INTRODUCTION

The research work explores the issues of representation and identity of the indigenous Australians through an examination of the works of Bruce Pascoe. The work also addresses the portrayal of the indigenous people by colonialists. Bruce Pascoe is a representative of postcolonial writing as his works are associated with the postcolonial strategy of “writing-back.” (Ashcroft, Bill, et al. 133). He sought to rewrite colonial versions of history that portrayed marginal places and people as exotic and savage. This form of writing is a response to colonial literature, which “resists and corrects the myths propagated through literature upon which colonial relationships have been premised.” (Templeton, Neil) Colonialism systematically destroys native cultures, says Frantz Fanon in his speech at the Congress of Black African Writers in 1959. He observes:

Colonial domination, because it is total and tends to over-simplify, very soon manages to disrupt in spectacular fashion the cultural life of a conquered people. This cultural obliteration is made possible by the negation of national reality, by new legal relations introduced by the occupying power, by the banishment of the natives and their customs to outlying districts by colonial society, by expropriation, and by the systematic enslaving of men and women. (The Wretched of the Earth. 45)

European colonial nations intentionally set out to obliterate indigenous cultures and their traditional way of life through the use of several strategies: by destroying indigenous religions, cultures and languages, and by forcibly imposing
Christianity and European education. These colonial practices have obliterated the socio and cultural contacts of Aboriginal societies. The traditional contacts have been broken. European cultures believe in the idea of power that rests in the accumulation of property and riches with military power and warfare. European concepts of owning land, resources are totally new to the natives. The indigenous religious beliefs are viewed as uncivilized and barbaric. These notions can be observed in the writings of Colonial writers.

Cultural genocide is the destruction of cultural heritage. This form of genocide aims at depriving the natives of their integrity as distinct people. Their cultural values and their ethnic identities aim at consolidating the native rights. The cultural ethnocide has psychological effects on the people who have been conquered. The colonizer can go to any extent to make the natives accept and admit the inferiority of their culture. By doing so the colonizer instills a powerful form of racism among the natives. Different degrees of domination, destruction, resistance, survival, adaptation, and modification of the native culture may follow inter-ethnic contact. The native culture experiences destruction as a result of a more powerful outsider. Civil repression using military force may lead to a cultural collapse. According to Conrad Phillip Kottak, the “Westerners will attempt to remake the native culture within their own image, ignoring the fact that the models of culture that they have created are inappropriate for settings outside of Western civilization”. (Window on Humanity)

Native Australian literature has been influenced by Aboriginal storytelling and convict tales. The folklore of the indigenous Australians has never been explored in depth and never been considered as a subject of greater importance by the scholars.
till recent times. The natives view their history, culture and tradition to be of great importance to themselves and to their indigenous communities. Because of racism and marginalization, native stories have remained untold for decades and centuries in the history of the colonized nation.

The definition of Aboriginality has become an incomprehensible subject for decipherment. From the colonial perception Aboriginality is understood with negative characteristics. But for Indigenous people, it is a significant aspect of self definition and a positive state of mind. Aboriginality is the legacy of traditional indigenous Australian culture. It is a counter cultural movement, a reaction against the hegemony of white Australian society and leads to the construction of the self image of Aboriginals. However, the perceptions and definitions of Aboriginality vary from Aboriginals to non-Aboriginals.

An African proverb says, “Until the lion writes his own story, the tale of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.” There has been a need for the natives to come out openly to write about their suffering and discrimination. Here, the consciousness of a glorious past, mounted unified response from the indigenous people across the globe and paved the way for the formation of Pan Aboriginalism, which has become a part of Black Australian self definition. It is essential to observe that unified Aboriginal consciousness has been articulated in the formation of Aboriginality. The concept of Aboriginality invokes respect for the Aboriginal past and Aboriginal Australian ties to the land. A sense of pride and dignity and an impetus towards establishing Pan Aboriginal identity is espoused in Aboriginal literature.
Pan-Aboriginalism reinforces socio, cultural and literary movements. The attempts of Aboriginal people to define themselves in literature have brought in the issues of shared experience of oppression and exploitation. Aboriginal literature centrally encompasses and promotes cultural nationalism, pride and literary talent. It also deals with the complex attitudes, beliefs and mores that constitute Aboriginality. However, it is pertinent to explore and probe the literary transformation of Aboriginal identity. In the initial stages, it was the subject shaped and manipulated by mainstream white Australian writers like Judith Wright and Patrick White.

Later, the subject of Aboriginality was handled by the writers of mixed Aboriginal parentage. The works of Sally Morgan, Melissa Lucashenko, Alexis Wright, Eva Sallis, etc. were widely appreciated. These writers explored themes of indigenous and settler identity, alienation, exile and relationship to place. Dislocated from their countries of origin in the early days of Australia’s settlement, many writers struggled with notions of what it meant to be Australian.

In the post-modern era, Aboriginality is an essential subject of genuine Aboriginal writers like Kim Scott, Anita Heiss etc. Their writings reflect the cultural diversity of contemporary Australian society. They have contributed to the development of distinctive writing styles and have produced a diverse range of internationally acclaimed novels, drama, poetry and non-fiction. Their works have increasingly been recognized through international literary awards. It is only in the hands of present generation of Aboriginal writers ‘Aboriginality’ as a subject of literature reached a stage of perfect manifestation, symbolization and representation of universality.
Bruce Pascoe (1947- ) has created an authentic picture of contemporary Australia through his writings. He belongs to Bunurong community and has been a member of Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative of southern Victoria. He has been writing fiction and non-fiction; been a successful publisher and the Director of the Australian Studies Project for the Commonwealth Schools Commission. He did his Masters from Griffith University on *Liberal and Interventionist Economic Policies: The Case of Indonesia* in 1994. He has been editing books on the history and language of the Wathaurong people and been instrumental in retrieving indigenous language. He has edited and published *Australian Short Stories* (1982-1998), which has encouraged the new writers to demonstrate their potential and also publishes experimental and traditional works of established writers like Patrick White, Elizabeth Jolley, Helen Garner, Frank Hardy, Gillian Mears and many other writers.

Bruce Pascoe’s ground-breaking works, which are known for their candor and lucidity, chronicle the agony and grief of dispossession. They deal with diverse themes about the exploitation of indigenous Australians in the hands of European settlers. At the same time, he makes it a point to propagate the richness of Aboriginal culture. He is faithful to the Aboriginal heritage by exposing the systematic exploitation of native cultures in the postcolonial and neocolonial era. His contribution to the indigenous literature has been vast and immense. As a writer he explored new and novel themes, which are factual and true to life.

Bruce Pascoe’s works speak about the love between Aboriginal people and their country. They are personal accounts that share knowledge, insight and emotion, each speaking of a deep connection to the native land and of feeling heartsick because of the harm that is being inflicted on it. In the post-war era, the native cultures are threatened by the impending destruction of their sacred sites, species, resources and languages. Through his works, Pascoe time and again stresses on the point that pain and suffering have been part of Aboriginal culture. He recasts long suppressed Aboriginality. His interpretations point directly to deeper and sadder truths.

Widely regarded as one of the most prominent writers of modern era, Pascoe raises profound questions on the institutionalized racism in Australia. Drawing on perspectives from history and politics, he tries to change the destiny of a nation. His themes are diverse and vary: national land rights, the treaty of reconciliation, deaths in custody, self-determination, the justice system, native title and stolen generations. His demands include: Aboriginal rights to land, stopping Aboriginal children being
taken from their families, the acquisition of citizenship rights, defending a distinct Aboriginal cultural identity.

Pascoe’s first work of fiction, *Fox* is about a half-caste Aborigine, who is on the run from police for killing his adopted father. The Australian desert provides him the site and means. The protagonist, Fox, suffers from identity crisis and searches for his Aboriginality and tries to reclaim the spiritual illumination available to his people. It is a chase from Victoria to Northern territory with issues of deaths in custody, race relations and discrimination, land rights, effects of government policy, traditional aspects in modern life such as initiation and schooling, Ngalakan life.

*Bloke* is about coming to terms with who you are, where you belong, who you love. Jim Bloke, the protagonist, has a weakness for women, which leads him into trouble. He becomes a runaway when things go wrong, during which he meets his real family and comes to know of his real identity. A reviewer, Jason Cotter remarks:

*Bloke* is full of deftly drawn characters, from the comic and sinister to the magical, populating an evocative Gippsland setting, and the novel’s shifting moods and odd socio-political punchgrabbed me to the final page. (Cotter, Johnson)

*Cape Otway-Coast of Secrets* provides the complete history of the secret coast of Cape Otway, a remote Victorian cape with one of the most compelling stories of any land on earth. A lighthouse was first lit in 1848. Eight ships were wrecked along the Cape Otway coast from 1851 to 1932. The work is a guide to the Victorian Otway region, giving an overview of the area’s history and providing information about topics such as vegetation, wildlife, paleontology and notable features such as the two
lighthouses. The details of tourist accommodation and activities, lists of birds, plants and animals seen at Cape Otway, are provided in this non-fictional work.

_Wathaurong Too Bloody Strong_, portrays the stories and life journeys of people from Wathaurong. The Natives don’t want to yield even though their spirits are broken because of Stolen children, stolen land and stolen freedom. The proud cry of survival can be heard in all the stories and also a hopeful future. From making baskets to building fences, from nursing to law, in education and art, the Wathaurong people are preparing for the brand new day when the sun rises over a land of equality.

_Wathaurong The People Who Said No_, was prepared by Bruce Pascoe for Koorie Studies and for the Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative and Coast Action. The Wathaurong people of South Western Victoria said ‘No’ to European invasion. The work gives an incredible description of the heroic resistance of the natives to the occupation of their lands. Can white and black live together or must they be always at war? The answer can only be given by young Australians.

_Convincing Ground: Learning to Fall in Love with Your Country_, pulses with love of country. This is a wide-ranging, personal and powerful work which resonates with historical and contemporary Australian debates about identity, dispossession, memory and community. In this powerful, lyrical and passionate work, Bruce Pascoe asks us to fully acknowledge the Aboriginal past and the way those actions continue to influence the nation today, both physically and intellectually. _Convincing Ground_ resonates with ongoing debates about identity, dispossession, memory and community. Pascoe has written _Convincing Ground_ for all Australians,
as an antidote to the great Australian inability to deal respectfully with the nation's constructed Indigenous past.

The first chapter, “Aboriginal Literary Renaissance”, takes into consideration the chronological evolution of Aboriginal literature of Australia and traces that Aboriginal storytelling and folklore have been the beginnings of the Aboriginal literature. The knowledge gained through the stories pertains to all spheres of Aboriginal life. They speak of social, moral, ethical values besides spiritual and transcendental truths. Aboriginal oral tradition has expanded itself into written literature. Native writers have carved a niche for themselves in writing all genres of literature.

The settlers portrayed a grim picture of Aboriginal culture. The indigenous writers retrace the Aboriginal identity. Taking into consideration the incidents, the phases, the persons and the literary adventures that are part of the evolution of Aboriginal literature, I tried to locate the literary placement of Bruce Pascoe in Australian Aboriginal literature. A brief analysis of the contribution of writers like David Unaipon, Katharine Susannah Prichard, Xavier Herbert, Ion L. Idriess, Daisy Bates, Judith Wright, Patrick White and A.D. Hope, has been presented in the chapter. The chapter is confined to giving a definite literary shape to Australia’s Indigenous literature and the centrality that Bruce Pascoe has acquired with his polemical works.

The second chapter, “Dispossession of Papuan Culture”, discusses *Ruby-eyed Coucal*, which explores the neocolonial policies of Indonesia in occupying West Papua with the support from the developed countries and UNO. West Papua has been
occupied as soon as it got independence from the Dutch in 1969, with the ‘Act of Free choice’. Since then, West Papuans have been experiencing a brutal period of suppression, denial and genocide under Indonesian military rule. There’s little support for them from other nations. The neighboring countries, Australia and Papua New Guinea support Indonesia. The natives struggle hard for their survival. Their agony and sufferings are immeasurable. OPM (Free Papua Organization) have been striving hard to resist the alien rule as they can’t digest the disappearance of their culture.

The plot circles around an elusive bird- Ruby-eyed Coucal. It has unusual habits as it collects precious stones from the land for its easy digestion. Indonesians, aware of the preciousness of the land, invites foreign mining companies to rob the resources of the land. In olden days there used to be trading links among West Papuans, Aboriginal Australians and Indonesians. They used to exchange the feathers of an elusive bird-. These trading links are used as a way of challenging the very basis upon which whites assumed ownership and control of Australia and Indonesian occupation of West Papua. The oppression and victimization of the natives and their powerlessness; resistance and fight for liberation, and mostly observed, the violation of human rights, are to be observed in the work of fiction.

The third chapter, “Plundering Aquamarine”, discusses Shark and investigates the harsh experiences of native Australians through the brutal period of colonization and conquest. It talks about the suppression of Aboriginal Australians by European settlers. Culture and environmental conservation are highly important in the life of Aboriginal people. Australia was known for its abundant resources. European
capitalistic approach resulted in the disappearance of many marine species. The riches that the rare fish species have fetched them in the world market made them practice modern methods to catch fish. For Aborigines fishing is part of food-gathering. The native Australians demand the government for regulations on fishing. Unfortunately, they are at the receiving end. There were new regulations on fishing and hunting, which made the natives starve to death.

Australian law is biased and it supports settler communities. The natives have suffered systematic inequality in law and they demand for an impartial law and judiciary. There has been resistance towards Australian law and governmental policies by the natives. When there was need for young and able leadership, the young generation of native kids resolutely takes the decision to lead the resistance fight, and wish to shoulder the responsibility. The fight for rights and identity play a pivotal role.

The fourth chapter, “Plundering Livestock”, discusses *Earth* and portrays ‘Stolen Generations’ – the Aboriginal children of mixed descent who were taken away from their families at the time of their birth during 1860s to 1970s by the Australian Federal and State Government agencies and Church missions. Stolen Generations remained as a tragedy in the Australian Aboriginal history. The policies of the white people caused great pain on thousands of Aboriginals that blighted the bond between mother and child. It is estimated that around 100,000 Aboriginal children were stolen from their families and were sent to Christian homes run by European settlers, leaving their mothers heart-broken. These children are forced to learn the European habits of living. The government stated it as a process to provide
a better life and welfare to the Aboriginal children who they think, lead an aimless and immoral life in the interiors of Australia. A generation of black kids lost the memories of Aboriginal way of life.

The settlers believed that the ‘full-blood’ Aboriginal culture would quickly die out as a result of its technological and civilisational inferiority. The policies operated to separate Aboriginal children from their families would result in Aboriginal extinction and eventually Aboriginal culture wouldn’t be reproduced. *Earth* also observes the conditions and circumstances in which the full-blood and half-caste Aborigines lead their life in towns and in reserves. All the full-blooded Aboriginals have been sent to reserves and the half-castes are allowed to reside in the towns. How these half-castes lead their life in an environment of suspicion and distrust, and their struggle for identity form the basis of the novel.

The fifth chapter, “A Neocolonial Critique of Seal Industry”, discusses *Ocean* and deals with the early European contacts of trade with Australia. The Seal Industry flourished at Bass Strait islands of Australia even before European settlement. It became a highly profitable exporting commodity that fascinated foreign Sealing industries. Sealing ships from the United States of America and the United Kingdom used to take seal skin and seal oil from these islands. The indigenous Australians were killed to occupy the islands, which were full of abundant seals. By early 19th century, the produce of seals had gone down drastically because of ceaseless hunting.

The contacts began between sealers and natives, is initiated in the thematic illustration of the novel. They used to trade Aboriginal women, kangaroo and seal
skin. The sealers abducted the Aboriginals and enslaved countless Aboriginal women, who were kidnapped as slaves and subjected to rape and murder. The abducted native women, who were used for sexual pleasure, were left at fishing towns or at trade centres. These women would die a miserable death from sealers’ disease, leaving their children for their fate. The consequences still haunt the country in the modern era and live on in the survivors. European settlement led to the near extinction of Aboriginal tribes, who live on today as a distinct group with mixed ancestry. Though they claim Aboriginal identity, they are entirely dispossessed of their culture and lands. The pillage of Aboriginal women has resulted in the growth of half-caste Aboriginals. The chapter also explores the beginning of stock industry in Australia. Europeans started cattle industry and stockyards, depriving the natives of their free hunting and food habits.

The following chapters make a theoretical interpretation of the novels: *Ruby-eyed Coucal*, *Shark*, *Earth* and *Ocean* in the light of postmodernism, postcolonialism and post structuralism. I have also analyzed various issues latent in these works. I have not provided the elaborate history of every critical stream but confined to a mere introduction of critical discourse to he needed extent. The thematic textual analysis is argued in its elaborate sense where the issues appear to be repetitive. The intention of bringing these issues is to further consolidate the Aboriginal cultural consciousness within the framework of New Literatures.

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