

## CRITICAL STUDY OF CHARLES HARPER'S POEM: AN ABORIGINAL MOTHER'S LAMENT

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**Abstract:** Australians are considered to be the oldest surviving cultures in the world. Aborigines are the native indigenous people of Australia. Between the two world wars from 1910 to 1970 the rule was proposed that the children who belonged to the aboriginals have to be forcefully removed from the families and be raised by the white institutions. During this time many missionaries were started to take care of the aboriginal children and this generation is called as the stolen generation. The white men started to colonize the original inhabitant of Australia they forcefully looted the things and killed people and the children were separated from the parents and put into foster homes and missionaries. The proposition of the paper is to bring to light the sufferings and struggles of aboriginal people through Charles Harper poem *An Aboriginal Mother's lament* which draws the reason behind Harper writing the poem. It was the May hall massacre which took place in Australia killing the innocent aboriginal tribes moved Harper and the plight of the peoples lament and the innocent mother wanting to save her child from the white man is all the poem about.

**Keywords:** Aborigines, sufferings, colonization, Massacre.

**Introduction:** The author of this poem *An Aboriginal Mother's Lament* Charles Harper was born at Windsor, New South Wales, on 23 January 1813, the son of emancipated convicts. Charles Harper is commonly acknowledged to be one of the most important colonial poets. In his own lifetime, Harper attracted both sincere praise and downright abuse. "Charles Harper was one of the first and most important of Australia's native-born poets. From the time he began writing in the 1820s till his death in 1868, he was concerned with celebrating the beauty of the Australian landscape and attempting to improve the intellectual life of his fellows. Harper himself became ill with tuberculosis, and died on 8 June 1868. An *Aboriginal Mother's lament* is a poem written by Charles Harper in response to the Mayall Creek massacre. In which some thirty unarmed indigenous men, women and children were shot and slashed to death by stock men on a remote property in northern New South Wales in June 1838. Late in the afternoon Sunday June 10th 1838, a gang of eleven convicts and ex-convicts stockman led by a squatter, brutally slaughtered a group of some twenty eight Aboriginal men, women and children who were camped peacefully, next to the station huts on the Myall creek cattle station in Northern New South Wales. It is so significant because it is the only time in Australia's history that white men arrested, charged and hanged for the massacre of Aborigines.

In this poem one woman escapes from the hands of white man with her infant and the plight of the woman and her lament on the way is the entire poem about. On the way she laments about her condition to the child and her only intention at that time is to escape from the hands of the white men and to save the life of her only child. She keeps running into the

forest it become dark but still she never gives up the thorns prick her feet and body gets bruised.

Still father would I fly, my child,  
To make thee safer yet  
From the unsparing white men  
With his dread hands murder wet  
I'll bear thee on as I have borne  
With stealthy steps wind feet  
But the dark night shrouds the forest  
And thorns are in my feet

The aboriginal woman is even afraid of telling her husband's name because he is killed by the white men and burnt to ashes. Almost all her family members were killed by the murderers. The death of her husband was in fact a great shock for the aboriginal woman, because her life was totally dependent on her husband. Then, he is gone. Her grief is intensified when she hears the death cry of her kindred. She tells her child that she saw her husband being thrown into the fire bleeding to death by the white men.

And but for thee, I would their fire  
Had eaten me as fast  
Hark! Hark! I hear his death- cry  
Yet lengthening up the blast!  
But no- when that we should fly,  
On the roaring pyre flung bleeding-  
I saw the father die!

The child cries due to hunger and thirst she calms down the child by saying she will even give the braids which she got as gift from her husband to quench the thirst of her child.

Oh moan not I would give this braid  
Thy father's gift to me  
For but a single palmful  
Of water now for thee

This poem brings to light, the dark history of Australia. The European settlers who settled in Australia ill-treated the aborigines. Since they wanted to capture the lands of the aborigines, the European settlers started butchering the aborigines for no cause. In this poem we see the aborigine woman running away with her child. The reason behind this particular act is that the white men pretending to be Christian missionaries took away the aboriginal children from their families telling that they would educate them but the fact is that they were made to work for the settlers at their houses. They were even forbidden to talk in their native tongue. These children who were taken away from their families are known as 'The lost generation'. They were racially discriminated by the settlers. The removal of children was ultimately aimed at destroying the aboriginal race through biological and social assimilation. If the children were raised to think white then they would never want to go back to their aboriginal life. The European way of life and culture was considered to be far superior to that of the aboriginal people who could not possibly look after themselves.

In 1770, Englishman Lieutenant James Cook landed on the Australian east coast. Captain Cook was the first person from Europe to land in Australia, but it had been already occupied for tens of thousands of years. He wasn't even the first European to stumble across the continent. Somehow Britain claimed the continent for itself. Under contemporary international (i.e. European) law, Britain took control of the territory by persuading the indigenous inhabitants to submit themselves to its lordship; also they purchased land from the inhabitants to settle. Aborigines were not seen as proprietors of the land that they had inhabited for at least forty thousand

years. Cook said that the people could not be considered owners of their land. They were simply primitive and happy occupants. Eventually the British settled in Australia completing the colonization process. White Australians began to view their continent as 'home'.

**Conclusion:** With independence never having been granted, Australia continues to be a colonized country. As a colonized nation Australia can never call itself as an independent country. The aboriginal population of the country was, and still is, being suppressed by the colonizers. Now Australia claims itself as a liberal nation. The lost generation is otherwise called as the stolen generation as the children from the mothers was forcefully removed from their own families and they were placed into the foster houses and missionaries. This took place from 1890 to 1970 as the children who were separated from the parents were not allowed to meet them back and they were totally cut off from the aboriginality. Many girls were raped and sexually abused and their children also were forcefully taken away from them. The Australian people felt that since they had the mixed white blood in the aboriginal children they can reform them and make them into human beings. They were termed with different names as mixed caste, half caste, quarter caste, and then they were not accepted by the aboriginal or the white people and they were termed as double outcaste. Though Harper belongs to white community he had the sympathy towards the aboriginal people. The Aboriginal mothers lament is about the suffering of one mother who represents the sufferings of all the humans of the aboriginal tribe who have lost the family, children.

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