
UNIT 2 AUSTRALIA – LAND AND HISTORY

Structure

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit discusses certain aspects of the issue of land and history in Australia. It is hoped it will help to answer questions such as: When does one begin to take into account the history of 'Australia'? How did the nature of the land shape the course of Australian history after colonial settlement? How have questions about Aboriginal claims to the land changed the way the land and its history are thought about? What do early white settler images of the land reveal?

2.1 A QUESTION OF BEGINNINGS

When one starts to tell the story of a nation where does one begin? According to some theories in geology, Australia was part of a large land mass called Gondwanaland, a million years ago. Besides Australia, this land mass joined together what are today the continents of America, Asia and Africa. Therefore, in a way, India and Australia were 'connected' even in those days. With time the land mass moved apart and Australia became an island continent.

The first aboriginal settlers were supposed to have reached the land around 50,000 years ago. William Jansz, a Dutchman who sailed along the West Coast of Cape York Peninsula is considered to be the first European to reach the island continent in the antipodes. The first British sailors to the continent were shipwrecked there in 1622. In 1688 and 1691, the Dutchman William Dampier explored the continent and sent back bad reports of the miserable aboriginal people and the hostile land.

Captain James Cook landed at Botany Bay, which is near present-day Sydney on April 29, 1770. His reports of the land were better. He claimed the land for the British monarch King George III and called it New South Wales. Over ten years later, it was decided to make New South Wales a penal colony to keep British prisoners in. On January 26, 1788 the first fleet of ships carrying convicts from Britain landed at Sydney Cove. Other colonies of the British Empire on the Australian continent came up in the nineteenth century – Tasmania (1825), Western Australia (1829), South Australia (1836), Victoria (1851) and Queensland (1859). Each of these six colonies were separate and given powers of partial self-rule by the British Empire until 1901 when they decided to come together and form a federation which came to be what we now know of as the country of Australia.

The Bicentenary 'celebrations' of 1988 raised in a significant way questions about how the beginnings of 'Australia' as a nation have been portrayed in history, literature and popular culture. The celebration of January 26 as Australia Day or Foundation Day (which we in India celebrate as Republic Day) and of 1988 as the Bicentenary of the arrival of the first settlers have evoked reactions that have revealed the problems about assuming that there can be one simple national identity for

Australia. On the one hand, the Bicentenary was a commemoration, for the white settlers of British origin, of Governor Arthur Phillip's landing on Australian shores with the first fleet of convicts and the beginning of British colonial settlement nearly two hundred years ago. On the other hand, to the Aborigines it "commemorated a white invasion of Aboriginal lands and the destruction of so many Aboriginal people and their traditional way of life" (Lohrey, 150). As far as the Aborigines are concerned, the day historically holds next to no positive meaning for them. There is nothing worth celebrating in an event that was to eventually lead to the destruction of their cultures, civilization and relationship with the land. What is 'Australia Day' to the former group of British origin, is to the latter group of Aborigines 'Invasion Day'. To the former, it is marked by the need to create the myths of national foundation and beginnings that justify their presence on the island-continent. To the latter, it underscores the beginning of a history of loss and the need to question those myths of the Australian nation.

The choice of the arrival of Governor Phillip in 1788 over the constitution of the federal Australian nation state in 1901 is significant. In some ways, the discussion over identifying the actual beginning of Australia is very similar to the debate in India as to whether our nation is over 5,000 years (if we go back to the Indus valley civilization) or just over 50 years (if we take 1947 as the starting point). The choice reveals the nature of the foundational moment that was sought to be presented. Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra comment:

The Bicentenary took as its starting date the first invasion by the British in 1788, not the founding of the state of Australia itself, which happened in 1901, only 87 years before the 'Bicentenary'. There is here a characteristic Australian move in regard to history. On the one hand time is stretched out, to give a longer history to the nation than it has. But then that double century was drastically shortened and emptied out in the celebration, reduced to two moments juxtaposed: the pioneering moment, in which heroic blue-coats gazed at the empty land, and the contemporary moment, filled with cheering spectators. (ix)

Hodge and Mishra point out two areas worth noting about this choice in telling the story of the Australian nation and the making of the Australian national identity. The first is that in this choice, '[t]he decisive event was the act of invasion, not the gesture of independence' (x). This choice is one aspect that shows that Australia's 'postcolonial' status is different, especially in relation to countries that 'fought' for their independence. The British monarch still remains the titular head of the Australian state. The referendum held in the second half of the year 2000 on whether Australia should become a Republic or stay under the British Queen, decided in favour of monarchy.

More important about the way the history of Australia has been told for a long time is the way in which beginning this story with the arrival of the British, ignores the histories of the Aboriginal peoples that lived on the continent before 1788. Ignoring those histories erases the nature of the colonization of the Australian land. Traditional white histories present the arrival of the British as a peaceful and benevolent settlement. This justification of colonization by arguing that it was part of the 'white man's burden' to bring civilization and culture to the rest of the world is being questioned and revised. New histories attempt to show how colonization was racist in its thinking and led to the invasion of Aboriginal lands and the systematic destruction of Aboriginal cultures. Both of these became areas of contestation during the Bicentenary celebrations and continue to be so.

When Arthur Phillip claimed the territory of Australia as a British possession, he did so on the principle of *terra nullius* – 'empty land'. The land was declared uninhabited

and annexed to the British Empire. This allowed what was an act of violent conquest to be presented as an act of peaceful settlement. It also removed any obligation on the part of the British settlers to negotiate a treaty with the existing Aboriginal population. It is estimated that at that time, the Aborigines had been in occupation of the land for at least 40,000 years. With the arrival of the British, a period of dispossession, disease, and the destruction of indigenous cultures began for the Aborigines.

With the invasion and later colonization of Australia, land came to be under the control of the British Crown, with the colonial governor as the administrator. He controlled settlement, land purchases and leases. Ex-convicts and free settlers were leased land for development. The actual owners of the land – the Aborigines – were completely ignored in this process. The material and deep spiritual significance of the land within Aboriginal traditions was not understood or taken into account by the discourses of Australian nationhood – legal, historical or cultural.

Part of the social and cultural justification of this can be traced to racist ideas in anthropology that presented the Aborigines as inferior to the British colonizers. It was therefore argued that there was no need to treat the Aborigines as the equals of the colonizers. Even in official documents, the Aborigines were regarded as either non-existent or half human. In some cases they were regarded almost like dogs, with all the negative connotations that such a connection can carry (Ward and Robertson, 334). Ross Fitzgerald quotes one such passage that shows how in some cases the Aborigines were portrayed in this way.

Like his own half-wild dogs, the black could be frozen into shivering immobility or put to frenzied flight by people or things that provoked impressions of terror, or moved to yelps of delight or to racing round, or striking grotesque poses, or to expressing frantic excitement by any sort of clowning when what might have been menace proved, instead amusing or brilliantly productive. In his bushland home he lived in such insecurity that his immediate response to any situation of surprise was almost a conditional reflex – instantaneous: to strike, to leap aside, to fall and roll. Like his dogs, too, he would be cowed by direct and confident stare into a wary armed truce, but would probably attack with fury if an opponent showed signs of fear, or ran away, or fell disabled....(72-73)

The British colonizers who considered themselves torchbearers of culture and civilizational values used their perception of the Aborigines to justify their inhuman treatment of them. The report of the National Inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, which came out in 1980, exposed Australia's shameful history of racial control and cultural genocide or destruction. It dealt with the testimonies and records of the Stolen Generation of Aboriginal children who were separated from their families and brought up in white orphanages or foster homes in an effort to assimilate them so that they become part of mainstream white Australian values and culture. The stories of this generation, which are part of a biography revolution in Aboriginal writing, have revealed how hidden histories can question the motives behind and the ways in which national identities have been imagined and sold to the public. The history of massacres during frontier conflicts between the Aborigines and the white settlers is bad. So is the even more terrible history of the cultural genocide committed at the level of government policy. All of these things place a question mark on the nature of the culture and civilizational values that the settlers were so proud of.

It is thus not surprising that until recently any writing that dealt with Australia documented primarily the history of the white people in Australia. Such histories recorded the experiences of the settlers from their point of view and gave the wrong

impression that before the coming of the Europeans, there was nobody living in Australia, hence the idea of the land as till then unknown and empty - *Terra Australis Incognita* (unknown) and *Terra Nullius* (empty).

2.2 SHAPING THE COURSE OF HISTORY

From the very outset, the land played a very decisive factor in shaping the history and literature of what came to be known as Australia. Dutch sailors reached Australian coasts as early as 1623, and the British explorer William Dampier reached the west coast of Australia in 1688. However it was in 1770 that Captain Cook reached the east coast of the continent and claimed possession of Botany Bay on the eastern coast for King George III. Trade and commerce were the original purpose behind Britain's desire to establish a colony in the Antipodes – which means on the other side of the world in relation to Britain. However, according to Ian Turner, Lieutenant James Cook reported of New Holland, as the land was then called: 'the Country itself so far as we know doth not produce any one thing that can become an article in trade to invite Europeans to fix a settlement upon it' (14).

The focus of the colonial plan thus shifted away from trade to other uses of the land. The overcrowding of British prisons and the loss of the newly independent American colonies made it necessary that a new place be found for deporting British prisoners. The unproductive yet vast nature of the land in Australia made it seem perfect for this purpose. As a result, the culture and ways of the Penal System became a part of the early history of New South Wales and Van Damien's Land (now known as Tasmania) from 1788 when Captain Arthur Phillip landed at Sydney Cove and became the first Governor of the colony of New South Wales.

The transportation of convicts continued for a little over half a century, during which Ian Turner documents that "150,000 men and women came to Australia in chains"(14). As a result of the policy of transportation, most of the people that came to live in these colonies in the early days from Britain were a mixed crowd coming mostly from the lower classes of the British society of those days.

They were mainly illiterate peasants, workers, vagabonds, professional criminals, transported for thefts or crimes of violence against the person; but among them were a few (English, Scots, Irish, Canadian) transported for such 'gentleman's crimes' as forgery, embezzlement, or abduction (Turner, 14).

Besides the jailed, the rest of the population consisted of the civil and military officials who took care of the administration of the penal colony. The wealthy aristocracy who in Britain were the producers, consumers and patrons of literature did not find much representation in the social framework of that period. Furthermore, in those early years the concern and effort of the few in the colony who had, to whatever extent, enjoyed the cultural benefits of education and higher social status, was directed first towards survival and then to making a fortune.

It was inevitable then that most of the written output of the upper classes during this period was restricted to journals, letters or other pieces that held descriptions of the strange sights and experiences encountered by these new residents of the island continent. Turner comments on the way the land and historical situation shaped the literature of this period:

Those who, in those first years, wrote of the antipodes were concerned mainly with the prestige or profit to be won from satisfying that intense interest in the novel and the picturesque, the history of the earth and the origins of man, which was a major product of the Enlightenment. And there

was much in the new world that was novel and curious – the landscape, flora fauna, the Aborigines; but those who set out to depict these strange phenomena saw the land through English eyes. They looked at it as visitors, excited by the unfamiliarity of what they saw...; but they did not look yet as exiles, overwhelmed by the unfamiliarity and possessed by the intractability of the land – that was to come. (15)

Changes became visible in white Australian society as free settlers began to replace members of the Penal System as the ones who set the socio-cultural pace of this Antipodean British colony in the first two decades of the nineteenth century. Realizing the potential of the land to sustain sheep rearing, large holdings of land were devoted to the pastoral enterprise directed at an export market that satisfied the demands of the British textile industry. This trend initiated by the officers in the New South Wales Corps soon started a series of explorations that led to the founding of other settlements at places like Melbourne, Adelaide and Swan River. Until the economic depression of the 1840s the growing pastoral industry resulted in the establishment of towns. The gold rush of the 1850s too caused more clear changes in the population patterns as waves of immigration washed the shores of Australia in search of the precious yellow metal.

The gold rush began in 1851 when a discovery near Bathurst was made public. Soon gold was found in large deposits in Victoria at Clunes, Ballarat and Bendigo. Later discoveries in Queensland led to immigrants and people moving there as well. The news of these discoveries caused the workers within Australian colonies and immigrants from outside the island continent to come pouring in. Turner says, "Within the two gold decades, the population of the Australian colonies grew fourfold"(23). Till that time close to fifty percent of the population was of convict origin or descent. In the final analysis, the gold rush phenomena gave Australian colonies, capital and labour from overseas. This newfound prosperity, according to Turner, gave "a sense of permanence to the occupation of the land; the startlingly rapid, yet solid, growth of the colonial capitals provided a new pivot for colonial society"(25).

This consolidation of the colonies had two faces. On the one hand, the pastoralists assumed the leisured lifestyle of the powerful landed rural rich. Turner comments on them, "Socially, they were the most conservative stratum of colonial society; they aspired to a prestigious education and culture, but not to the searching of science or the storm of creative art"(25). The only things that roused them were threats to their property interests from land reformers in parliament. On the other hand, in the cities, intellectual and professional pursuits began to flourish. Libraries, universities, museums and galleries found their place in the city landscape and brought with them a heightened refinement of tastes and culture. However, Ian Turner notes that in the more practical atmosphere of the colonial middle-class society, subjects like law, medicine and the natural sciences had more takers than the liberal arts, classics and mathematics (26).

Growing literacy across the board also produced a growing demand for popular literature. However, the small size of local audiences forced the early Australian writers to publish only in magazines and newspapers in Australia; they had to look to publishing houses in London for publication in book form. According to Ian Turner, this was not a big issue with these writers as most of them were British-born and sought to write for the larger audience in Britain that enjoyed the exotic flavor of their works. Among this early group of writers who wrote about Australian life and landscape, **Catherine Spence** occasionally made the cities her theme, **Marcus Clarke** wrote about the Penal system, while **Boldrewood** made the Bush the setting of his work. Imitation of the English literary tradition and a desire to become a part of it marked their writing. As a result their influence on urban Australian culture was

very little, the newly literate people of the bush however responded very well to whatever was particularly Australian in this writing.

By the 1890s the concept of Australian nationhood began to become more concrete as the ideals of socialism, unionism and nationalism began to spread. The possibility of the six colonies being perceived as one nation began to emerge. In 1898 the Australian constitution was approved by referendum. Isolation and distance began to cut the umbilical cord from the Old World. By the 1900s, when most of the people of the continent's six colonies were native-born in Australia, the movement for federation caught on and gave a new angle to nationalism. In 1900 the British Parliament passed an Act to constitute the Commonwealth of Australia and all the states joined the Federation. 1901 witnessed the proclamation of the Federal Constitution as well as the first national election, leading to the opening of the first Federal Parliament on May 9. This was also the year the 'White Australia' Policy was enacted as a legislation that would prohibit permanent settlement by non-Europeans. Ian Turner quotes **Henry Lawson** in 'Jack Cornstalk' (1901):

And I said to him, 'Jack!' as he gripped my hand fast,
'Oh, I hear that our country's a nation at last!' (36)

By the 1900s the publication scene in Australia too had changed. Many of the writers of this period were born on Australian soil. Their ties with the metropolitan centre were not that strong, nor was their orientation to cater to the tastes of the British reading public. Besides *The Bulletin*, *The Worker* and other papers that published their work, the publishing house of Angus and Robertson started publishing the books of Australian writers regularly from 1895, starting with **Banjo Patterson's** *The Man from Snowy River*.

The spread of railways, a State education network, faster communication networks and mechanization of farming ended the isolation of the bush communities and narrowed the cultural gulf between the urban and rural areas. "There were still (as indeed there remain today) many differences of response and taste; but the bush community, aided by universal literacy, was passing from active creation of a hand-tailored culture to passive reception of the ready-to-wear urban commodity" (Turner 38). Soon many writers began to reflect these trends by churning out more predictable narratives of adventure, humour or romance to supply the new breed of Australian paperback publishers such as the New South Wales Bookstall Company. Though the assertion of the nation and faith in social reform still surfaces strongly in the work of the writers of this genre and period, the middle-class origin and higher educational background of these writers made them turn to the cities for their intellectual environment.

The Australian participation in World War I (1914 – 18) and the tragedy of Gallipoli – where many soldiers from Australia and New Zealand died fighting a European war under the British banner—were important in the nation's formation of an identity different from that of Britain. The great world Depression that darkened the interwar years left nearly one-third of the Australian workforce unemployed by 1931. World War II (1939 – 1945), which brought the theatres of war closer to the Antipodes due to the threat from Japan, too was another watermark in the nation's history. It accelerated industrialization and opened Australia to both alliances with America and an awareness that it was part of Asia. The Vietnam War of 1965 brought together these trends and heralded the repercussions they would have for the nation and its construction of a national identity. The influx of immigrants from Southern Europe and Asia that followed in the postwar years set the stage for a change towards a more multicultural paradigm of national consciousness and social policy.

2.3 ACKNOWLEDGING ABORIGINAL OWNERSHIP

Most of the histories of Australia written in the past neglected the experience of Aboriginal peoples, women and members of other ethnic or racial minorities. They ignored the fact that the so-called 'settler society' was in actuality the product of white invasion and dispossession (Davidson, 24). The Aborigines were not considered official citizens of Australia and their numbers were not even counted in official censuses. It was assumed that they were a part of the population that would soon be extinct or become fully assimilated into the white population. Selective Immigration policies sought to ensure that Asians would not be admitted into Australia or allowed to settle down there in substantial numbers. One of the early acts of the Australian colonial government was to introduce the 'White Australia policy' which controlled the right of settlement for Europeans only. This policy was supported by all the groups and parties within the political spectrum and reflected the predominantly white population profile they wished to maintain for the island-continent.

Aboriginal land had been forcibly taken by the State-Federal government without compensation from the time of the arrival of the colonizers. Aboriginal people were physically and often violently removed from the land they had previously freely roamed and kept segregated in government reserves or church missions. Their children were forcibly taken away for adoption by white foster parents or placed in institutions that were supposed to guide them towards the goal of assimilation – becoming part of mainstream Australian culture and thinking. They were denied land rights or titles – they could neither own nor till the land. It was then argued by some government officials and policy makers that Aborigines were not advanced enough to be granted freehold land. The racist attitude of the response of Mr. Ken Tomkins – the Queensland State Minister for Aboriginal and Island affairs—when asked to comment on the Aboriginal struggle for land rights in October 1982 is quite evident:

Blacks do not understand freehold tenure and are not used to a lot of money. They live out in areas where they don't use it much. They catch birds and goanas and fish and this sort of thing The women do not wear 'very expensive dresses' and neither do the men. The fact that they drink a lot now doesn't do them any good. They just can't do it. Years ago when they didn't want to drink they were very good people' (Ward and Robertson, 340-41)

Meanwhile the Aborigines had begun to organise against the official government policies of paternalism – which assumed that the Aborigines as a race needed to be taken care of like children—and assimilation in the 1950s and 1960s. The movements for land rights and empowerment were led by leaders like Charles Perkins from the late 1960s onwards. Soon this mobilization began to bear fruit in terms of social reform, greater civic rights and a greater public awareness of Aboriginal issues. On 10 May 1962, the national vote was given to Aborigines. In 1962 the Institute for Aboriginal Studies was established and in 1965 reforms such as the establishment of the Aboriginal Welfare Conference was put into force. The 1967 referendum granted citizenship rights to Aborigines, allowing them to be counted for the purpose of the national census. There was however strong resistance, to this kind of social reform that empowered the Aborigines, from vested interests in the state governments of Queensland and Western Australia, as well as from mining companies and the landed rural population. This was because in these regions it was felt that these kinds of reforms would ultimately lead to the land being returned to Aborigines. Since farming and mining were very important in these areas this was a big threat to the white people involved in these businesses.

Despite the racial prejudice that has been directed towards them, the Aborigines have continued to fight for their ancestral land. Some have even taken legal action. The high watermark of the land rights movements was the Mabo judgement (Mabo vs. Queensland) resulting in the historic decision of 1992. Before 1992, there had been no legal recognition of pre-existing rights of the indigenous peoples of Australia to their lands and resources. The High Court's decision granted land title or claims to the Aboriginal Torres Strait Islanders in the Mabo judgement. This decision strengthened the legal position of native title against action by the State and Territory governments. The provisions of this judgement firmly provided "against removal of the indigenous peoples from their land other than with their free and informed consent, after agreement on just and fair compensation and where possible, with the option of return"(Nettheim, 42). As a result of this High Court decision, the Native Title Act of 1993 was enacted by the Australian federal Parliament, which set out among other things, to recognize and protect native title.

The High Court's decision was significant in many respects. **Firstly**, it corrected the wrong perception that Australia did not belong to anybody before the coming of the white man. **Secondly**, it will serve as a guide and beacon for any future cases concerning native land and compensation to the Aborigines for the wrongs inflicted on them. **Thirdly**, it brought the issue of land ownership in Australia into sharp focus. This has had far-reaching influence in the legal, political and economic spheres in Australia. Since the landmark High Court decision in the Mabo case of 3 June 1992, the fallacy that Australia had been an empty land prior to 1788, was laid to rest and the Native Title Act of 1993 put in the law the recognition of native title or claim to the land.

This has not failed to have its repercussions in the field of cultural production and history writing in Australia. Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra comment in their preface to *Dark Side of the Dream: Australian literature and the postcolonial mind*:

The study of Australian history and literature in schools and universities was able to marginalise Aboriginal history and silence Aboriginal voices, acting in parallel to the repressive government policies that attempted to 'eliminate' the 'Aboriginal problem'. This pattern has now been broken. Aborigines are at last being written back into the history of Australia. In literature and art, Aboriginal creativity is being recognised and valued as a major component of Australian cultural production. Recent histories of Australian literature can now be expected to have a (small) section at the end devoted to Aboriginal writers. Cultural justice, however belated, now seems to have come. (xiv)

2.4 EARLY SETTLER IMAGES OF THE LAND

The nature of the land strongly influenced the course of settler history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It also left a mark in the cultural consciousness of the new arrivals to the land. The land became the most prominent thing against which the identity of the settlers could be constructed. By the end of the nineteenth century, myths of the new land had taken formal literary shape in Australia in the writing of the early settlers. The experience of the settlers and the weekly *Bulletin* fuelled the formation and establishment of the myths that linked the land and the early white settlers.

According to John Rickard "the function of the myth was to idealise the men and women who confronted the environment" (65). He details two different variations of the myth linked to the land at two connected periods of the history of white settlement. **First**, the traditional 'Australian legend' highlights the life of the shearers and migratory workforce of the Outback (the Australian word for a remote settlement

in the interiors of the land) recruited from the convicts or their descendants. According to Rickard, in the versions of this legend that have found their way into ballads and stories, the image of the travelling bushman was an idealized personification of the environment's ability to transform the convict attitudes of disrespect for authority and crime into democratic and collectivist ideals that eventually earned him the status of a cultural hero (65). Rickard notes that, most often, this was a male centered legend. **Second**, by contrast, the later pioneer legends focused on the life of settlers attempting to make a part of the land their home. These incorporated women to a greater extent, even though the focus remained on men and their lives. Another point of difference with the bushman legends was that later became the odds against which the pioneers struggled and overcame to establish their presence in the land.

The early writers also had to invent ways of presenting the vastly different environment and atmosphere of the island-continent. The seasons there were reversed with summer peaking in December and winter in June. The flora and fauna too seemed so different from anything in the metropolitan centre. Antipodean inversion thus became one device for transmitting the land's alienness. Rickard quotes **Marcus Clarke** as having written thus in 1874:

In Australia alone is to be found the Grotesque, the Weird, —the strange scribblings of Nature learning how to write. Some see beauty in our trees without shade, our flowers without perfume, our birds who cannot fly, and our beasts who have not yet learned to walk on all fours. But the dweller in the wilderness acknowledges the subtle charm of this fantastic land of monstrosities. ... The phantasmagoria of the wild dreamland called the Bush interprets itself, and he begins to understand why free Esau loved his heritage of desert-sand better than all the bountiful richness of Egypt. (66-67)

John Rickard argues that it was a simple change to move from presenting the alienness of the land to depicting a certain alienation or distance from it. **Henry Lawson**, who had a major hand in developing the popular image of the Bush, according to Rickard, celebrated the spirit of the white bush folk but depicted the outback as bleak and unrelenting. Another aspect of this early depiction was that the celebration of the bush was at the expense of the city. The ballads of **Banjo Paterson** and the bushman's bible the *Bulletin* encouraged the construction of this opposition. The Bush and its mores were seen as authentically Australian.

The Australian legends, Bush lore and pioneer myths have in recent times been open to much criticism on the grounds of being sexist because they focussed mainly on the male point of view and did not inscribe the reality of contact between the settlers and Aborigines. They have also been seen as no longer satisfactory symbols to represent the Australian identity in the era of multiculturalism.

These images, however, are an important barometer of the times and socio-cultural environment that produced them. For example, John Rickard argues that the celebration of the pioneers was a way to replace the convict as victim by focusing on the settler as the agent of progress and national consciousness (72). He feels the emergence of this myth did not, therefore, so much reflect social reality as a historical socio-cultural need to change a cultural identity and construct a more favourable one. He also points out that its romanticizing of the past involved a kind of falsification through selectively presenting things. For example, in assuming a tradition of alienation from a harsh environment the myth structure ignored the different variety of environments actually encountered by the early settlers, from the bays and inlets of Sydney Harbour to the deserts of Central Australia. Like the larger narratives of history and literature, cultural symbols and myths too can be read both with and

against the grain to reveal much about the society that produced and perpetuated them.

2.5 LET US SUM UP

The land and history of Australia are inseparably linked. The connection of the two has been actual as well as discursive. The outcome of the links have had results that are political as well as socio-cultural. Be it in history, the law or legends, the way the land has been presented is very important in the context of Australian studies in general and the study of Australian literature in particular. In all these cases it is important to read the discourses as they are presented as well as to read between the lines and against the stated intention of their texts.

2.6 QUESTIONS

1. Discuss why the question of beginnings is an important one in relation to Australia's construction of history.
2. Discuss the position of the Aborigines with regard to the land and writing of history in Australia.
3. What do some of the early settler myths and legends about the land reveal?

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