boss. Malvern sometimes hides himself from the boss to escape punishment. The boss meant threat to the Aboriginals, living on the station. When the boss tries to control them, they sometimes wanted to fight against him. It could be understood as the tormenting oppression that the Australian Aboriginals are unable to bear and that they wanted to rebel. At times the boss even seems to ill-treat the missus, his wife. Though she is a white woman probably because she could not get the love a wife expects from her husband, she falls in love with the Aboriginal gardener, Wunman. Wunman who grows the vegetables and flowers doesn't like the homestead cook Sally because of her physical features. To avoid Sally, he directly takes them to the missus. Their regular interaction and conversations turn into love between them. Wunman would spend his time with the missus on the verandah where only the homestead Aboriginals girls are allowed. Their interaction turns into a relationship that leads to her pregnancy. Knowing this, the boss has a fight with his wife demanding her to give up the pregnancy. But she doesn't. He decides to send Wunman away to the mission. After her delivery, the missus has to forgo their baby and the Windmill Baby dies, carried away by the flooding river.

Sally, the homestead cook is dragged out of her camp and she is scolded badly. He wants to punish Sally for not winning the heart of Wunman. In-spite of her screaming and crying the boss crazy with anger would not leave Sally off and points a rifle against Malvern for his intervention and trying to stop the boss from punishing Sally. Wunman has to hit the boss from behind, in his head, chucking a piece of wood in order to save Malvern.

Wunman and Malvern who work on the station are not found to have any earnings. There are no traces of their being paid any wages for the works they do. Though Malvern is said to be the head stock man, “he didn’t really know what money was” (contemporary Indigenous plays, 215). This shows that though the Australian Aboriginals hold very responsible and important positions on the cattle stations, they don’t have financial freedom and are not paid wages for their works. Even when Malvern buys Ruby the ring, it is purchased by selling off a couple of killers. Wunman and young Maymay could not oversee the orders of the boss because they lacked liberty to disobey him. For the Aboriginals, it is inevitable to follow boss’s commands. That is why Wunman takes up gardening and young Maymay accompanies Malvern in droving in spite of her pregnancy. Throughout the play, there is some or the other kind of exploitation that the Australian Aboriginals undergo in the hands of their white boss and their interaction is mostly filled with tension.

Thus, *Windmill Baby* highlights the exploitation that the Australian Aboriginal men and women undergo on a cattle station, run by a white boss. Missus’s case is another example, helpful to trace out the white women’s conditions on such cattle stations when they love and sleep with the Aboriginal men. The experiences and pains that the characters of the play undergo are evidences to the subjugation and exploitation of the Australian Aboriginal people by their white authorities

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