

RECONSTRUCTING HISTORICAL PAST IN MUDROOROO'S *MASTER OF THE GHOST DREAMING*

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Mudrooroo's novel *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* (1991) rewrites the Australian Aboriginal historical past with contemporary issues of Identity and Belongingness. *Master of the Ghost Dreaming* is Mudrooroo's Fifth novel in series. The novel itself is an evidence to understand author's commitment and quest for liberation. Mudrooroo doesn't consider the course of action to protect his people which is an easy task on Australian colonial land: "a minority finds it difficult to escape the influences of the encircling majority... the Aborigines in Australia are under an intense and constant cultural barrage which may in future utterly destroy their culture except for some fossilized traditional remnants"(29). Margery Fee says presumably these "Traditional remnants will survive because they are precisely the markers of the exotic authenticity so admired by a touristic consumer culture" (*The signifying writer and the Ghost Reader*, 20). On the other hand Mudrooroo Narogin's narration in *Writing from the Fringe* as "Aboriginality is not a static ideology based on fixed traditional ways of expression and culture, but is... a way of building a contemporary Aboriginal culture, a radical re-education of Aborigines by Aborigines at the direction of Aborigines"(45). Kevin Gilbert says, "White people's devaluation of Aboriginal life, religion, culture and personality caused the thinking about self and race that I believe is the key to modern Aboriginal thinking" (*In Living Black*, 1978 , 2). Similarly Adam Shoemaker in *Black Words White Page (1929-1988)* says that "a fundamental relationship exists between the sociopolitical milieu and Aboriginal creative writing in English. He reasserts his view by further saying that black creative writing cannot be studied in isolation and that it must be examined and evaluated in terms of the social environment which surrounds it and the historical events which precede it" (Shoemaker, 6). Both Gilbert and Shoemaker construct a context to meet, understand and interpret Aboriginal literature. These statements implicitly suggest the rise of Aboriginal literature from Aboriginal suffering and Aboriginal activism. Aboriginal literature springs from such depths of experience that without an introduction to history and culture it becomes impossible to interpret.

The plot summary of the novel moves around four aspects: Culture, Oral history, Identity, and Belongingness. Each of the aspects is well narrated through five characters: Jangamuttuk, Ludjee, Fada, Mada, and Wadawaka. The novel explores Australia's European past and its political sketch; which helped them to control aborigines and the primitive culture. The novel stands as an apt example to reveal the incomprehensibility of Australian Society with its past characteristics of darkness and death. The novel explicates that Aborigines have seen happy days as well as the worse days. They do not have everything that they want, but they want to have all they need. Mudrooroo made it clear that they woke up with some throbbing and pains. Their lives are not reassured during colonial period and in the post colonial period; still they believe that they are blessed because "the land provided everything that was needed to survive" (*James Miller, Koori: A Will to Win, 10*). Such landscape has become unfriendly land, on which humans, animals, trees, and insects wither and suffer with European settlers. Mudrooroo created a central character Jangamuttuk; who made an attempt to protect his people from the despondent position to restore their hope of life from the white's government in the novel.

Mudrooroo's '*Master of the Ghost Dreaming*' is an appropriate example for the 'magical realism'. Brenda Cooper states that 'magical realism' is a label that certain anti-colonial writers spurn, as the term carries with it "overtones of exotic otherness" which attracts and fascinates white readers "greedy for escapism"- particularly in Europe and North America (Cooper, 15 and 31). Maureen Clark describes "*Master of the Ghost Dreaming* is an Australian incarnation of the 'magic realist' style of writing. The novel moves beyond Doctor Wooreddy's counter realism and imaginatively engages the multi-dimensional language of dreams –shape-shifting, timelessness, the mysterious, the supernatural- to disrupt the totalizing effects of dominant historiography. The book also reflects Johnson's penchant for the blurring, or distortion, of genres by embracing the Gothic mode to signify his characters' sense of disembodiment and deep despair." (*Mudrooroo: a likely story, identity and belonging in postcolonial Australia, 2004*).

The opening lines of the novel connote the psychological, physical, and metaphysical status of Aborigines on Australian landscape with its feature. James Miller states that "the invasion and settlement of Wonnarua tribal land by the white man was disastrous, and almost immediately the family groups of the Wonnarua began diminishing in numbers" (*James Miller. Koori: A will to win, 48*). In order to create survival environment on colonial landscape, Shaman has made his people vigilant with alien cultural forms which suits to his own cultural

matrix, and especially the pioneer troupe is ready to perform the ritual ceremony under his choreography. Shaman has been working so diligently over the year to do for the first born people and their career. It created a great hope in Aborigines to believe that their spiritual journey, their complete physical and mental attention and determination would bring them “back safely into their own culture and society” (4).

The act of performing ceremony with ritually is a dream of Jangamuttuk, by which all his aboriginal people come into contact with the one realm and to capture the essence of health and well being as they were in their past-glorious culture. He has no intension to cultivate European culture among aboriginals, but he used it as means to develop strong communication among his people through ceremony and get them “back safely into their own culture and society” (4). They have never aspired for the benefits of the mission but they do perform the traditional ceremony, which they have taken as a serious business. The souls are filled with esteemed goal to make a dreary island into joyful island with past glory. Mudrooroo portrayed the protagonist’s role as a capable to incorporate the traditional aboriginal ceremony with contemporary changes. If it is observed closely, the spiritual journey in the past and at present shows the newness and contradiction. Including Jangamuttuk, male and female aboriginal bodies are painted with various symbols like circular and spiral designs. Fee Rightly stated that” Mudrooroo is not so much importing alien ideas as adding to traditional ways of understanding the world as a world of representations rather than as a world of rationally- comprehensible objective facts” (*The signifying writer and Ghost Reader- 3-4*). It would be quite startling to European eyes, if they were there. Fada is under the impression that aborigines have inspired with mission conciliation. “Fada’s scissors arranged their locks into the shape of flat European hats ... to be the high helmet of a European soldier” (3) at the same time he re-observed conflict in his mind. He has moved softly towards the flickering fire and the clap sticks sound in forest. He peeps through the giant boles of the forest. The traditional ceremony scene pushed him into the darkness of the illumination “which reminded him of the mass of the popish Church of Rome” (12). Shaman has identified with his special ghost knowledge that Fada is observing ceremony. Jangamuttuk has transformed into sacred Goanna “His power flowed as he looked up at the stone axe-head of Goanna bending to accept him” (13).

Jangamuttuk has completed traditional ceremony and coming out of his trace. Fada with angry eyes “Jangamuttuk, you old villain, you will put an end to this immediately” (17). He is speaking strictly to this contests the transformation in the shape of spider and as a master, he

has been creating passage way to evoke indigenous believes to reach the sacred cave and to strengthen the central ritual practice. It is amusing to see the spirit of the natives stepping into the light of the common vision to have their sacred old days. Fada has become infuriated, when the rest of the people show the sign to practice native ceremony and to have the immunity of the painted symbols on their bodies, because at least through which they could realize and sense the importance of unity to get their specific identity in the world as well as on their own land. Here, the author employs the dream symbol of the spider to enhance believes of aboriginals, Jangamuttuk has strong commitment to protect his community and culture from colonizers and to show fascinated bloated horror of the strong ambition of colonizer to transform aboriginal gentle Green earth into complete mission compound. This context shows that his commitment to make their people to know importance and glory of their ancient culture irrespective of age group. The psychological condition of the protagonist is the best example to understand the sadness and the urgency of transforming island from fascinated slaving jaws into a healthy island.

“He took on the shape of a spider and darted along a safe strand towards his goal. A slab of wood attempted to bar his way, but he passes through and found himself caught fascinated by the bloated horror that hung in the centre of the web. It had not been his web, but her web.”
(14)

Fada is the second protagonist in the novel. He is appointed as superintendent of the govt. mission to turn aborigines as strong followers of European culture. His attitude is to fulfill his ambition and to become a member of August body. But Fada personally witnessed that Jangamuttuk has “the power to send the apparition back when it had come” (17). The Scene pushed him to think again and is planning to take necessary effort to stop native ceremonies. Fada has understood very well that he is with worse luck. The atmosphere in the colony has turned against him. Fada hides original ambitious nature to get back his aboriginal companions so that he gets positive complements from the Augustus body.

With this foresight, Jangamuttuk prepares two novices as emblem of traditionalism by impeccable teaching about laws and dreaming strength and their connection with ancestors. Native traditional laws are certain example for traditionalism. The laws of men and women are different. Turtle dreaming is men law, through which men used to across the water. Frog ancestor law, water bird, etc... are female dreaming energies. Ludjee is a certain example for traditional woman law put into practice and her emotional dive into the sea like a water bird to “Their search for the roots, and then give their sense of satisfaction on finding rich food

(John McLaren , *Australian literature, prologue- xi*) to feed the committed traditional savants. This context is also the best indication to understand the deep relationship between aboriginal and the power of dream time. “It not our law can’t break that law” (58).

Jangamuttuk has taken all Ludjee’s movements in the novel which are great live examplesto impart the knowledge of laws and its quintessence to the novices.

The portrayal of Ludjee character is on par with central character. She never compromises herself to make alien people to understand the traditional ceremonies and rituals with same perspective, even though they belong to “different skin and different way” (19). The terrible period in which Aboriginal’s woman lived and suffered has depicted symbolically as “the girl Ludjee had been taken in by ghosts and used and abused as everything was used and abused” (26). Speaking metaphorically, the damage of aboriginal woman’s bodies shows the cross-culture impact and damaging status by the colonized nation.

Mudrooroo created Jangamuttuk character such a way as aborigines acknowledged him as a crafty, a healer, and a savior from the land of ghosts. He is the man who uses all his powers to succeed “the collective feelings of his people” (2). The protagonist is a perfectly fit for a definition of the trickster figure suggested by Henry Louis Gates Jr. as one whose “Priority over destiny is inscribed in his role as the guiding force of interpretation itself (Gates 1989, 23). Aborigines strongly believes in him that “he would enable them to evade the demons of sickness, which were weakening and destroying them and then when they were strong... but first the ceremony, but first the ceremony” (4).

In *Master of Ghost Dreaming* Mudrooroo introduces the black African character ‘Wadawaka. He is searching for carefree land like his mother womb, which is a safest heaven, where no wretchedness savage, slavery, ill-treatment and endeavor for survival. He feels “Safe at home in the womb ... walls pressing, pushing, pushing into the world” (88). In each scene, Wadawaka appears differently. He also roses his voice to oppose by stating that “after three hundred years of plundering and enslaving us” (81); as a reply to Fada statement “missionaries were working to bring the light to darkest Africa”. (81). Wadawaka’s initiation in the ceremony he got a chance to have “his totemic- animal”- Leopard (89). He feels that living with shaman’s mob is like an “infants sheltering in the womb” (88) and his joy is “sprang through the air, sailing high and fast and free” (90).

As discussed in chapter five of the novel, Adam shoemaker expresses “Sunny introduction into the story is one example of the novels divergence from the model established by Mudrooroo (*Mudrooroo: a critical study*, 71). Sunny’s die-hard spirit day and night and responsible

approach, attitude to get glorious days to the lives on island. Sunny appears to the natives like luminous. Fada commends his son for maintaining the necessary skills to accept the distance between him and natives. He also shares his personal experience on several occasions. He suggests him, discreet observation is necessary to know the working minds of the natives.

Every human being has thrust on Identity. In some one cases it becomes eventual object in their life. If it is observed scrupulously, all troubled character are living in chaos. They have “the mire of a past life” (108). The identity, belongingness, peace, love and joy are dislocated both physically and mentally in their life. To the natives of Australian landscape shape-shifting and connecting with ancestors through primeval law and escaping “away from the cursed land of the island” (59) are part of dreaming world of aboriginality. Surprisingly Mada, who has identity and place of belonging, has taken part in the dreaming world of aboriginality throughout the novel. She expresses “an uncaring land covered with the sacredness of the night” (6). The psychic position of Mada admits to understand the context in multi-dimensional way. The pathetic conditions of aboriginal landscape has exposed through the conditions how slowly eats away “Her memories of London” (6). She has been experienced the harsh realities like ‘the exile life’, which she never had in her life at her hometown. The context reveals that the time has arrived to dim her memories and the experiences. She says “a fairy land free from suffering” (6). She explored both shades of positive and negative. The dream shapes looked from attitude point of view the white bird shows her passive nature, where as the hornet symbolizes her aggressive nature. It is a symbolic struggle between contrast nature wit in her as well as it shows juxtaposed nature on Australian landscape. Brenda Cooper writes “to be a poor white in the colonial context is to carry a particular burden of suffering and concealment humiliation and secrecy” (Cooper 1998-7) and he also observes “nothing sums up the ambiguity of politics better than the ambivalent attitude towards women” (218). Adam shoemaker writes “the contest for the spiritual health of the tribe takes place inside the dreaming of a white woman, Mada and her cure from disease is the key to the liberation of the aborigines” (69, 1993).

The so-called civilized mission compound administrators kidnapped the two novices “there began a ritual tug of war” (120); whom Jangamuttuk trained as emblem of living Aboriginal religious ritual faith. The scene was ended with two shamans Jangamuttuk and Wadawaka, both was taken initiation to naming to those two novices. Wadawaka named, one of the novices as “George” “because he looks a bit like that old crazy king” (125). Later Jangamuttuk has observed the other boy carefully and named as Augustus. Both names are new and whites

names. The peculiar context helps to understand the writer interest on those characters. The environment in and around 'Fada' has compelled him to prepare to leave with mere satisfaction. He feels happy for natives mimicking their voices and thought "his mark on the island" (125) which will remain as unsigned history.

At the end of the novel Jangamuttuk has formed "The three shaman" group along with Ludjee and Wadawaka. The shaman group has decided "to come together to restore the health of" (87). The worst agonies of aborigines have shown symbolically through Mada's death bed scene. Her "hunger of the heart" (113) is vivid symbolism for displacing aboriginal heritage as well as worst agonies. As Cooper writes "to be a poor white in the colonial context is to carry a particular burden of suffering and concealment humiliation and secrecy" (Cooper 1998-7). The present context shows that any living creature has to suffer victim to the circumstances irrespective of colour [white or black] gender, social status in this savage land.

There are two contrasting places to discuss at the end of the novel. Both stands for its own importance, those two places do have normal significance earlier. One is a hill sight. It is Jangamuttuk ritual campsite, and living with his two novices to practice traditional ceremonies with complete freedom. According to aboriginal believes, pinnacle of the mountain is a place to interact with spirits of their ancestors. The reason behind is their habit of claiming the mountain when they are sorrowful. The act of occupying the summit of the mountain by whites symbolizes as aborigines are accepting the colonial power. In order to maintain the tradition as well as to demolish Fada's perennial dream is to see British flag flying on peak of the hill. Jangamuttuk is living with his spear novices on top of the hill.

The other significant place is Mada's room. It represents the place of despair and impression. The way she is lying on bed signifies the condition of landscape "Writhed in an attempt to rise"(113). If we examine the physical description of Mada, the white female, lying on bed in her room is an attempt to connote the feelings and long term suffering of aborigines. The physical narration about Mada in the text (112-113) can be considered as geographical conditions of the Australian landscape. "a hunger of the heart rather than of the stomach"(113) is an expression of aborigines. Mada's both physical & psychological conditions and the room where she has lived signifies as Australian landscape "that had caught some contagion and become imprisoned" (112).

The use of symbols, metaphysical, ironical, stereotypical expression in the novel is very vivid and shows the aborigines struggle for their existence. Author made an attempt to focus light on battered cultural heritage of landscape. The use of symbols shows suffering and agony of

insecurity on island. Each object in the novel is a pathetic situational presenter of land. Shellfish almost disappeared from the aboriginal diet, wild animals like Kangaroo's scraped clean on the land. Each other's pocket relation of custom is in words of James Miller "Both man animal descended from the spirits and moved over the earth. They were related to each other through interactions that had taken place in the dreaming. They were much to be learned. Laws that were made in the dreaming were passed on to man by the spirits. Man was thus made aware of these laws and passed them on to succeeding generations. Answers to the great questions of life were there to be learned" (James Miller Koori: A will to win- 1). The above scene shows that Aborigines are in reminiscing of those days and have felt that if the Colonial administration continues there would be nothing to eat in forthcoming days. The modern culture and civilization affected the aborigines physically as well as psychologically. The variety of costumes made them to feel penetrating and struggling and also scared off alien culture as it may take away traditional primeval beauty. Aborigines have a sense of foreboding and understanding the play of European political conspiracy through which they wanted to promote the superior culture and civilization and decrease priority for their own culture "without land, without hope" (77). Mudrooroo writes "The stale ghost food and clothing had altered their metabolism had made them sick and smelling of corpses" (53).

If it is observed closely, the shaman has not designed to lead an easy life. He has more than an ordinary Aborigines share of trials and tribulations and they have at once toughened and re-found him into a remarkable man. His original insight and varied experiences enabled him to propound philosopher. He has done everything for human equality on landscape. He believes that there can be no equality as long as colour barrier is not done away. So he has gone out of the missionary compound and selected hill side as his campsite. The movement Jangamuttuk started being there the 'hill' got specific holistic significance. Moreover this place gave him spiritual strength to perform rituals and not only to practice, but also has taken initiation to train the novices as a cultural bridge to connect with next generation as well as to pass the wonderful cultural glory to next generation. The hill campsite has got more importance than the mission compound and appears like perfect place for Worship. Sometimes church services scheduled in mission compound was disturbed. Fada "hoped that Mada & Sonny were patiently" (116) would continue the church service.

All his dreams have come true with new in charge invitation to the mission compound "Your place is in the mission compound with the rest of your people" (136). So Sonny "Eventually he gave up, and leaving the old man to organize things". (137) Jangamuttuk with his efforts the

purpose “call to be healed” has done successfully. Their attachment with land, ritual, culture and traditions can be performed with complete freedom.

At last, there is a final job to be done to reach “their heightened vision” (146) i.e. renovation of island as well as protecting the aboriginal sacred sites. The heavy boulder and Jangamuttuk campsite stand as symbol of aboriginal sacred sites and were “circled it once” (145) by Jangamuttuk, Ludjee, Wadawaka, and Mada. [she rejoined in the form of her dreaming giant white Bird]. Simultaneously, they have destroyed all the constructions of “church” and other monuments stood as a symbol of colonizers land mark on island. The “Island had reclaimed the structure” (146) “with their heightened vision” (146).

Mudrooroo’s use of language signifies that his involvement to explore aboriginal Australians historical attempts to stand by with their own culture. The use of symbols signifies variety of meanings. Jangamuttuk campsite – is a symbol of aboriginal ritual practice compound, huge boulder to protect sacred site, Mada’s sickness exhibits the island demolition and the church stands for conversion & failure. Through extensive religious symbolism, the novel is constructed where reader could understand the author’s passion and insight.

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