

# **Astronomical and Astrological Myths of Aborigines**

## **Introduction**

Aboriginal heritage and culture, in terms of its historical continuity, is one of the oldest on the planet. Rock paintings at Olary in South Australia have been dated as 34,000 years old. Aboriginal people themselves believe that they have lived on this continent since the beginning of time.

There are many different tribes with different language. They have differences and similarities in their myths, life styles and cultures. The Anthropological surveys in the last five decades shows that there were 300-500 Aboriginal languages and ten percent of Aboriginal people still speak their indigenous language.

In Aboriginal Myths, there are many stories that tell relations between creatures in the world and celestial beings. They're simple but signify the celestial roots of human.

Myths invariably evoke a sense of awe because they're dealing with great and profound mysteries. The initiated Aborigines keep the secret meanings of their myths. There are some stages of initiation in Aboriginal societies. And in these initiations, secret meanings of myths and song, rituals and ceremonies are passed to new initiate ones orally. Each song is a celebration of the unique role of a Spirit Ancestor within the sacred landscape, each song an integral part of Creation itself.

## **Dreamtime**

Dreamtime is an important concept to understand Aboriginal myths related with creation. Supernatural beings, which will until that time had slept beneath the surface of the earth, rose to create the world in the Dreamtime.

The Arrente term *altjiranga ngambakala* has the inference of 'having originated out of one's own eternity', 'immortal', 'uncreated'. This is the essential concept of the Dreamtime or the Dreaming. At the same time, '*altjirarma*' means 'to see or dream eternal things' or 'to see with eternal vision'.

Before the World came into existence, there was a mass of dark and formless matter, a vast watery expanse or a somewhat featureless plain. Spiritual Ancestors defines all spaces and all time out of what was potentially there in this dark, nameless matter, '*ngallalla yawun*', everything soft like jelly.

The stories of the Dreamtime are the foundation of all social and religious life. They recount the journeys of these primordial beings and show how the landscape was shaped, how fire was created, how plants, animals and humans were made, and even how necessities such as spears and grinding stones were invented to help Aboriginal men and women with their daily lives.

The Aranda, an inland people, say that in the beginning the earth was like a desolate plain. There were no hills or rivers, and no light either, for the Sun, the Moon and the

stars still slumbered under the earth. Nor were there any plants or animals, only semi-embryonic masses of half developed infants lying helplessly in places that would be later become salt lakes and water holes.

These shapeless infants could not develop into individual men and women, but neither did they grow old and die. Indeed neither life nor death as we know were present on the face of the earth. But beneath the surface, life did exist in the form of innumerable supernatural beings, who slumbered there awaiting a call to emerge. What summoned them to awake we do not know, but one day their eyes opened and they broke through the surface to impregnate the land with their energy and power. The Sun and Moon rose too, and the Earth was flooded with light. It's a remarkable complex cosmogony. To create humankind, these beings, 'born of their own eternity' used stone knives, first to release the arms and legs of the Inapatua, as the embryonic infants were called, then with four swift cuts to make fingers and toes. Eyes and mouth were opened, noses and ears were moulded, and the previously shapeless Iapatua grew swiftly to adult size.

A variation of soma (drink of immortality) theme is an Aboriginal myth, which tells that in the Dreamtime, people did not die, because each month the Moon gave them a magic drink that restored them to life. And soma is the blood of Moon.

In Aboriginal cosmology, everything and everybody, all space and all time is interwoven and interdependent and all are kin.

Aboriginal people recognise that they have a spark of their Ancestors within them, which can be activated in ceremony and ritual, and thus they have an unbroken link to the Creation Epoch, known as the eternal 'Dreamtime' or 'Dreaming'.

The Spirit Beings created the sacred teachings of the Dreaming (The Law). They establish customs, they taught humans how to hunt, how to utilise fire and make cooking utensils, how to dance and perform ceremonies and they invented languages.

### **Ancestral Beings**

Ancestral Beings has an important role in creation and life of Aboriginals especially in their ceremonies. These beings are the ancestors, the beings worked in creation. Some of them are related with celestial beings, stars, planets, Sun and Moon.

Djan'kawu is the collective name for them. Ancestral Beings, a male figure called Djan'kawu and his two sisters. The elder sister is called Bildjiwuraroiju or Bildjiwuraru and the younger Miralaidj, Malalait or Mandalaidj. The two sisters are associated with the Sun and one of their totems is the red-breasted parakeet whose feathers are like the colours of sunlight.

Bornumbirr is the Morning star that's the planet Venus which arises in the morning before the sun.

Seven sisters is Pleiades stellar constellation. They called as Nakkarra Nakkarra; seven sisters Dreaming. It celebrates elements of the women's lives from food gathering and preparation to their participation in ceremony and their role in their sons' initiations. In the Ngarangkarni (Dreamtime), seven sisters descended from sky and travelled

through the land. They were the first women on Earth. They would come to Earth to hunt and gather bush tucker and to paint themselves and dance ceremony.

Mirraboona is the Southern Cross constellation. He watched forever the tribes he loved. He is the protector of humanity.

Kurikita is another Ancestral Being, was the beautiful wife of Biame (a sky God). She was completely covered with quartz crystals, so that when she turned, light would flash in every direction. She was lovely in form and always appeared particularly youthful and vital. In the Dreamtime, she left the Earth and went up into sky to Wanlanggura, the place beyond the clouds. She is identified with emu, called Jarawajewa who was her assistant totem. She is also the mother of Crow (Waken, Waa or Wahn) that is a very important Ancestral Being who is identified with night or shade and shadow. Crow is also connected with the star Canopus.

Sun Woman is Wuriupranili and Moon Man is Japara. Each bears a torch of flaming bark but when they arrive at the western horizon, they extinguish the flames and use the smouldering ends to light their way as they return eastwards through the dark realms of the underground world. Each morning, the fire, which has been lit by the Sun-Woman for her torch, provides the first rays of dawn. She decorates her body with the powered ochre.

### **Rainbow Serpent**

One of the other important concepts of creation is Rainbow Serpent. You can see Rainbow Serpent in most of the creation scenes created by Aboriginal artists.

The revered and feared Bolong (Rainbow Serpent) is recognised by Aboriginal tribes around Australia as being the Creator of Life. When the Bolong (who has female and male aspects) created life, she placed all living things into categories.

In the Dreamtime all the earth lay sleeping. Nothing grew. Nothing moved. Then one day the Rainbow Serpent awoke from her slumber and pushed her way through the earth's crust, moving the stones that lay in her way. When she emerged, she looked about her and then travelled over the land, going in all directions. She travelled far and wide, and she grew tired, she curled herself into a heap and slept. Upon the earth she left her winding tracks and the imprint of her sleeping body. When she had travelled all the earth, she returned to the place where she had first appeared and called to the frogs, 'come out'. The frogs were very slow to come from below the earth's crust, for their bellies were heavy with water, which they had stored in their sleep. The Rainbow Serpent tickled their stomachs and when the frogs laughed, the water ran all over the earth to fill the tracks of the Rainbow Serpent's wanderings and that is how the lakes and rivers were formed. Then grass began to grow and trees sprang up and so life began on earth. All the animals, birds and reptiles awoke and followed the Rainbow Serpent, the Mother of Life, across the Land...

## **Moon**

Most of Aboriginal Myths tells of a male Moon and a female Sun.

For Aborigines, the Moon brought two profound gifts: fertility and the hope of life after death. The Moon was a fertilising male, who conferred the power to reproduce on women as well as on plants and animals.

*"The Moon was husband to all women, and if a girl feared getting pregnant, she took care not to catch the attention of the Moon-Man or look at him too closely."*

The Moon governs the waters in which its reflection floats. It produces floods and controls the tides. Its 28 days cyclic is nature's clock. With its three dark days and pattern of growth and decline, it's the master of death and rebirth.

There is the idea of nautilus shells as the skeletons of dead moons. And Moon is shown as life-giver as in a series of songs called The Moon bone Cycle below;

Singing sticks are beaten, wooden trumpets are blown, and the women dance in the moonlight while they sing how Moon lived with his sister, the Dugong, in the plains bordering Arnhem Bay. Dugong collected lily bulbs and lotus roots for them to eat, but she was constantly bitten by leeches, and one day she stormed home crying in irritation: *'I've had enough of these leeches, brother. I'm giving up land life to enter the sea and become a gong.'*

*'What shall I do?'* asked Moon.

*'You can stay in the sky,'* said his sister, *'but first you must die.'*

*Moon considered this. 'I won't die like other people though,'* he said. *'I'll always return to life again.'*

*'Do as you like'* said Dugong, *'but not me. When I die I won't come back, and you can pick up my bones.'*

*'I'm different,'* her brother told her, *'when I die, I'm coming back. Each time I grow sick I'll become very thin and follow you down to the sea, by then, only my bones will be left, so I'll throw them away and die.'* *Become pure spirit, he meant, 'But after three days I'll rise again and return to the sky.'*

Emu, crab, possum, frog and bear are sacred animals of the Moon. Bone and boomerang are also related with Moon.

Snakes are also the hunting companions of Bahloo, an important Australian Moon deity who helped creating babies. In some places the bite of the serpent was thought to be responsible for a girl's first menstruation and of course the period generally occurs in a 28 days cycle like that of the Moon. The Maori of New Zealand called menstruation Mata Marama (Moon sickness). The Torres Strait Islands has one word that is used for both Moon and menstrual blood.

The Moon Tree finds an echo in many Australian myths in which a tall tree or a magically rising tree forms a ladder for the Moon-Man to reach the sky at a critical moment in his story. Sometimes the Moon Tree grows in a grove or garden. It makes a charming appearance in the Aboriginal myth of the Birthplace of the Moons. This tells of a valley where the soil is the richest on earth.

In a myth of the Southern Australian Dieyerie tribe, Pirra (the Moon) made all creatures under the direction of a creation spirit named Mooramoorra.

Another deluge myth concerns the frog, an important lunar animal. Tiddalik, the largest frog ever known, awoke one morning with an unquestionable thirst. He commenced drinking and drank so much that there was no water left in the whole world. The land began to dry up, the trees shed their leaves and it was clear that if an action were not taken soon, the animals would begin dying. A council was called and searched in vain for a way out, until a wise old wombat suggested that if Tiddalik could be made to laugh, the water would flow from his mouth and they would be saved. Creature after creature tried to amuse the giant frog, but he just blinked his eyes and ignored them. Finally, the eel or a snake began to dance. The shapes he twisted himself into were so comical that Tiddalik shook with laughter. Out gushed the water from his mouth, and flowed off to replenish the earth.

Cycle of Moon is related with life and death. Bahloo, The Moon declines in stature every month but grows again to his full size, a sign to mankind that when they die they will be restored to life again in the land that Baime (the great spirit, his wife Birrahgnooloo is described as Mother of All) has provided for them.

## **Conclusion**

Aboriginal people kept their traditions orally so the only written traditions we reach are stories told to white man in the last two centuries. These stories clearly show that they had a profound knowledge of cosmos and human and tried to live according to law that rules the cosmos. They kept alive their relation with the celestial beings and the earth, the mother of all living creature in the world. The traditions we can learn from Aboriginal myths have many things to say to the people of modern world to direct his way to Heaven, to realm of Ancestral Beings again.

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