Dalit Politics in India

Dalit politics in contemporary India represents a Janus of two contradictory movements: On the one side, there is a face representing the hope of progress and on the other, there is a strange tale of regression.¹ The brighter face represents an interesting shift in terms of both the conceptual methodological concern and the normative promise that it offers. These shifts are also sociologically significant for they point out the questioning of the established categories by new claimants from Dalit communities. Secondly, they are also interesting spatially, because the available discursive space is argued to be insufficient for them.² The politics of Dalit movements as well as the aspirations of Dalit masses, have acquired a new political and cultural content in this emergent phase of globalization. They have reached a critical juncture at which the movements are being pushed to adopting radical stance on issues, while the politics of the Dalit led political parties are becoming more accommodative and consensual.³ It can be observed in the past decade of the 1990s that lots of unexpected things have happened and many things not happened. For example, the issues about which the Dalit movements cried hoarse but had, by and large, remained unheard until the 1980s found, almost suddenly, a wide-spread resonance and even concrete and positive action-level responses in the 1990’s in different sectors of the civil society. And in the same period of the 1990’s the power and the clout of Dalits increased significantly- i.e., beyond their

² Ibid, Introduction, P.11
leadership's own expectations – both in the arenas of governmental and bureaucratic power.

Conditions today have undergone a change and therefore the dichotomous mode of categories has become less relevant if not completely redundant at least in large parts of India; for example, Brahmanism and non-Brahmanism may not attract attention of the Dalits in the political arena but Manuwad would do so. The dichotomy may be still relevant at least in some parts of the country, especially in states like Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Bihar. Similarly, this reification may not be there in Western and Southern India because the structural conditions have changed. It is true that rigid dichotomies do not work in literal democratic politics. Alliance politics in that case forces concerned groups to give in to the logic of overlapping calculations (and not consensus) of sharing formal political power. It is no doubt, due to this overlapping ‘concern’ that one comes across plural articulations even in Dalit politics today. It is precisely for this reason Dalits are busy floating new parties without followers. As a result, Dalit politics today has become ironically autonomous and hence irresponsible than ever before. Dalit leaders and parties feel free to make alliances that may not have been informed by the political and ideological aspirations of Dalit people.

Dalit politics today is in search of its institutionalization. Is it not a depoliticization of politics itself? This happens partly because there is no social vigilance that could be sustained through a robust political movement. Therefore, the central question of Dalit politics today is the fast vanishing organic link between the robust movement and its corresponding purposive politics. What one finds instead is disproportionate emphasis on electoral politics and not the politics of opposition and interrogation. Dalit politics today has become rudderless and lost its real purpose in a hail of claims and counter claims that are launched at it from both within and outside the Dalit platform. Those who masquerade as the champions of Dalit cause have been propagating with
impurity their hideous perspective that serves nobody else but themselves. It is merely cunning that they deploy to use Dalit cause for personal ends. In fact, there is complete lack of social vigilance among the common Dalit masses whose practical reason is used by these self-appointed Dalit as well as non-Dalit 'messiahs'. Dalit politics today suffers from double malice. First, it does not demand a serious intellectual or political investment into the project of creating new categories (about which we will talk later) that would capture its political essence in its volatile complexity. Second, such politics lacks moral capacity to recognize the categorized (which will be discussed later) that played historic role in orienting Dalit politics. Such politics, instead of giving these categories their due, show impatience with the letter. In view of the sway of post structuralist politics of writings on the wall and the culture of larger than life projections, the otherwise sturdy-looking old methods followed by movements in the past look to feeble to defined the categories that are historically constituted, sociologically arrived at and politically articulated. These new kinds of politics have a stifling impact on the arena of movements without generating space for new issues that have sprung forth as a result of arrival of globalization and the open economy system.

There are only a few political personalities and parties to discuss the pathetic condition of the Dalits in contemporary India. Interestingly, truly speaking, there is no political party except Bahujan Samaj Part (BSP) that has any Dalit leader of repute and mass following who can raise these issues in their respective parties. According to 'Reference Handbook, general Elections 2004' released by press information bureau, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting of India, there are in all seven national parties, forty state parties, and about hundred and ten registered (unrecognized) political parties in India. The irony, however, is that most of the national and state parties contest from the reserved seats for the Dalits and add them in their kitty to grab the power. Not only that time and again they boast that as they have won the highest number of reserved seats they are their true representatives as well as which is nothing but a force.
Congress and the Dalits

That the congress party represents a liberal democratic political ideology is true, but it is also true that the congress which used to have a bulk of the Dalit leaders and also the reserved seats for parliament before the emergence of BJP and BSP has not even one Dalit leader today who has a national or even regional following. Gone are the days when late Jagjivan Ram used to be the Dalit icon in congress and congress bagged most of the reserved seats for the Dalits and their votes in its kitty without much effort. Meera Kumar daughter of Jagjivan Ram has just shifted her base from Delhi to Bihar where she is facing the overpowering personality of Ram Vilas Paswan. Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, also unrepresented by any Dalit leader from congress. This means the cow belt, which accounts for 187 parliamentary constituencies in general and 35 of the reserved constituencies has no effective representative of the Dalit in the political sphere. In Maharashtra congress (I) is trying to ride on the back of Republican party of India and Sushil Kumar Sindhe (a Dalit) but here also it is facing a stiff challenge. The Republican Party of India which is now fragmented in number of fractions is being led by Dalit leaders like Prakash Ambedkar the grandson of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, R.S. Gavai, Ramdash Athawle, Jogendra Kawade etc., is weakening day by day. Though these political parties project themselves as independent Dalit political parties, they have no mass following in the state.⁴ In the words of Kancha Ilaiah

_The relationship between an 'upper' caste man and a Dalit Bahujan caste man within the congress was like that between Ram and hanuman. It is common knowledge that Hanuman was South Indian Dalit who joined the imperial army of Rama to fight against the South Indian nationalist ruler – Ravana. Hanuman worked day is and day out in the interest of ‘Ramarajya’ (an anti-Dalit bahujan and anti-

⁴ Kumar, Vived, 2006, India’s Roaring Revolution: Dalit Assertion and New Horizons, Delhi: Gagandeep Publicatoins, pp. 197-200
women kingdom), yet his place in the administration was always marginal and subservient. Similarly, all the Dalit bahujan activists who joined the congress party were given subservient places in the party hierarchy.  

Kancha Ilaiah argues that the main task of the Dalit Bahujan activists was to mobilize the masses, and organize ‘praise melas’ of ‘upper’ caste congress leaders in whose names they would carry the party flag. More so, they would organize photographers to publicize the ‘images’ of the ‘upper’ caste leaders. The aim of an average ‘upper’ caste congress leader would be to would every Dalit bahujan into a trustworthy Hanuman. The Dalit bahujans, who by imitating them were trying to get assimilated into this were never allowed to be equal partners. The establishment of a liberal democratic party like the congress which has ruled this country for nearly fifty years, has not improved unequal caste relations and the gap between Hindu ‘upper’ castes and the non-Hindu Dalit bahujans within the party ranks has never been bridged. The relationship always remained antagonistic and distrustful and caste distinction continue to operate.

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BJP and the Dalits

Baharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on the other hand also has the same status as the congress in terms of the effective Dalit leader who has any mass following. Bhartiya Janata Party's the Bangaru Laxman experiment to attract Dalits towards the party miserably failed with his unceremonious ouster after Tehelka episode. The elevation of Suraj Bhan, the Dalit leader from Haryana first to the post of governor of Uttar Pradesh and then his shifting to the same post to smaller state of Himachal Pradesh also angered the Dalits. Today he is totally neglected in the party without any function. The same is the position of veteran Ambedkarite turned shaffornite Sangh Priya Gantam who became vice – president of BJP and was also a cabinet minister but he can not raise any voice for the plight of the Dalits. BJP was hoping to cross the river in U.P with the help of BSP but in the last general election that also failed. So, BJP has debunked the Dalit agenda and is hoping to align with the Other Backward Castes instead of Dalit.6

Left parties and the Dalits

The condition of the Dalits in the left parties are even worse than that in the congress and BJP. In left parties also as in other parties, the Brahmins who always remained brutal towards the masses, are the leaders, while the cadre base of the party is from the Dalit castes. All over the country, the Brahmin population has become leaders in all spheres of socio political life. They never remained part of the masses. Thus even the communist parties have started functioning in two separate camps the 'upper' caste leader camp and the Dalits cadre camp. Kancha Ilaish draws a distinction between the two. He writes:

\[\text{in reality the Dalit bahujan masses and the communist leadership remained distinctly different in three ways: (i)}\]

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6 Kumar Vivek., p. 200
the communist leadership came from the 'upper' caste mainly from Brahmins; (ii) they remained Hindu in day-to-day life styles; and (iii) by and large the masses were economically poor but the leaders came from relatively wealthy backgrounds. The masses came from Dalit bahujan castes, and these castes never found an equal place in the leadership structures.⁷

The leftist parties dominate West Bengal where Dalits constitute approximately 24 percent of total population of the state. Here the left coalition grabs all the eight seats for the Dalits but we cannot name a single leaders who represents the Dalits there. In fact, their representation in the state cabinet is a testimony to the fact that how they have been denied their representation and today Dalits are devoid of any Dalit leader of repute and mass following in the state. Hence one can argue that the leftist never groomed any leadership among the Dalits though they reaped good harvest of their others. Further, though Dalits constitute 24 percent of the total population of West Bengal but their representation is meager 1.5 percent only. One can imagine the gap between the total population of Dalits and their representation as Atul Kohli rightly observes: "In the case of governments led by the communist party of India (Marxist) between 1977 and 1982 there were even more Brahmins than in the congress governments, over 35 percent; the number of Kayasthas (31 percent) and Vaishyas (23 percent) was almost the same as in the congress governments, while scheduled caste representation was marginally lower at 1.5 percent." ⁸

Other state parties and the Dalits

DMK, ADMK, AD, TDP, SP, BJD, RJD, SAD, AGP, INLD are some of the state political parties which have ruled the different states at different point in

⁷ Kumar Vivek., P.200.
time but here also there is lack of effective Dalit leadership. We cannot name a single leader, who has any voice in their respective political parties or they have any mass following. It is difficult to understand why south India which has witnessed the anti-brahmin movement, assertion of erstwhile Shudra castes has failed to produce any Dalit leader an national level. In Orissa, Biju Janata Dal (BJD) which is in power for more than five years has not taken any special interest in developing a separate Dalit agenda and thereby a Dalit leadership. Rashtriya Jantha Dal (RJD) in another such state party which though swears for being the saviour of Dalits has neglected the Dalit issues and Dalit leaders. Of Late RJD is projecting Sanjay Paswan as a Dalit leader in the party by elevating him to the post of party's spokesperson. The highest percentage of Dalit population resides in Punjabi i.e. 28 percent yet Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) or Akali Dal has no representation of Dalits in its leadership either at the state level or the national leve.\(^9\)

**Bahujan Samaj Party and the Dalits**

Under the above mentioned circumstances of blatant neglect of issues and leaders of one fourth of Indian population, political space was available for a political party to come and take the leadership excluding of the Dalits in the country. This could happen only if a political party led and dominated by Dalits was to be established at the national scene. Scheduled Caste Federation (1942), Republican Party of India (1957), Dalit Panthers (1970s) were political parties led and dominated by the Dalits. They made some progress to uplift the Dalits and sowed the seeds of independent Dalit assertion in the realms of political power. But they could not go beyond a point.

On the 14\(^{th}\) April 1984, there emerged a political party with a name of Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) which had its exclusive agenda for the Dalits and also had its core base among them. With short span of time. BSP has become

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\(^9\) Kumar, Vivek, pp.201-202.
the first political party led and dominated by the Dalits to be a national political party. The emergence of the BSP has been an important milestone toward the goal of achieving an autonomous Dalit political identity. The swearing in of Mayawati, a Dalit woman, as Chief Minister of the state of Uttar Pradesh – India’s most politically important state, supplying the largest number of legislators to the national assembly – is an event whose importance cannot be exaggerated. In a political dispensation, controlled until recently almost entirely by hereditary landlords or westernized upper castes, the rise of India’s plebian politicians is nothing short of revolutionary. The consistent rise in the vote share of the BSP in Uttar Pradesh is indicative of the rising awareness of political autonomy, although this electoral phenomenon remains largely limited to north India.

The BSP remains the single most successful Dalit political formation at the national level. Its success is in contrast to the history of the Dalit Panthers. The Panthers – who borrowed their name from the Black Panthers in the United States – emerged in 1972, comprised mainly of poets and writers. While the Panthers contributed a great deal of revolutionary literature and campaigned against several crimes against Dalits, within a few years the movement splintered and became co-opted, joining various government committees and panels. The BSP, on the other hand, has build strong grassroots links with rural areas. BSP politicians prefer to use the term “bahujan samaj” or ‘society of the backward’ rather than Dalit in their attempt to build broader based electoral alliances with other backward castes.

The BSP revolution, however, suffer from several contradictions. The party has often been accused of creating a new ‘power elite’ and patronage networks among Dalits. The most significant criticism made of the BSP, predominantly by the world of Dalit intellectuals, is that at the level of political categories the BSP is suffering from the ‘rushing’ mode through its sudden transmutation of ‘Bahujan’ into ‘Sarvajan’. The second most significant criticism made of the BSP is that it has on many occasional allied with the Hindu
nationalist Bhartiya anta Party (BJP). The reason being that since the BJP’s identify is that of a party of high caste Hindus, this alliance stands in direct contravention of Ambedkar’s searing rejection of Hinduism and upper castes.

The fact that the BSP politics has displayed an element of ‘rushing’ mode through its sudden transmutation of Bahujan into ‘Sarvajan’ and thus forced the revision of categories that existed and oriented Dalit politics in the past has drawn a long debate amongst the Dalit intelligentsia group. The idea of rushing mode has provoked scores of questions in the minds of the movement -artists and intellectuals. The question that one needs to address is, does BSP have a second moral / theoretical reason to suggest this revision. Or is it motivated by pragmatic reasons to transmute the Dalit category into established categories that are given and hence universal? Do the categories suggested by BSP politics correspond to the general purpose and ideals of the people or are they motivated by some particular purpose? The attempt to drag Dalit politics after the categories that belong to ‘other’ discourse has implication for the relevance of Ambedkarism. Such attempts tend to show impatience with categories that Ambedkar used for taking Dalit politics from particular to universal. If Ambedkarism embodies the general aspirations of not only the Dalits but also of the larger marginalized masses, then can one propose ruthless revision of his thought and politics? What is the soundness of the ground on which such revision that is implicitly suggested by the contemporary Dalit leaders including BSP stands? Should Dalit politics create space for concepts like Brahmanism and Manuwad? To what extent should Dalit politics render its conceptual space open so as to accommodate these categories that were considered to be not just alien but deeply dangerous? If accommodated, will these categories be complementary to Dalit revolutionary politics or would they erode the Dalit space from within? These are the questions that need to be addressed.10

10 Seth., P.34.
The biggest challenge facing the Dalit politics- and generally, the national politics- today is about bridging the gap between the movement politics of discourse (from Durban to Diversity) and the Dalit party politics of power from Kanshi Ram to Mayawati. The contemporary Dalit situation is so vastly different from what it was at the time of Independence that the kind of movements and strategies which need to be deployed to cope with this changed situation cannot be derived entirely and mechanically, from Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s political thinking and experience. His social and political philosophy, without doubt, is of great lasting value, but the terms of discourse and categories of political practice he developed – say, in dealing with Gandhi, the left the upper-caste Hindus and the religious minorities may not help us equally well today. The Dalit situation in the current context needs to be problematized. The short point is if we give up our old, idle habits of finding quick fix solutions to our problems we will see that some thoughts and practices of our great leaders do not serve us as well as they did in the past; they need to be invested with new meanings and interpretations. Thus, though many old terms of debate and controversies may continue to be used today in the context of Dalit movements, the universe of discourse has changed.¹¹

Prof. D.L. Seth¹² argues that from the time of the independence movement (say, since 1920’s till upto early 1990s the Dalit discourse and politics, as also that of the OBCs, and the religious minorities, were all articulated with reference to the then existing, active and intervening authority of a ‘third party’, supposedly a neutral arbitrator of all inter-community disputes – the British rulers. He further argues that the ‘third party’ arbitrator formally ceased to exist in 1949 when the constitution came into force. He points out the fact that while the secular-democratic state rooted in the constitution has replaced the colonial state, it has yet not been able to fill the void created by the eclipse of the ‘third party’ for the communities that have been historically wronged and justly aggrieved except perhaps for the OBC among them. Consequently, what is

¹¹ Ibid., P.34.
¹² Ibid., 34-35.
happening today is that the contemporary politics of Dalits, as also of the religious minorities, often seem to incarnate the neutrality and legitimacy of the missing. Third party in some trans-national authority located in some other nation-state of the world, or in an ephemerally and episodically existing global civil society, or in some of its transient forums. For, the already emaciated world organization of the United Nations and its agencies, being inter-governmental in its constitution, is reluctant, if not incapable, to play any significant interventionalist ‘third party’ role in the affairs of a particular nation state. This situation has resulted in privileging a certain kind of intellectualized Dalit politics usually seeking global forums for articulation and redressal of problems facing the Dalits. This politics can best be described as a pure politics of discourse, detached from and running parallel to the actual politics of power. The actual politics of power operate in the arenas of elections, parties, legislatures as well as in the micro struggles and movements of Dalits at the grassroots.

The changing reality of caste politics can be best grasped by mapping the shifting categories within the Dalit political discourse. Dalit leader are moving away from Dalit to Bahujan and now through Bahujan to ‘Sarvajan’ (meaning all without any discrimination). Such a shift suggests a new language of Dalit – Bahujan politics in North India. The language of Dalit political discourse seems to have acquired a multiple departure from the mainstream thinking of post-structuralism and post modernism, thus offering an illusion of a third political discourse seeking autonomy from the Dalit life world in the sense that it is taking place well outside the dreams and issues of common Dalits of the country. While offering universal, this language is tentative and contingent. The point to be noted here is that by trying to universalize the petit bourgeois dream as the dream of every Dalit, this new language is seeking to project the particular as the Universal. This rushing to the universal has implication for the Dalit categories that are historically arrived at the politically constituted. First, the BSP politics does not ask for the revision of the category of Dalit, but goes for its sudden rejection. Similarly, it does not go for the modification of the category of Bahujan.
Instead it seeds to ensure the latter into ‘Sarvajan’ without any consideration for the historical role that this category has played in consolidating the Dalit Bahujan solidarity. This rushing to ‘Sarvajan’ thus denies the impact that Dalit Bahujan have created on Dalit parties and on dalit politics. These concepts did correspond to the general purpose of the Dalit Bahujan masses. One is not sure, whether the category of ‘Sarvajan’ would correspond to the general purpose of Dalit Bahujan. It might very well correspond to the specific interest of the BSP leaders and the leaders from the ‘Sarvajan’. ‘Sarvajan’ no doubt initiates a more open discourse thus converting politics as a limited, adjective process of mutual accommodation. Prof. Gopal guru\textsuperscript{13} argues that these seem to be four contexts that can explain this regressive shift in the Dalit Language in recent times. First, the decline of the congress hegemony and lack of an alternative political hegemony has released Dalit politics from constraining paternalism, allowing it to make convenient electoral moves. The political salience of the numerical strength of chamars of UP for instance, makes it necessary of them to forge alliance with other castes. Within the purity pollution framework, the OBCs would be assumed to be their natural allias but one finds the BSP willing to join hands with the Bharatiya Janata Party rather than with Mulayam Singh’s Samajwadi Party. Thus at the level of political categories, one finds the BSP suffering from the ‘rushing’ mode through its sudden transmutation of Bahujan into Sarvajan. Secondly, this new language has found its base only in the northern part of country. There are different historical and ideological reasons that can explain this. This ideological inconsistent language looks attractive precisely for the electoral success of Dalits in North. India that could not be replicated and achieved by Dalits in the other regions. In view of this ‘spectacular political advance’, normative and moral objection to pragmatist politics appears to be stupid to the supporters of such pragmatism. Thirdly, the new language can operate freely in the absence of any powerful left alternative in these regions where it finds its support base. Finally, the NGO is of Dalit politics which is trying to decide the political agenda of the

\textsuperscript{13} Gopal Guru, pp.27-28.
Dalits, has denied the political agenda of the Dalits, has denied the Dalit political discourse and authenticity.

Prof. Gopal Guru is also of the opinion that the new language reflects primarily two moments of its shifts from the particular to the universal. The journey undertaken by some of the prominent Dalit leaders from their particular cultural situation to the universal is being traversed at great speed, almost overnight. Their advice to the Dalit masses is to merge and forfeit their cultural symbol of the elephant for the new political avatars of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. This ontological blindness is being touted around without realizing its devastating implications for the history, present and future of Dalit emancipatory politics. Such a great a such rush denies the Dalits their history – where Ambedkar had selected haathi (elephant) as a symbol of strength and unshakable confidence. This journey to the ‘Sarvajan’ is sudden for another reason also – an alliance with the ‘Sarvajan’ is suggested without exhausting the option of Bahujan that was invented by the BSP only the other day. In this great rush, Bahujan is dying an unceremonious, unheroic death at the hands of the BSP. Secondly, this jump from Bahujan to ‘Sarvajan’ or from Pochamma to Teen Murthi, seems to indicate that the Dalit leaders are rushing towards the universal without resolving the material contradictions that necessarily sustain the cultural and caste tensions between the haathi and the Teen Murthi or Bahujan and ‘Sarvajan’ at the local level.

However, the emergence of BSP politics in north India has fascinated social activists and political observers, and intellectuals. It looks fascinating to them at least for two important reasons. First, this kind of politics to begin with emerges as an autonomous movement outside the mainstream political parties. This could be a welcome development in as much as it assigns authenticity to Dalit consistency. It is for this reason the emergence of BSP politics was applauded because it gained for the Dalits the consciousness of power if not

14 Ibid., p.28.
social justice to them. Second, it has been considered unlike other dalit politics to be very dynamic, open and accommodative and holds promise to move beyond its own dalit constituency.

As far as the direction of contemporary dalit politics is concerned, there are three levels at which the contemporary dalit politics can be intervened and interfered. One is the search for new and more accommodative categories and alliances. The dalit has to critically and collectively claim the categories that belong to the same logical class of emancipation. For example, the dalit should claim the categories of secularism and nationalism and the non-dalit should associate themselves with the categories like dignity and self respect. Secondly, Dalits and non-dalits should go for pedagogy of creating new theory of politics that would save the dalit political practice from being caricatured by the dominant forces that have stake in discrediting and running down dalit politics just because somebody gives them a chance to do so. The new pedagogy of theory should give the Dalits the inner strength to resist any sudden transmutation of genuine categories into an alien category like the 'Sarvajan'. Thirdly, the issue of elimination of the para-politics of the NGOs must be dealt with seriously. There is a need to minimize the influence of the NGOs over categories that have a potential to grow a new and be expansive and finally, the alliance politics has to be a balance between concern and anger. The counter aim of the dalits and their friends in alliance politics should be a balanced recipe of legitimate anger and concern.

Literary Struggles in Dalit Writings

Dalit literature / literacy discourse is not recognized as full-fledged marketable 'national' literature. Literary historians and theorists concerned with Indian literature written in the regional languages as well as English or Hindi or any other languages have generally failed so far to place and to deal with the
implications of Dalit literature, largely because it does not fit into their theoretical frameworks. Indian literary history and theory, as well as the teaching of Indian literatures, are spectacularly silent about Dalit literature. Yet, Dalit cultural and critical productions make a significant critical intervention in the thinking and writing about Indian society, history, culture and literature.

While Dalit literature has been recognized as a field of rich academic possibilities by the Indian academia, it is interesting to note that most often—even within the higher academic echelons Dalit literature has been improblematically equated with Maharashtrian Dalit literature especially that which is available in easily consumable translated anthologies. This situation however, is changing now as English translations of Marathi, Telegu, Tamil, Kannada, Hindi, Punjabi and Oriya dalit literatures are becoming available. The premise seems to be that unless this discourse and its texts are made ‘accessible’ to the dominant Indian literature in English discourse/market through translation and commodification, its protest and substance will not easily leave the domain of an ethnic soliloquy by the subaltern consistency, of the subaltern consistency and for it. For academic research and study, the subaltern voice is variously medicated, appropriated, co-opted, accommodated and commodified. Consider for example Viramma: Life of an Untouchable\textsuperscript{15} which is the result of a tortuous pathway of mediation. It is the outcome of ten years of ethno musicological research by Josiane Racine who spoke to Viramma in Tamil, worked with taped oral material to structure a written (auto) biography in French which was then translated into English by will Hobson under UNESCO sponsorship. However, in this text made available by this complicated process of mediation, translation and possible transcreation, among the many things admitted to have been lost is the texture of an oral culture and the nuanced but sociology very significant dialect use of incorrect. Tamil stigmatized as a ‘half-language’.

There is no denying the fact that the dalit 'predicament' too finds greater publicity when mediated represented or incorporated in the texts of mainstream non-dalit writes for example, be they Mahashweta Devi, Premchand, Mulk Raj Anand, Gail Omvedt or Arundhati Roy. However, I would like to bring in here Sharan Kumar Limbale who uses the term 'reformist-liberalism' to describe the politics of Dalits' inclusion in the Brahmanical literature of what he calls modern and contemporary periods. In his option in these periods, this literature moved from erasure to containment. He argues that unable to imagine the untouchable other out of existence, Brahmanical literature now sought to confine it within a discourse marked by 'sympathy' and 'comparison'. There was no place for Dalits in the content of this literature. The space that they occupied outside the village in real life was erased in the world of literature. Thus Limbale argues that if society ensured its purity by relegating the untouchable to a limited space, literature went a step further. It ensured that the untouchable would not pollute its world even by touching that space. In Limbale's telling, upper caste Hindu society was not content with avoiding the Dalits in its literature. It also made sure that Dalits could not speak in the tongue of the upper caste. It would appear that the upper caste Hindus achieved in literature what they could not in real life, namely, a complete silencing, if not erasure of the untouchable.

Sharan Kumar Limbale further adds that this erasure was not confined to the literature and culture alone. A review of Indian literary history would show that the untouchable was absent from Sanskrit and other regional literatures as well. For example, of three randomly picked collection of essays on Indian literatures and culture written over twenty years, only one-Hogan and Pandit's. Literary India-contains one essay dealing with caste, and that too, in a modern novel, Rabindranath Tagore's Gora. The untouchable other was now visible, but only in the context of a discourse of 'sympathy' and 'compassion'. Dalits were still not speaking subjects; they were not people who can not make their own decisions take action. In Mulk Raj Anand's novel, untouchable, for example, the

16 Limbale, Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature.
protagonist, Bakha, instead of opting for radical action, submits to Gandhi's pacifism, and is thus contained.\textsuperscript{17}

Though consigned to the margins of society, and to the same tasks that kept the upper caste society pure and pollution free, Dalits, today are becoming a visible presence, and their voices have begun to break through the boundaries that hand kept them apart. But of they can no longer be kept out or erased, Brahmanical literature can certainly keep them in their place, and thus protect the purity of its space. It is these representations of Dalits by upper caste Hindu writers, rather than those created by Dalit Dalit writers themselves, which have been the basis of any discussion of issues of caste and castism in literary history and theory. Thus, even a radical critic such as Gayatri Spivak, for example, has based her entire exploration of the life experiences of Advasis or aboriginal communities, another group that has been kept outside the boundaries of the village, on the writings of the upper caste Bengali writer, Mahasweta Devi, several of whose works Spivak has translated into English.\textsuperscript{18} She makes no use of any writings by Dalits or Advasis themselves in her theorizing on subalternity.

As I have suggested earlier, contemporary Indian literary history continues to be for the most part a history of upper caste Hindu writings. Its failure to recognize the writings of Dalits creates the impression that the treatment of Dalits and Adivasis in literature is due solely to the efforts of committed and progressive upper caste Hindu and other non-Dalit writers of good will. As far as literary history is concerned. Dalit writing is, to use Limbale's characterization, a nomad\textsuperscript{19} much like the Dalits themselves dwelling outside the boundary of the literary village. Dalit literature has, today, established its own tradition with anti-caste or untouchable thinkers like Buddha, Kabir, Phule and Ambedkar as its signposts. A great deal of Dalit literature has come up in the genre of life writing.

\textsuperscript{18} See for example, Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, 'Draupadi by Mahasweta Devi, in other worlds: Essays in cultural politics.
\textsuperscript{19} Limbale, Towards an Aesthetic of Dalit Literature P.9.
Not only has there been a preponderance of Dalit autobiographies, fictional writings, too, has used the biographical autobiographical form to narrate the Dalit experience. These narratives seek to capture the authentic Dalit experience through a minute chronicling of the smallest detail of daily life in a language that, as Limbale\textsuperscript{20} terms it, is crude, impure and uncivil. It is as if, by capturing each detail, and reproducing it deliberately in a language that is the opposite of the language of upper caste literature, the Dalit literature is concerned with is not that of the life of the individual but of the community.

Methods and approaches of traditional Indian aesthetics are wholly inadequate to deal with the particularities of Dalit literature. Those associated with subaltern studies and post colonial studies have not fared any better in evaluating or theorizing about Dalit literature, being caught up in the binary framework of the colonizer and the colonized. Fredric Jameson, in his controversial essay\textsuperscript{21} proposed another way of reading the so-called third world literature. He argued that all ‘third-world texts...are to be read as...national allegories,’ and, further that ‘the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society. In a general sense, perhaps, Dalit literature accomplishes this, to the extent that the authentic experiences of the Dalit are a part and consequence of the conditions of India’s public culture and society. But can it really be said that Dalit texts are national allegories’, especially when Jameson defines the third world only in terms of its ‘experience of colonialism and imperialism?’ Yet, interestingly, even a radical critic like Aijaz Ahmad, who severely upbraided Jameson for taking this position and ignoring the fact that not all writers wrote back to the empire, being concerned, instead, about society’s internal contradictions and complexities, has had nothing to say about the role and purpose of Dalit

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid. p.12.
The most progressive leftist critics even have maintained silence to engage with Dalit literature. One reason for this may be that very little of it is available in English. Most Dalit writers work in their first language, and are only now beginning to be translated. A bigger reason is that their work not only does not fit into neat binaries, in fact, it complicates them by exposing how a subjugated society such as that of pre-independence India could, simultaneously, be a subjugating society and how, in postcolonial India, that subjugation could continue. A further complicating fact is that Dalit writers and intellectuals do not fit clear ideological categories. Being Dalit centric, these writers and intellectuals have reacted vehemently against any attempt that seemed designed to dilute the Dalit cause.

As far as the development of Dalit literature is concerned, a variety of opinions has been put forward by a number of critics in this respect. It has been said that there is a need to search for and build literary tradition that will have a positive and inspirational impact. Some have expressed the view that, alongside Dalit literature, a body of intellectual literature should also be created. Yet others have felt the necessity to undertake a clear analysis of the emerging tendencies in Dalit literature. And there are those who have demanded that Dalit literature be evaluated as literature, with attention being paid to its characteristics and shortcomings. Finally, critics have looked for the possibility of an independent aesthetics of Dalit literature on the basis of clues derived from an examination of actual literary creations.

Today, dalits claim a stake, both in knowledge and the power that its serves more strongly than ever before. Right from the nineteenth century, dalit discourses have emerged as challenges to the Brahmanic national universal with distinct and dissenting imageries of future and the quotidian, the community and the nation. A programme of Dalit studies that aspires to be emancipatory, seeks to challenge and change the every edifice of social sciences. In its efforts it tries

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to resemble the de-brahmanisation of knowledge. At present Dalit Studies attempts to intervene in the pedagogic discourses of the system of higher education and contemporary socio-political discourses at large in order to sensitize them to the issues of the marginalized sections of society. The main principle behind the venture is to attempt to 'de-normalize' caste as the lasting category of Indian society that gets case acceptance in the categories of Indian social sciences, either in the form of universal or national. It is to retrieve and sustain the rational emancipatory articulation of such discourses in the course of reconstruction. The fact that the meanings and experiences of caste have fundamentally changed, necessitates a relook at contemporary discourses with the perspective of changing experiences of Dalits. There have been many efforts, taken by several Indian universities, to establish Dalit studies as a new perspective to reread the pedagogic discourses of higher education and as a critique cum restructuring of existing disciplines in social sciences and humanities. The very resistance of establishment of Dalit studies as an independent mode of knowledge, an autonomous discipline within the larger framework of social science, is a kind of politics from above within the field of social science. In the discipline of sociology, there hand been always a tendency to naturalize critical issues like caste system because of western and Brahmanic dominance of knowledge. The same is the case of history. The way historiography is developed in India is replete with mere historicism. One finds total absence of critical issues like caste in the Indian historiography caste seemed to be gift to the discipline of sociology. Besides one finds subaltern knowledge in the field of history being subjugated and marginalized under dominant discourses. In the field of literature also the dominant knowledge had been the western classics rather than Indian writings, which has always remained in the margins of English literature in India. The establishment of Dalit studies as a new perspective, however, should not be treated as a mere body of knowledge, rather there is a need to construct a new perspective that cuts across all disciplines in the social sciences and Humanities to comprehend the Indian reality. In the present context, Dalit studies poses imminent danger of
ghettoisation and appropriation. The post colonial condition characterized by western dominance of knowledge leaves almost no space to establish dalit studies as a separate discipline. This critically of the post-colonial condition offers possibilities for developing a new perspective, a new less through which we can look at different disciplines within the social science field rather than the establishment of Dalit studies as a separate discipline within the wider framework one needs to identify, define and develop the very structure of knowledge?

The recovery of history and culture of dalits by undoing the hegemony of the dominant knowledge system and preparing enough ground for understanding the history of suffering of marginalized groups and from this point critiquing the dominant system could be the most appropriate way of understanding the dalit structure of knowledge. One effort in this regard will be looking critically at the anti-colonial movement as a kind of instrument to appropriate the movements from below. This rereading of the text needs to capture the inter-subjectivity of the concrete. In terms of praxis, Dalit studies needs to focus on teaching the students by promoting critical thinking and self-reliance as an alternative to the destructive ‘guru tradition’ which leaders such as Ambedkar and Phule had criticized so thoroughly.

It is well known fact that in the everyday life of Dalits poverty looms large beyond which the marginal communities fail to see. They become a commodity in terms of their labour power in the eyes of the masses and bodies in circulation in a capitalist system. Therefore, any effort vying for their effective participation in the reconstruction of their knowledge system needs to liberate first from the clasps of poverty, under the capitalist system they have undergone painful separation of them from their means of production. They have lost their lands and crafts, the pivot of their life. Dalit studies alone cannot take the responsibility of improving material condition of the dalits. There are various efforts being undertaken in the government and non-governmental fronts to uplift the material conditions of the dalits. However, dalit upliftment or dalit empowerment cannot be

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a linear and static process since the question is also related to the psyche of the mainstream. The very project of Brahmanic division of labour in knowledge production left no space for marginal communities to learn their history, art and culture.

There have been exchange of views, ideas, and discussions towards establishing a dalit studies or dalit respective in various disciplines of social sciences. One prominent view in this regard is that science the marginal people are the frontier people, the making of frontier curriculum needs to be carefully balanced process building theoretical and practical skills. While building up curriculum for Dalit studies there is need to emphasize upon the development of organic link between academics, intellectuals, student communities, organizations working at the grassroots level and communities. There is a greater need for exchanges of ideas and views, discussions and debates to concretize the dalit perspective of social sciences between academicians, bureaucrats, planners non governmental organizations working at grassroots levels, students and communities to further the effort in this regard.

Aboriginal politics in Australia

Since 1788 when the British claimed sovereignty over Australia and colonized the land as ‘terra nullius’, the aboriginal people have suffered the consequences of the ‘terra nullius’ theory, or assumption and consequently have been subject to grave consequently have been subjected to grave injustices. Colonization decimated the aboriginal population, fragmented the indigenous people and their cultures and challenged their identity and survival. In the face of it aboriginal people had to adapt changes occurred to ensure their survival as a people. They had to undergo and bear the brunts of excruciatingly legislations and policies such as segregation, isolation, assimilation and integration. Thus, aboriginal societies which had known only gradual and minimal change over their long histories suffered sudden and momentous changes with the advent of

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English colonial settlement, or invasion since 1788. Broome maintains that many of the groups subject to the initial impact of settlement were wiped from the face of the land by killings, the introduction of new diseases and the loss of will as they were driven from lands which had been central to their way of life. The dispossession of the land was justified by emerging western theories culminating in social Darwinism, which assumed that earlier forms of social organization would be replaced inevitably by more progressive and more highly developed forms. Other groups in remote regions had more time to adjust to this impact and did not face the same pressure of invasion. They were able to survive despite a severe decline in population. Colonial authorities revised their politics for administering the surviving groups according to changing ideologies, the demands of the dominant population and the resistance of the groups to the policies. Broome refer to the twin objectives in early policies of civilizing and Christianizing the aborigines. As adherence to traditional beliefs and practices were seen as inimical to the process of civilizing these was pressure to discard them.

In the original Australian constitution (1900) the only reference to Aboriginal people was one of exclusion. Aboriginal people were referred to in number of state acts and the common wealth’s exclusion from any responsibility towards aboriginal people only served to confuse the status of aboriginal people and alienate them from aspects of Australian life. Aboriginal people had no citizenship under British law and were thought to be doomed. The 1900 constitution act resulted in Aboriginal resulted in aboriginal people being excluded from some commonwealth services and programs until the seventies. This had the effect of making Aboriginal people invisible to most Australians within society. Though the constitution excluded. Aboriginal people from being counted as citizens some Aboriginal men served as soldiers in the wars. Upon

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24 Ibid. p.31.
their return to Australia they were no longer prepared to be treated as less than human and started to discuss the possibility of becoming organized and asserting their citizenship rights and entitlement to land. Most Australians have had limited personal exposure to Aboriginal people or to studies which show Aboriginal people in a favourable light. Consequently, attitudes towards Aboriginal people are based on very little knowledge, or are inaccurate because of over generalization. The Australian education system contributed to misconceptions by the use of ill informed text books, the Victorian Education Department's series of readers, dating from 1927 and used until the 1960s are an example. Many books on Australian history referred to Aborigines only in passing or briefly in the first chapter. Professor Noel Loos in 1977 wrote that "the history of frontier contact between white settlers and Aboriginals in Australia had been glossed over." He noted the tendency to treat aboriginal Australia as an episode in early Australian history. Loos also noted that: the few ethno historians who have researched in the area have understandably concentrated on the destruction of the pre-existing or traditional Aboriginal society. The 'domestic race' theory has thus had its effect on historians, who marched the survivors from the battlefields and the disease ridden 'blacks' cramps to the concentration camps of the reserves, out of Australian society and its history.

The representation of Aboriginal people in early texts on Australian history has been categorized in the following ways as suggested by spalding:

(i) The colonial presumption – Where aboriginal people are represented as being appropriate subjects for colonization and civilization

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29 Ibid, p.510.
(ii) Inadequate treatment – A failure to take account of Aboriginal people’s presence in Australian history and to mention Aboriginal dimensions only in passing.

(iii) Stereotypes and derogatory concepts- Nations of superiority expressed in stereotypes such as childlike, simple, savage and primitive.

(iv) The exotic stress – Draws attention to superficial differences but infers group’s inferiority through words such as corroboree, cannibal, polygamy and bone pointing.

(v) Objects for study and discussion – References such as they, them, these people aligned with physical descriptions emphasizing stereotypes such as medium stature, wiry hair, thick lips, prominent lower jaw and broad nose.

(vi) Distortion and euphemism – where Australian history begins in 1788, for example, cook discovered Australia, first settled, the Aboriginal problem, and pioneers.

There is no doubt that such images support the argument that the new settlers were members of a superior culture and thus their acquisition of the ‘empty’ land would lead to the creation of a superior nation. This argument was further strengthened by stereotyping Aboriginal people as "simple, primitive, dirty, ugly and degenerate" therefore in need of “progress, advancement and uplift.”

A watershed in the mainstream theorizing with relation to the world of Aborigines was marked by an epoch-making referendum held throughout the commonwealth of Australia in 1967. As a result of the referendum, the commonwealth government was given power, formerly held by the states, to...

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legislate for the welfare of Aboriginal people. Mary Edmunds' study\textsuperscript{31} of the opinion, the media and attitudes towards Aboriginal people refers to the 1967 Referendum where an impressive 90.77% of electors voted to change the constitution. She has suggested that this result has been interpreted by some commentators as support for Aboriginal people and recognition that there needed to be a change in the status of aboriginal people's quality of life.

By the 1950's assimilation had become official policy for all of Australia. For the first time, the states gathered to discuss the 'Aboriginal problem'. In 1951 Hasluck, then Minister for Territories, reported to parliament that the Native Welfare Conference held in Canberra.

\ldots agreed that assimilation is the objective of native welfare measures. Assimilation means, in practical terms, that, in the course of time, it is expected that all persons of Aboriginal blood or mixed blood in Australia will live like White Australians do.\textsuperscript{32}

The policy of assimilation, spelled out by Hasluck in 1951, was confirmed in 1963 when a further conference of commonwealth and state Ministers was held in Darwin and resulted in a more detailed statement on the meaning of the policy of assimilation. The statement went on to acknowledge the conflict between such a policy and the existing legislation referring to Aborigines. It adverted to the fact that there was specific (restrictive) legislation for Aborigines and noted the 'rather loose use of the term 'citizenship', as Aboriginal people in most states were not permitted to vote at that time which means Aboriginal people in 1963, in most states, were not entitled to vote. As late as 1964, Beazley, the member for Fremantle, was pleading for all commonwealth instrumentalities, including the armed services, to pay Aborigines employed by

\textsuperscript{31} Edmunds, Mary, 1987. \textit{Opinion, Ideology and Practice or do Public Attitudes Exist Rebutting the Myths}. Canberra: AGPS.

them a wage at least equivalent to the award rate as fixed by the Arbitration commission for worker similarly employed who was covered by awards. Other white voices supported Beazley’s pleas for the injustices suffered by Aboriginal people to be redressed; there was also a growing insistence on the part of the aboriginal people to have their voice heard. Once policies of assimilation of Aborigines were projected, and their status as citizens having some rights and some status was acknowledged (if only at the level of rhetoric), a change had to be made in the conceptual machinery seen as appropriate for their control by the dominant group. Aboriginal people became eligible for a form of control different from that of inhalation. A new conceptualization of Aboriginal identity by the white world was to be articulated at the Federal level. Whereas, until the mid-1960’s, governments had created differences between white society and Aborigines, erecting boundaries to exclude the latter, now differences could not be tolerated. Formerly, the total world of meaning of Aboriginal people was inhalated; in changed circumstances, operating under a policy of assimilation, Aboriginal people were to be recognized as citizens. If, however, they attempted to assert their rights as ‘human beings’, such activity called into question the theory and practice, the world of meaning of the dominant group, and could not be tolerated. ‘Political’ activity of Aboriginal people (that is, activity to bring about change in their circumstances) had to be nihilated; while at the same time, as individuals, Aboriginal people were to be assimilated.

In 1967, a referendum addressed to the people of Australia relating to the transfer of responsibility concerning Aboriginal Affairs from the states to the Federal sphere was supported. Aborigines were no longer to be segregated, but were to be contained by becoming part of a family. However, as a family has rights by ascription, not by achievement the seeking of rights by Aboriginal people in the political arena demonstrated clearly that, over a period of two hundred years, such rights had been denied by mainstream society. It was on affront to white society for Aboriginal people to demonstrate this openly by
claiming such rights. The incorporation of Aborigines into mainstream society was predicated upon the nihilation of the world of meaning of Aborigines.

A newly elected labour government set Aboriginal affairs on an entirely new path. Rowell\textsuperscript{33} saw the policies of this government as the most daring and positive innovations of any Australian government. For the first time, there was a move away from policies aimed at the control and containment of the Aboriginal people towards policies requiring consultation and negotiation. A new era had begun where in Aboriginal people were seen as adults who had opinions worth consulting, who had a right to autonomy over their lives. For the first time, theorizing about a positive Aboriginal identity was offered by government.

When the labour party came into power at the Federal level in 1973, policies which had been developed concerning Aboriginal affairs became official party policy. The platform statement of the federal labor party proposed legislation against all forms of discrimination and the promotion of the rights of Aborigines with regard to social services, land rights and health all new policies. For instance,

(i) Aboriginal people were to receive the standard rate of pay for employment and the same industrial protection as other Australians, a dramatic departure from practice

(ii) Educational opportunities were to be provided that were in no way inferior to those of the general community. Pre-school and adult education were to be provided as broadly as possible.

(iii) The philosophy underlying these programmes was that self-determination for the Aboriginal people, and the exercise of a greater autonomy all areas of their lives.

In one sense, such a policy was integrated into the overall thrust of labour policy, which was one of providing equality of opportunity for all those in society who were disadvantaged in one form or another. However, the policy for Aborigines went beyond this. It recognized the need for positive discrimination. For example, special provision for employment was to be provided in regions where there was a concentration of Aboriginal people. Above all, the policy recognized in positive terms the right of aboriginal people to find there identity within a Aboriginal world of meaning. Every Australian child was to be taught the history and culture of Aboriginal Australians, as an integral part of the history of Australia. The Labor party, although in office only a short time, introduced massive legislation at the commonwealth level. This legislation objected a world of meaning about Aboriginal identity, laying down guide lines which were inherited by the Liberal / National country party coaltion in 1975. The policy of self-determination initiated by the labour party was modified by the Liberal / National country party coalition to one of self-management in its platform policy of 1975. 51. There was no emphasis in this policy on the active encouragement of the politicization of Aboriginal groups.

In 1978, the globally report\(^{34}\), particularly with regard to its recommendations for education, devoted one page (.4.) to a description of the Aboriginal situation, and ignored the participation of the Aboriginal people in a multi cultural society as "the government has acknowledged the unique position of the Aboriginals by the establishment of the department of Aboriginal affairs" on Page 8, the statement was made:

*The conceptual framework for education for a multicultural society must include all groups in Australian society. There is a popular tendency to think of multicultural education as relating only to immigrants.*\(^{35}\) Mention of 'all groups' in society did not refer to Aborigines but to established Anglo-sacon groups who were to he


\(^{35}\) Ibid. p.8.
encouraged to appreciate the culture and customs of the immigrants, as is made clear by the footnote:

The government has accepted that special educational provisions are necessary for the Aboriginal group.

This statement clearly showed that Aborigines were to be given special help, placed in a unique position; at the same time they were placed outside the conceptual framework of a multicultural society. They were prevented from locating themselves within mainstream society by a boundary - from - without.

In the same year as the publication of the commonwealth Education Portfolio discussion paper (1978), a ministerial committee was appointed to make recommendations on the distribution of funds for multicultural education. This committee, in presenting its report, stated:

Australia has always been a multicultural society. Even before the European settlement the continent was inhabited by the Aboriginal groups each with their own distinct and different languages and cultures.  

With these few words, which can only be seen as pure rhetoric, Aborigines were dismissed from inclusion in the 'new' multicultural society. Thus, the situation of the Aboriginal people, their loss of culture and their loss of identity, placed them in a category quite different from that of immigrants to Australia. Aborigines recognized this; they saw their case on all counts as different from that of immigrants (They are not 'new Australians' they are the original Australians.) In a paradoxical way, the report of the ministerial committee pointed but recognized it by excluding Aborigines from further mention.

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36 Committee on Multicultural Education 1979. Education for a Multicultural Society. Reports to the schools commission: Canberra, p.5.
Aboriginal people were excluded from the conceptualization of mainstream society at the same time they were presented with an ideology of self-identification self-management; it must be judged that the party platform of the liberal governments concerning multiculturalism in the 1970's, in seeking to integrate immigrant groups in the newly emerging multicultural Australia, at the same time had the consequences of working against the integration of Aboriginal people. As, by general consensus of policy makers in multicultural Australia in the 1970's Aborigines were not part of the new multicultural "Australian" identity, the logical deduction was that they had to find a separate Aboriginal identity. The exclusion of Aborigines from the newly emerging multicultural identity was cemented by the discussions about the locus of administration for Aboriginal affairs. The department of Aboriginal affairs was initially set up to further Aboriginal interests.

The exclusion of Aboriginal people in the 1970's through a 'boundary-from-without', nevertheless paradoxically worked to the advantage of Aboriginal identity, as the possibility of disparate groups of Aboriginal people becoming more cohesive and constructing a framework for building positive identity was facilitated by policies which acted to exclude Aborigines, while 'theorizing' about them positively indeed, the very fact that mainstream theorizing about Aborigines since the 1970's has been positive has borne fruit in the 1980s as the Aboriginal people have been given, and have taken, responsibility for their own development.

The Mackay Report37 (1988) included a chapter called 'The Aborigines: a dimension to the Australian identity". This study found that the Bicentennial year, 1988 heightened the discussions about Aboriginal people and Aboriginal issues. There was an almost universal awareness that Aboriginal people believe that they are a dispossessed people and they are a disposed people and that some reparation should be made on their behalf. The study found that Australians had

37 The acceptance of this policy was reaffirmed by the Minister for Education, Senator S. Ryan, in allocating funding in 1984.
become more comfortable about discussing the Role, plight and future of Aboriginal Australians than a few years ago. The following comments indicate a belief that having achieved a free and open discussion about Aboriginal issues there is no need to do anything more:

_We all seem to be much more prepared to discuss it these days – I suppose that’s a good thing._

_There’s so much in the media about Aborigines. They have really used the Bicentenary to push their cause. At least we have listened to them. We are all much more aware than we used to be._

_I really wonder about the future for Australia, because I am convinced we haven’t come to grips with the past. I don’t think we can go on in the right way until we accept what our history really is and not glamorize it._ (Mackay, 1988).

The 1988 Mackay Report apparently indicated that there was an acceptance that Aboriginal people had grounds for complaint about their past treatment and about their status in Australian society. The 1988 Mackay Report indicated clearly that the Bicentenary has changed Aboriginal participation and representation forever indeed leaps, have been made in self-management for Aboriginal people since the 1970’s in the area of Education. The Minister for Education, senator Carrick, in announcing the establishment of the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) in 1977, outlined the role of the committee as giving advice to the department of Education on Aboriginal needs, and ways of meeting these needs, and advising the department of aboriginal affairs and indeed all instrumentalities concerned with education. The committee was to assist the department in monitoring existing programmes and researching and proposing new programmes. The committee has more than fulfilled these expectations; it has carried out a series of evaluations on existing projects (e.g.
the Black community school in Townville, the Aboriginal community college in Adelaide etc). In 1979, it researched the need for Aboriginal teachers training for Aboriginal people in response to the National Inquiry into Education; it articulated and disseminated NAEC policy in the area. It has clearly stated its Aims and Objectives for Aboriginal Education, in a widely disseminated policy statement. It researched the involvement and needs of Aboriginal people in Higher Education, and produced or comprehensive document to guide the government in the allocation of funds for the 1985-87 triennium (Aborigines and Tertiary Education – A framework for the 1985-87 triennium). Together with the commonwealth. Tertiary education commission it mounted a review of support systems for Aboriginal students in higher Education.

Aboriginal studies programs generally aim to increase understanding of Aboriginal life, activities, social organization, beliefs and values. Such courses provide an opportunity to deal with ill informed stereotypes of Aboriginal people. Intrinsic to such studies is the attempt to present a more realistic view of Australian history and endeavour to create a more tolerant and culturally plural Australia through better understanding of contemporary indigenous affairs.

Nevertheless, one issue still remains: the schools commission in 1982 advocated that Aboriginal people take full responsibility not only for policy making in education but also for funding. This has not yet happened. Clearly the 'golden rule' applies 'He who has the gold, makes the rules.' This is true of most situations in the white world; research is carried out in those areas which are funded, and therefore which, by definition, meets the needs of the funding group. Aboriginal progress towards self-management, self-determination, will always be controlled, in the final analysis, by those who control the funds.

Since the 1980s there have emerged many Aboriginal writers telling their stories and, therefore, trying to balance the scales of history and representation.

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Aboriginal people such as Jack Davis, Sally Morgan, Ruby Langford, Glenyse Ward, and Eva Johnson are writing books, poems, short stories and plays. They have been followed by a plethora of indigenous visual art expression. This is helping to redefine Australian identity. Indigenous Australians are developing the potential to influence all facts of Australian society and develop an indigenous approach to being Australia.

Aboriginal people are now moving into radio, television and print. The central Australian Aboriginal media association, well known as CAAMA radio in Alice Springs and imparja television have contributed to new images of change. Radio is widely used among Aboriginal groups to maintain social and cultural links. At Eranabella and Yuendumu Aboriginal people are developing new uses for communications in support of social and cultural links, service delivery and commercial activities. Video conferencing, computer links, telephone, radio, local video production and broadcasting are being controlled by local groups. There is a national indigenous media association of Australia in Brisbane. A perusal of the national directory of Aboriginal and Torres strait islander organizations 1996 and the internet provides many contacts. It is in the sports arena that indigenous Australians probably have made their most obvious impact and contribute in a uniquely Australian way. The media plays a significant role in projecting the range of images of indigenous Australians not only on the sports field but in the arts and elsewhere. This arena has provided a rich array of images in recent times in Australian Rules football, most importantly cricket and international sports competition, providing indelible portraits of Evonne Goolagong – Cawley, Cathy Freeman and Nicky Winmar expressing their identity as Aboriginal Australians.

In Australia, the November 7, 1999, referendum to decide whether the nation should become a republic with a president to take the place of the Queen; the move to have the premier inaugurate the 2000 Sydney Olympics instead of

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the Queen; and the granting of Australia's request to the international Olympic Committee to fly the Aboriginal flag alongside the Australian flag at the games mark shifts in that nation's construction of its post-colonial identity. However, questions still remain as to the limits of the policy of reconciliation towards the Aboriginal community. The terra nullius premise that openly underpinned Australian historiography and the legal system prior to the Mabo ruling of 1992 continues to do so in more subtle ways after the Wik use. Australia Day and the bicentennial celebrations which have had totally different connotations for Aborigines, who celebrated their survival, and mainstream white 'Australians' who commemorated their immigration, are also symptomatic of the problems involved in resolving the tensions between the dominant construction of national identity and the subaltern construction of identity within the nation space.

Many Aboriginal and Torres strait islander people today live in cities and participate in a range of cultural, political and religious activities across Australia. Diversity means that no one Aboriginal group's lifestyle and cultural activities is more or less valid than any other's. The plethora of aboriginal media activity through radio and television is projecting fresh and unique Australian images. At the same time these representations are ensuring that those images are close to the contemporary indigenous realities. Aboriginal people have fought long and hard for justice, for their land, preservation of culture and development on their own terms. Perhaps the high court decisions on Mabo and Wik will enable the indigenous Australians to at last be given justice through the Australian legal system and the true process of reconciliation can be commenced.

40 The Olympic charter permits only the national flag and Olympic flag to be hoisted. 'Aboriginal flag', *The Sunday Times of India* (New Delhi, October 3, 1999), p.20.
42 Rejecting the fallacy that Australian land belonged to no one before European settlement, the Mabo decision paved the way for the Native Title Act of 1993. The parliament recognized that native title might exist in all areas of Australia, except where it had been clearly, extinguished. However, the Wik case in 1996 where the High Court decided that native title rights of the Wik and Theyorre peoples could co exist with a Queensland pastoral lease, reintroduced a element of doubt into the matter of native title.
The council for aboriginal reconciliation also viewed the high court’s decisions with optimism, describing it as an "...opportunity to set right the relations between aborigines and other Australians in a way that was not possible in the beginning." Manifestedly a considerably goodwill gesture towards indigenous Australians, The council for aboriginal reconciliation witnessed a poignant note in one of the panels titled. "Australians Declaration towards reconciliation" in 2000:

"We, the people of Australia, of many origins as we are, make a commitment to go on together in a spirit of reconciliation.

We value the unique status of Aboriginals and Torres strait islander people as the original custodians/owners of lands and waters,

We recognize this land and its waters were settled as colonies without treaty or consent.

Reaffirming the human rights of all Australians, we respect and recognize continuing customary laws, beliefs and traditions...

Our hope is for a united Australia that respects this land of ours; values the aboriginal and Torres strait islander heritage; and provides justice and equality for all 

**Australian apology to aborigines**

February 13, 2008 will be marked as a watershed in the Australian history as Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd made a historic apology to the

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aborigines for injustices committed over two centuries of white settlement, saying he wanted “to remove a great stain from the nation’s soul.” The Television networks aired it live and thousands of people crowded around huge screens in major cities to witness the event. The Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, told parliament, “We apologize for the laws and policies of successive parliaments and two governments that have inflicted profound grief, sufferings and loss on these our fellow Australians.” Many Aborigines had traveled thousands of kilometers to Canberra for the occasion, and some wept as Mr. Rudd said sorry for the wrongs the original Australians endured after British settlers arrived in 1788. Aboriginal flags flew on major buildings, including Sydney’s Harbour Bridge, or were carried by thousands of others who cheered as Mr. Rudd’s speech began. “After all this time it’s finally happened and I am here to support all those mothers who went through so much pain at having their children taken away,” said Aborigine Evonne goolagong, cawley, who won Wimbledon tills in 1971 and 1980. Malcolm Fraser, Conservative Prime Minister from 1975 to 1983, said he saw “a new chapter for Australia,” said he wished he had apologized when leader. Another former Prime Minister, Paul K eating, said Australia had witnessed a day of ‘open hearts’. He added: “The stolen generation was a cut right across the spirit of those people and the soul of the country”. ‘Stolen generation’ elder Mark Baker said, “It makes the indigenous community feel, for the first time in a real long time, really feel part of Australia, that it’s embraced by the whole Australian nation.” There is no doubt that Australia as a nation will be immeasurably strengthened if it can demonstrate sustained political will and deliver justice and reconciliation to all First Australians – by ending racial discrimination in education, health care, criminal justice, and every other area of public life. Reconciliation by way of Australian Prime Minister saying ‘sorry’ to Aborigines) between Aboriginal and white Australians is a positive move in the

48 Ibid., p.22.
49 Ibid., p.22.
50 ‘Oz says sorry to “Stolen Generations”, The Times of India, (New Delhi, February 14, 2008).
right direction for a more friendly relationship between these two peoples. Reconciliation means friendship and understanding and of course, a forgiveness for what happened in Australia's past history.
LITERARY STRUGGLES IN ABORIGINAL WRITINGS

Today aboriginal writing has undoubtedly emerged discursively as powerful visible form of protest against a chequered history of exploitation and injustice both in the socio-politically materialist and discursive relatives. However, it is sad to learn that till date Aboriginal literature, dispute the fact that it has witnessed a remarkable transformation of an 'oral literature' into a written literature, is not recognized as full fledged 'national' literature. The premise seems to be that unless this Aboriginal discourse and its texts are made 'accessible' to the dominant Australian literature in English discourse-/market through translation and commodification its protest and substance will not leave the domain of an ethnic soliloquy by the subaltern constituency and for it. Consider for an example the fact that as the Australian studies project begins to take root in India, the emphasis in terms of course structuring in literature programs, the availability of texts at universities' and the high commission libraries and focus in translation programs, remains by and large on the canonized white Australian male writers – partrick white, Thomas Keneally and Davi Malouf. Judith Wright and say, an Aboriginal writer like Ruby Langford or sally Morgan are added on occasionally as taken representatives of the gender and Aborigines erasures of what is exported as a 'national' literary cannon.

There can be no doubt that since British colonization, one area where Aboriginal knowledge was used in the past was in academic research. And it is no surprising that the Aboriginal voice, just like Dalit voice, has been variously mediated, appropriated, co-opted, accommodated and commodified, where as prior to European invasion and the colonization of Australia, Aboriginal people's literature was limited to bark paintings, message sticks, cave paintings and body markings. The majority of Aboriginal history and tradition, was passed on by way of oral history, by word of mouth and by enacting the experiences that occurred to Aboriginal people and to their forefathers. Since British colonization Anthropologists and other learned people lived among Aboriginal people and
collected all the information about Aboriginal culture that they possibly could. They would pick the people’s brains to learn how Aborigines lived. Their social, religious and kinship ties and other aspects of their lives were given to these academics without thought. Aborigines were happy to oblige and to indulge the white people’s every question about lifestyles and environment. They had no thought that may be they were giving away their cultural heritage, not for their own gain but for other’s gains. Aborigines never did receive payment for their efforts, but those who compiled the information did, as well as the fame of becoming a notable authority on Aboriginal people and their culture. They, the white people, became the experts on Aboriginal issues, not the Aborigines themselves. White students would get their degrees on Aboriginal knowledge, the government would do deals with multinational companies after learning that a plant had medicinal properties and the Aborigines received nothing. In fact, the aboriginal input was totally ignored. It is only in the past 20 years, may be even less than that, the aboriginal people are learning not to give away their knowledge freely. For example, in 1989, at Curtin university, academics wanted Aboriginal students to take part in a research and give information about their culture, but the majority of those asked, refused. The knew they wouldn’t benefit from this exercise and that the white academics would get all the accolades.

History shows that Aboriginal people have been cheated out of their intellectual and cultural rights in the past and this practice still goes on. Aborigines have been swindled out of their right to own copy right to their works because they did not know that such copyright law exited. It is only in the last decades of the 20th century that they are learning the intricacies of intellectual property rights laws which are in place to protect every writer, artist, poet, musician and crafts person, from those who would take advantage of their ignorance in this area. But things are changing now as more Aboriginal people are becoming aware that they hold sole copy right to their works. While aboriginal people are becoming aware of the pitfalls of not stating loudly and clearly their rights to their intellectual property, there has become, tin recent years, the
practice of non-aboriginal identity in order to gain, what Dr. Rose Marry Vande Berg says\textsuperscript{51}, money, awards and fame as indigenous writers and artists.

Dr. Rose Mary Van den Berg raise a very important question pertaining to the above-mentioned issue:

\textit{The question now, how can we, the indigenous people of Australia, stoop non-Aboriginals from deliberately stealing an Aboriginal identity? There is this latest trend for imposters to assume an Aboriginal alias and write or paint under the pseudonyms of an Aboriginal identity. Why are these people assuming Aboriginal identities unless it is for self-indulgence and greed, and to make fools of both white and black Australians, to make fools of everyone, especially those who buy this art while under the impression that it is authentic aboriginal art or literature. There are big bucks involved with Aboriginal art and literature.\textsuperscript{52}}

Thus question of what constitutes an authentic aboriginal identity have dogged writers like Colin Johnson (now Mudrooroo), Elizabeth Durack (Edde Burup) & Leon Carmen (Koolmatric) and became decisive where such identity becomes the basis for making claims.

Looking at some of the positive aspects that have been achieved for Aborigines in the last decade or so, Aboriginal people have, most importantly, witnessed February 13, 2008 as historic day when the Australian Prime Minister said "sorry" to the indigenous people for the Stolen generations. It was definitely a positive move in the right direction for a more friendly relationship between these two peoples. So you can see the change of attitude towards the indigenous


\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., p.76.
people that wasn't there, say, twenty years ago. Aboriginal art has taken off life a rocket and many works of art have become collectors items to be proudly displayed in many an Australian or overseas household or office. Most significantly, Aboriginal writers and poets, novelists and dramatists have emerged who are among Australia's best. Aboriginal people have now found a new way of keeping their stories alive while maintaining the old, and that is through the printed media. Aboriginal people have now recently got few aboriginal publishing houses and editors for indigenous manuscripts. Their stories, from biographies and autobiographies to children's stories, are printed in books, magazines, journals and academic texts. However, film and television are now recognized mediums for transforming the Aboriginal oral tradition into the visual concepts, as in life stories or part thereof. Doris Pilkington's Rabbit Proof Fence (2002), comes to mind in film; and the many documentaries made, for example, Steve Kinnane's The Coolabaroo Club. Ms Pilkington's book and film and Mr. Kinnane's television documentary, which he co-wrote and co-produced, shows a part of Aboriginal life that white and ethnic peoples don't know about. Some people had never heard of these stories before this material was written down and then made into a film and a television documentary. Both are world-class a privilege to watch.

As far as the transformation of Aboriginal oral histories to the printed media, that is, Aboriginal literature is concerned, it is only in the last three decades that Aboriginal people felt at liberty to start writing down their stories. Prior to that, David Unaipon was the only Aboriginal writer to get a mention in the dominant culture's literary circle. Stories about aboriginal people were written by non-indigenous writers, just like they have been recording and writing down aboriginal oral histories through interviews with indigenous people. These people are usually anthropologists and historians, but it is not the same as an aboriginal person doing the interviews with other aboriginal people, readers are now getting a different perception on Aboriginal life because stories are coming from an Aboriginal point of view, recorded and written by aborigines from their own
experiences of being aboriginal and they are having more say in what is being written about them. When non-indigenous people interview aboriginal people and write down their research, it comes out in their writing, it is always a 'they' and 'us' stance. Aborigines are the objects of the research, rather than subjects. In other words, non-indigenous researchers are outsiders looking in and writing about aboriginal people from what they see or perceive. It distorts the true perception of what it is like to be aboriginal. That is why it is very important for aborigines to have a hands on input into the research, transcribing the oral into the written and knowing what the researchers are doing with their material from the first instance. In this way, aboriginal story-tellers are empowered—and informed, not being left ignorant of what is being said on their behalf by non-indigenous people.

It is only within the last two or three decades that Aboriginal literature has taken off in this country. Aboriginal people are rewriting Australia's history through their literary input. They are writing autobiographies and biographies, poetry, fiction, drama, the short story, academic papers and children's stories. There are, however, many hurdles / snags in front of Aboriginal writing. Not every manuscript gets published. Many aboriginal writers send manuscripts away to publishers but they are retuned with some excuse for not publishing it. You set, there are just so many works written by aborigines that are permitted to pass through publishing house. There seems to be a quota on the amount of publications permitted to aborigines and if a manuscript is too controversial or too political, then through some excuse or another, this material is turned away. It is another way of having control over Aborigines to which we shall return in the next few pages.

Let us now look at Aboriginal literature as it exists today and make an attempt to find out why it has been so slow in coming, why it hasn't been so slow in coming, why it hasn't been encouraged more, why aboriginal writers haven't been sponsored more than they have been, and why aren't money and

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resources following freely into black communities, into black areas, for the purpose of developing black writers, particularly black writers who are intent on the creative area of writing, poetry, novels and other such things. The one area where there does seem to be a deal of money for Aboriginal writers is in the field of research, which involves non-Aboriginal people as well as Aboriginal people, where tapes are used quite often, words are put to tape, and tapes have been transcribed by non-aboriginal people of what the aboriginal people have spoken about. To understand the politics of aboriginal literature we must look at the various agencies that have been set by governments, that have been set up by governments, that have been established by concerned people, either to encourage those black writers or to stymic them and to stop them from going ahead. As an example of the latter, one could refers to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA), which has enormous amounts of money, that has given it an enviable position of power in aboriginal affairs. Now that money is not made available to Aboriginal people according to what they describe their needs as being. It’s made available to Aboriginal organizations and communities in terms of what the DAA and in terms of what previous non-Aboriginal writers had determined as to what the needs of Aboriginal people are.

This brings a very important fact to the surface and that is that Aboriginal people, writers who even write their own material, have no control over that material in terms of having it published. They have no control over the finances that make it possible for them to exist, make it possible for them to pursue writing as a career, and, most importantly, to act as historians in control of the way in which they write and what they write about in terms of what is happening within the Aboriginal population of Australia within the various Aboriginal communities throughout Australia. Bruce McGuiness maintains:

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unless Aboriginal people control the funding, unless, Aboriginal people control the content, the publishing, the ultimate presentation of the article, then it is not Aboriginal; that it ceases to be Aboriginal when it is interfered with, when it is tampered with by non-Aboriginal people who exist outside of the spectrum of Aboriginal life, of Aboriginal culture within Australia.  

It is, therefore, very important, he further maintains, that the Aboriginal communities, particularly at the local level where it all starts from, are able to assert themselves, are able to establish a power base and a control base for the implementation of programmes that will guarantee that aboriginal writes are in fact able to maintain their credibility in terms of what they're writing. It is no good for aboriginal people to be writing what non-aboriginal people, what white publishing companies, what governments, what government agencies decree that they ought to write. If it's going to be legitimate Aboriginal literature, then it must come, flow freely, from the Aboriginal people, from the Aboriginal communities without any restrictions placed upon them. Bruce McGuiness argues that community control is a very important aspect of Aboriginal life. It's not a new aspect, in fact that's the way things were running prior to the coming of white people to Australia. White people themselves, if they belong to different class groups, and particularly to working class groups, find themselves in a similar situation to that of Aboriginal people, insofar as they have no control over what they are permitted to write and over the end product of what they do write when it is finally published and presented to the public.

There is no denying the fact that most of the Aboriginal artists in the field of writing are struggling. Some of their work gets printed and a hell of a lot of it doesn't, and the reason why it doesn't get printed is because aboriginal people don't control it. Aboriginal people don't have control at the local level, they don't

54 Ibid., p.44.  
55 Ibid., p.44-45.  
56 Ibid., p.45.
have control at the funding level, they don't have control at the policy – making level policies are determined by what is written about aboriginal people by non-aboriginal writers. Bruce McGuiness further maintains that the aboriginal people, in the field of aboriginal initiative, still have situation where the department of aboriginal affairs hurts them in two particular ways. One is by taking their graduates, taking their writers and giving them jobs in the public service sphere. The second is that they make research grants available to non-aboriginal people, to qualified people, qualified academically, and what is written then used by those departments and by those governments to formulate policy that in turn determines what funding arrangements will be made available by study grants, and overseas scholarships etc are made to aboriginal people. However, the selection of the aboriginal people is made by a combination of both aboriginal and non-aboriginal people at a top level. It isn't done at the base level, at the community level, so there is no control by communities over that. There is no control by Aboriginal communities as to who their representatives will be within government representatives will be within government departments and on non-government committee. Denis Walker rightly asserts.

Our needs and aspirations in black Australia in some respects have been subverted by the way in which white people view their literature, and try to impose their concepts of literature on to us so that we can succeed within this white society.57

Denis Walker further gives advice in terms of solution to the problem mentioned above in the following words:

Rather than having white people advise what would be the best thing to do at this particular time the community should be able to assess their situation at the local

57 Ibid., p.50.
community level and decide what needs to be expressed in order to achieve their needs and aspirations.\textsuperscript{58}

It can be seen from the above description that aboriginal literature has undeniably struggled a lot mainly due to the fact that there is too much politics involved in it and also the fact that aboriginal people don’t have control over the funding, the content and most importantly the publishing houses. It seems to me that until unless they aboriginal people get control over all these they will not achieve great deal because they are going to continually be dependent on the white economic system, the white processes, the white funding systems, and in doing to they will be pale imitations of what they used to be. I would like to conclude here with Neville Bonner’s words when he says:

\begin{quote}
I hope to see the Aboriginal race firmly established as a nation, an individual nation, with a strident voice which will be a force in government, and one which will establish social justice and equality for all of us, whether tribal, semi-tribal or urban through sensible, well planned programmes.

This is my dream...to see race gain its rightful place within Australian society, at the same time preserving the richness of our proud culture and customs...to make it a reality.\textsuperscript{59}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., p.51.