Chapter 3
MULTIPLE VOICES OF THE WRITER

Since autobiography is a biography of the self, the very first question that emerges while reading or analysing an autobiography concerns the way the writer perceives herself in her autobiography. When it comes to the question of autobiographies of Australian Aboriginal women, the above question becomes more prominent and crucial, because their autobiographies revolve around the issue of identity and raise questions and controversies about it. This chapter will discuss how this self is contemplated and expressed and analyse the factors that condition the thought and expression in Aboriginal women's autobiographies.

From this crucial predicament and issue of identity emanate the multiple voices of the Aboriginal woman writer. These voices represent the dominating consciousness of the writer as it is expressed in her autobiography and also the identity of the writer according to herself. As the discourse of identity gets emphasised in these autobiographies, the question of the writer's identity or the concept of her consciousness also becomes complex. In some of Australian Aboriginal women's autobiographies, the consciousness of gender dominates, whereas in some others the consciousness of race. Apart from this, we also come across the consciousness of the Aboriginal woman, which is quite authentic and operative in deciding the identity of the writer's predicament as a colonised. Both the terms in the phrase "Aboriginal woman" are very significant, individually and together and this Aboriginal woman's consciousness is the most crucial feature of these autobiographies. This chapter will discuss how the multiple voices of the Aboriginal
women's autobiographies represent the writers' concerns and purposes, simultaneously or distinctly.

Although this chapter uses consciousness and voice as synonymous terms at places, that is not an attempt to say that both are one and the same. But the voices of Aboriginal women reflect the consciousness that they have or the consciousness or identity that dominates their being. In other words, the voices of the writers vary on the basis of their identity according to themselves and according to the society in which they exist. But, this consciousness may not always find a voice or may get transformed into the consciousness of one of the multiple identities that are independent and interconnected. Their writings need to be approached by readers and critics with varying expectations, depending on the identity of the writers and the purpose of their writing.

It is not always easy to determine whether a particular voice represents gender consciousness or racial consciousness. A thorough understanding of these autobiographies and the socio-cultural and historical milieu is required in order to hear the multiple voices of the writers. This knowledge will certainly introduce the background to the Aboriginal predicament though it may not give a definite picture. Although these autobiographies give the readers an impression of being "autoethnographies", these writers do present individual cases as well, since they come from different individual backgrounds and situations. It also becomes difficult to decide on these writers' voices and consciousness since they are not watertight compartments but are interconnected very closely. Sometimes a writer reveals that it is her Aboriginal consciousness that is predominant in her autobiography but the text unveils something
else, or the writer wishes to say something else, but her writing discloses her Aboriginal consciousness.

Let us consider, for instance, the case of Roberta Sykes. Concerning her, as also several other writers, there appears to be some uncertainty regarding whether she is genuinely black. But, as the case with Mudrooroo Narogin, her ideas and theirs may still help us in the context. (See the following chapter for a brief discussion of this controversy.) For example, she declares that she looks at herself as a black woman (Personal Interview 9 January 1998). The title of her autobiography, *Snake Dreaming: Autobiography of A Black Woman*, also makes this clear. Although she puts it very clearly that she looks at herself as a black woman, several questions can be raised such as: What is her social, economic, intellectual, political, psychological and historical status as a black woman? Apart from this, is she a rural/tribal or an urban/urbanised black woman? Do such factors independently or collectively play a crucial role in moulding her voice? Can a black woman be as simple a term as it sounds and a definition of Aboriginal woman? If that is her identity according to herself, what is her identity in the eyes of "her" society and according to white society? (Indeed, whether or not a person belongs to a certain race may be a tricky issue to resolve. Meantime, if that person feels her racial identity and has been treated by others on the basis of that identity, for our purposes her views may be treated as authentic within reason. For more on this subject of identity, look at the following chapter.) What is the consciousness/voice that is heard in her writings, not only according to her but also according to her readers and critics?

Several such fundamental questions and different or shifting arguments of some other Aboriginal writers raise many other questions which may also be problematic in the
context of racial authenticity or authenticity of representation. For instance, Sally Morgan has been questioned regarding her representation of Aboriginality. And she does speak in different voices in different contexts. Her autobiography *My Place* was a tremendous success, became a trendsetter and was followed by many Aboriginal women's autobiographies. In *My Place* Aboriginal consciousness and the issue of Aboriginal identity find prominent place. It is a direct and overt representation of Aboriginal predicament, history, culture, dilemma, identity, consciousness and her search for roots. In fact, the whole autobiography revolves around the issues of going back to the roots, digging up "history" and reconstructing the history of Aboriginal people. That she includes the stories of her mother, grandmother and grandmother's brother in her autobiography provides evidence to Sally Morgan's anxiety to make as many Aboriginal voices audible as possible to readers and to represent Aboriginal life as intimately as possible. In fact, she herself admits: "What had begun as a tentative search for knowledge had grown into a spiritual and emotional pilgrimage. We had an Aboriginal consciousness now, and were proud of it" (Morgan 233). The knowledge she refers to is knowledge about her Aboriginal roots and the place of her belonging. She describes this search as a spiritual and emotional pilgrimage, implying her immense respect for Aboriginal culture.

The interrogating autobiography of Sally Morgan raises several issues starting from the writer’s identity, her roots and her identity dilemmas, all of which seem to have cropped up in her own writing or in interviews. Especially, when questioned, blurred, or denied certain aspects of identity, one is forced to speak of or write about. It is not unlikely, in fact, that a writer who takes on such a subject may end up with some queries
or unanswered objections regarding either a given aspect of her identity or the co-existence of several aspects. While we must be critical in evaluating such problems of clash or confusion among different identities, we can hardly deny that the situation itself is more complex than for someone well-settled in their community and whose community is not beleaguered by questions of identity. One cannot, therefore, expect an Aboriginal writer's work to be altogether free from such confusion or even conflict in a post-colonially heightened state of self-consciousness. Morgan's work presents us with a very good example of this far-from-clear predicament of someone attempting to re-locate themselves.

As we shall also see later in our discussion on multiple identities, My Place brings up very personal questions about the writer, in the process exploring and exposing larger issues like racial discrimination, physical torment, mental trauma, gender bias and politics in the name of welfare. Her dilemma over her receiving the Aboriginal fellowship regarding how Aboriginal she is does not remain a mere personal question but extends to the whole Aboriginal situation, evokes debates about the definition of "Aboriginality". It also asserts her Aboriginal lineage. Her going back to her Aboriginal roots also holds a mirror up to the situation, where Aboriginal people are opening up, crossing the threshold of their sense of shame and pain and desperately going in search of their Aboriginal roots, and are, thus, also digging up the hidden histories of ghastly atrocities against their people and their ancestors.

Whether she is presenting her individual situation or commenting and contemplating on the general Aboriginal situation, it is the Aboriginal consciousness in Sally Morgan that speaks and not a general Australian consciousness. Like other
marginalised writers, she acts as a representative of her race, not only of herself, whether it is in deconstructing the colonial history and reconstructing the alternative history or in expressing her righteous indignation at the absence of Aboriginal voices in Australian history and at the denial of access to Aboriginal people, to their own and their ancestors' records. Although different, both reinforce the need for Aboriginal people to know their history and to create their own. These aspects of *My Place* strongly express the Aboriginal argument to readers and the writer's Aboriginal consciousness and commitment towards Aboriginal issues make the text an out and out Aboriginal text.

Even as her autobiography published in 1987 comes to us as an Aboriginal text with an overtly Aboriginal consciousness and voice, Sally Morgan's interview with Delys Bird and Dennis Haskell in 1991 tries to present a different Sally Morgan with a completely contrasting voice. She presents a new reading of her text and herself as a writer by saying that she is one of those people who want to forget about what they, as Aboriginal people, had once experienced. If she wanted to forget or wants to forget what the Aboriginal people have gone through once, or are going through now, the text and the writer contradict each other. If oblivion, she thinks, is her stand, her excavation and reconstruction of history, her representation of Aboriginal voices and her concern for the past, present and future of Aboriginal history and culture set up a counterpoint to it.

*My Place* does not echo the sympathy of a mere outsider or a detached and distanced observer, but an identification with the community of suffering Aborigines. Her definition of the self may have changed by the time she gave her interview as an established writer, but her shift in her political stand is what poses the problem to the question of individual identity versus Aboriginal identity. This evokes the kind of
questions that Roberta Sykes' statement about her identity raises. This also raises the question of different versions and interpretations that the writer and the text present and how the writer may distance the text from herself and herself from the text, even in an autobiography. Community consciousness and identity dominate over the personal or the individual identity and consciousness in many Aboriginal women's autobiographies. Under these circumstances, we may wonder which self the writer is distancing from the text and which text from the self. This will in a way determine the audible voice in a text like *My Place* and also in other Aboriginal women's autobiographies.

*My Place* brilliantly depicts, literally and metaphorically, the independent but interconnected journeys of three women. For Sally Morgan's grandmother, Daisy Corunna, it is a journey towards shedding her Aboriginal identity, because of which she is scared of white brutalities and separation from her family. For Sally's mother, Gladys Corunna, it is a lonely journey in life carrying the yoke of family responsibilities. For Sally, her journey of search for her identity gives both her and us an insight into the temporarily forgotten or longed to be forgotten identity. Thus, three voices representing three generations and three attitudes towards life speak to the reader in *My Place*. One voice, that of Daisy Corunna, represents the fear of the Aboriginal people of humiliation and ill-treatment from white society and government and their effort to hide their Aboriginal identity in order to lead their life in a "safe", "secure" and "respectable" manner. It is the voice of an Aboriginal woman who has been exploited, played with and who has been deprived of freedom, protection, community life and motherhood and who is being haunted by the threat of her Aboriginal identity being detected. Hence, her
Aboriginal woman's voice becomes discreet but her Aboriginal consciousness and her Aboriginal response mark her character as an Aboriginal woman.

Her daughter Gladys Corunna represents the next generation-urbanised, self-reliant, even married to a white man; she has a family of her own, and she is institutionalised like all colonised people are, but not to the same extent as her mother is. Whether she is tormented by the threat of her Aboriginal identity being detected or not, her womanhood, to be specific, her wifehood, becomes a source of suffering for her. Her white husband returns from the battlefield and converts their house and life into a battlefield with his post-war trauma. Her husband's death releases her from that battlefield and she takes on the role of a young widow with the whole family relying on her. Whether she has any opportunity to feel nostalgic about her Aboriginal heritage and brood over its loss or not, her consciousness as a woman with responsibilities and duties does not allow her to think about or express it. It is predominantly a woman's voice that reaches the readers in Sally Morgan's mother.

Although these three women come from the same family, they hail from and are rooted in different locations and these determine their voices. They live with the identity of Indians-Sally's grandmother construes it; Sally Morgan's mother remains a spectator in that identity crisis; while Sally Morgan acquires or rather is given this identity. All these women enter into a discourse with the readers in different voices-of the Aboriginal, the woman and the Aboriginal woman. As we have seen in the case of Roberta Sykes also, even these three identities are associated with the writer's social, economic, political, intellectual, historical and cultural locations and contexts.
In general all these three voices speak in this autobiography with sensitivity to the gender issue. They realise or are conscious that their identity as women adds to the difficulties that they face, that they are doubly exploited as Aborigines and women and of course as Aboriginal women too. This gender discrimination is not confined to white society but extends to the urban Aboriginal families as well. Sally Morgan does not ignore this aspect of Aboriginal life. She looks at the tough situation from a multidimensional perspective. Her paternal grandparents and her father, who are white, and her maternal grandmother and mother, who face life with the untiring spirit of soldiers-everyone wants a male heir. Sally Morgan recollects: "Nan had always favoured the boys in our family, and now Dad was doing the same" (Morgan 48). Even Sally Morgan's mother, who was never happy and secure in the company of her white husband, looks forward to a man being the head of the family: "A couple of weeks after Dad had died, Mum informed us all that Billy was now the man of the house. This came as a great surprise to me, because Billy was only six years old" (Morgan 50). In her paternal grandparents' attitude Sally Morgan perceives discrimination not only of race but also of gender: "The only one of us they were really keen on was Billy, and that was only because he was the image of Dad. Grandpa always liked to have Billy close to him, but the rest of us were relegated to the backyard. Our cousins were allowed inside, but we had to stay outside" (Morgan 52). Thus Sally Morgan and her sister, being women of Aboriginal descent, suffer discrimination within as well as outside the family. That a male heir is preferred both by her mother and grandmother and her white grandparents raises questions about her female identity and discrimination against women. Although
she does not feel frustrated or depressed about it, she becomes conscious of the gender inequalities and that paves the road for her self-representation as a woman.

Speaking to the readers in these three interconnected and indistinguishable voices of woman, Aborigine, and Aboriginal woman in her autobiography, Sally Morgan reveals in her interview that the consciousness from which her autobiography emerges is "very much working class, you wouldn't have called us anything else; 'poor working class' would probably be more appropriate" (Bird and Haskell 7). This adds one more strand to Sally Morgan's identity and one more consciousness to her autobiography. Whether Sally Morgan's autobiography has working class consciousness and the readers understand her as a representative of the "poor working class" in her autobiography or not, some of the other Aboriginal women's autobiographies do not miss this aspect of Aboriginal life in a colonial situation.

Glenyse Ward's *Wandering Girl* is one of the autobiographies in which the working class consciousness dominates the consciousness of race and gender. Straight from Saint Joseph's orphanage at Rivervale, Glenyse reaches Bigelow's house as a domestic. Brought up in a strict environment where she was taught never to speak out to people unless she was spoken to first, no matter what the circumstances were, she quietly receives the old tin mug that she has to use for drinking tea. As a dark servant of a rich household she is overburdened with a long list of chores. It is not that she completely lacks awareness of her plight. She knows that race and class are responsible for her predicament. She recollects: "I couldn't get wild, because they were white people and our bosses. What could we do? Nothing!" (Ward 1987: 115). And, "In those days, not so
long either, we were not allowed to say anything against our white bosses” (Ward 1987: 126).

Although she refers to "white bosses", the readers get the impression that it is not only a question of racial difference but also the class difference that determines their predicament. There is an acceptance on her part of her predicament and an effort to convince herself that she must accept her plight as a black domestic. There is, apparently, not even a streak of covert protest in her behaviour or demeanour. It is not that she does not get angry or feel like bursting out against her boss, but she is not allowed to do that. Her statements quoted above not only reveal her understanding and acceptance of the situation but also accommodate several unarticulated and unanswered questions about power relations in a colonised society.

Although she expresses her fear as bottled up by her helplessness, she does not remain completely passive and subservient, but protests in her own way. Although told not to appear before the guests, she walks straight into the party surprising the guests and infuriating her mistress. In another instance, scared of going into the orchard, Glenyse Ward squeezes the stored fruits, violating the order of her mistress to be served fresh fruit juice. Tea in the old tin mug and some oats are all that is allotted to her whereas in her mistress' absence Glenyse Ward eats the food "meant for the whites” in their party ware. She enjoys the luxuries of her mistress’ bedroom. Above all, Glenyse Ward takes another than the expected route on her way to the mission for a holiday. This bold step transforms her life from that of slavery to liberty.

Her protest does not find verbal expression but manifests itself in action. Although silent and covert, her protest underlines her comments about differences and
discrimination. Whether her Aboriginal consciousness comes out in her protest or not, her working class-consciousness does spring up in her silent yet powerful protest against economically, socially, politically and culturally "superior" people.

In *Unna You Fullas*, Glenyse Ward once again comes to the readers as a dormitory girl. A similar acceptance of the predicament and silent protest characterise this consciousness of a dormitory girl. Here, it seems to be her identity as a dormitory girl, not even her identity as a stolen child, which comes forth. Although questions of stolen generation and dormitory life are not completely distinct and unconnected with each other, Glenyse Ward does not discuss the issue of the stolen generation much, and she does not identify herself either as a stolen child or with the fellow dormitory girls who try to escape from the travails of dormitory life. Unlike other Aboriginal women writers and other dormitory girls, she "owns" the dormitory and thinks that the dormitory "owns" her like a home. However, it is true in a way that she is owned by the institution through its power and discrimination, but not through its love and care as she assumes. She thinks that the dormitory is her home and the Sisters and the Brothers of the German Mission are her parents. Since she was removed from her parents when she was very young, as she herself reveals, she is unable to view herself as a dispossessed, dislocated and displaced stolen child. She cannot visualise her lost home, parents, society and culture. Although she believes and tries hard to convince herself that the Mission is her home and she belongs there, every now and then the protests and revolts by the fellow inmates create storms in her mind. Their tears over her innocence and her predicament as a stolen child faintly shake the foundation of her belief and this reverberates through her writing to her readers.
Glenyse Ward is thus torn between her conditioning and her growing up mind. Her complexion, features, Aboriginal English, common dress, dormitory life and the treatment meted out to her reiterate her Aboriginal identity. But her attachment to the Mission drags her to the other side. Thus the voice that emanates from the dilemma of Aboriginal stolen children turns into a voice that speaks with uncertainties and vacillation about her identity. It is the sense of belonging, which is a crucial and decisive issue in Aboriginal culture that decides the identity of Glenyse Ward here. In *Unna You Fullas*, Glenyse Ward remains a faithful and accommodative dormitory girl with occasional streaks of protest. But, in *Wandering Girl*, as the title itself speaks about her concept of her identity, directly or ironically, she turns into a black domestic with strong roots in her dormitory life, which demanded absolute silence and passivity.

As Jackie Huggins rightly observes, "In the colonial context, the Black man had virtually lost his bargaining powers and the coloniser assumed almost total control; hence, the interaction between white man and Black woman was one marked by compulsion" (Huggins 1998: 14). Thus Aboriginal life was completely ruled by whites, giving rise to the awful phenomenon of the stolen generation. Aboriginal helplessness and absence of rights over their own life and their future were facts of the times. Ruth Hegarty says that this book would tell us about the hurt and pain that the girls suffered being separated from mothers and families. It has to be remembered that most girls in the dormitory already had only single parents. This again is the consequence of colonisation, which resulted in divisions such as "half-caste", "quarter-caste" and "part-Aboriginal". Because of the presence of white blood in them, according to the whites, they were more educable and hence were able to rapidly assimilate into white society. Whether
assimilation into white society occurred or not, they were certainly alienated from their own culture and people. They were deprived of community life, love and warmth of parents, care and protection of their people and were trained to become no more than good domestics.

Ruth Hegarty’s mother’s life gets repeated in Ruth Hegarty’s life. Her mother is deprived of motherhood and Ruth Hegarty also goes through a similar predicament. The re-enacted past unites these two women not only as mother and daughter but also as two Aboriginal women who went through similar exploitation at the hands of a discriminating society and government. Two mature women recollect, relive and reconstruct their past: "We are now two mature women, both mothers, reliving our past, and talking about painful times we had not really discussed before" (Hegarty 28). Both are deprived mothers. Both had been single parents. Both were silenced at a crucial period of their lives. Is this book not an outlet for their suppressed and silenced feelings and experiences? If so, what gives them the courage to open up their changed roles-maturity, freedom from dormitory or freedom from sense of shame and pain? And, what silenced them in the past-the government policies, dormitory life, fear, or self-esteem?

As Ruth Hegarty rightly puts it, it is opening up a closed chapter. But the question about this closed chapter is, was it ever really closed or is it being expanded into the present? If it is a community experience, is it really a closed chapter for every member? Who or what closed it-time, individuals or change in the discriminatory policies? The whole book seems to be a juxtaposition of then and now, past and present, childhood and adulthood, dormitory life and free life. The major difference between then and now is that the mother and daughter are together and they are able to open up to each
other, which they had never done before: "We never talked about it among ourselves at that time. But now we are adults, without a threat of punishment or a sense of shame hanging over our heads, we are able to discuss these events quite openly" (Hegarty 77).

Ruth Hegarty’s statements reveal the historicity of personality, experience and review. For instance, that she is a different person now or that at least she is attempting to prove that she is a different person. A whole set of such topics presents itself to our view once we recognise and acknowledge that an individual also is subject to historicity. Take the fact that this autobiography takes the form of an adult's point of view of her childhood. What food for thought such a retrospective form would provide? For example, even though the writer says that there is a change in her personality, surroundings and situation, still some questions may remain for the reader, such as whether the autobiography is a faithful reconstruction or reliving or fictionalisation. Questions about the functions that such narrative techniques perform in the book; whether the writers’ recollection is from the point of view of an adult or recollecting and reconstructing as a free adult; what may be the purpose of such reconstruction, expression of nostalgia, fear and hatred that filled her childhood or adult effort at "understanding" etc. We will make an attempt to address such and other related questions in the following paragraphs.

Although Ruth Hegarty attempts to emphasise that she is a different person now, that does not seem to be completely true. For, clearly, she is what her past has made her. Neither can she delete the past from her life nor can she escape from the impact of that haunting past. For instance, she relates her present obsession with food to her starvation in the past, and says that her conditioned childhood results in disciplining her children or being conscious about her conditioning her children. Even the endearing call, "Is that
you Ruthie?" reminds her of a call for punishment or a threat. As an adult she watches the children's film "The Wizard of Oz" on TV, thirty years after she was denied a chance to watch the movie as a dormitory girl. Her autobiography is a recollection of childhood by an adult whose adulthood as well as its construction in the book are definitely moulded or influenced by her childhood. It is also an attempt to resist some of her childhood experiences. The haunting and conditioning memories remain a crucial part of her life and her childhood conditioning extends into adulthood and the sense of insecurity has its own role to play in it.

This story of conditioning and insecurity is also a story of deprivation. Ruth Hegarty's mother is deprived of education because her Aboriginal identity brings her humiliation from white children in school. Ruth Hegarty is deprived of her mother in the name of education. Both Ruth Hegarty and her mother are deprived of their children. Both Ruth Hegarty and her daughter, in turn, are deprived of their mothers. All the three are, like any other Aboriginal children, deprived of parental love, care, individuality, home and freedom in their institutionalised existence.

Even as Ruth Hegarty narrates the life of her mother, her mother narrates the most important episodes in her life; it is her mother who recollects why Ruth Hegarty started schooling at four and a half when other children started at five. She cries for other children and goes down to school to wait for them:

I had no idea that this day was going to be the beginning of a long and sad separation. This day was to rob me of the natural bonding that existed between my mum and me, and would place me under the "care
“and protection” of the Queensland government, which now classified me as a neglected child. (Hegarty 26)

Thus her education deprives her of her mother. While her Aboriginal identity deprived Ruth Hegarty’s mother of education, Ruth Hegarty is deprived of parental care in the name of education. In both the places, Aboriginal identity is what causes this deprivation, but for different reasons.

Ruth Hegarty’s childhood is thus recollected and recreated by Ruth Hegarty’s mother. Thus it is her mother’s perspective, not hers that we perceive here. And we also perceive that Ruth Hegarty as an adult is herself listening to the narration of her childhood. She remains detached and an outsider as far as the episode of her going to school is concerned. But, surprisingly, she remembers every other incident that preceded or followed her school admission. Is it selective memory or does she want to listen to her mother’s version and her agony of separation from her child?

This is evidence also of the vicious circle that led to the sexual exploitation of Aboriginal women by white men. Whether dormitory life resulted in single parentage or single parentage led to dormitory life is not debatable since clearly they were interrelated. Mother’s day celebrations in the dormitory bring no joy to Aboriginal girls but only memories of their mothers and tears in their memory. The long-silenced agony has an outlet only in tears on Mother’s day. Is this a celebration at all, is it an outlet or is the outlet an occasion for celebration?

A sense of loss and nostalgia permeate the lives of the dormitory girls and Ruth Hegarty becomes the spokesperson to convey them as her autobiography becomes her vehicle. The sense of loss gradually transforms itself into a sense of attachment to the
dormitory. Ruth Hegarty says, "Even after the mistakes we were glad to go back to the dormitory, it became a haven of protection for us. It was hard to break away from a place that kept us dependent on it, and virtual prisoners" (Hegarty 93). This admission presents a paradoxical situation where the dormitory is both a haven and a jail for the Aboriginal girls. Paradoxical or not, the situation that she presents is pathetic and thought provoking. The so-called mistakes that Ruth Hegarty refers to are the results of the Aboriginal identity of the dormitory girls. Many a time even if it was not the mistake of the girl at all, a punishment was imposed on her. Thus the guilty dormitory itself provides shelter for the girls who have been subjected to a heartrending predicament in it because of their Aboriginal girl identity. It not only keeps them imprisoned as virtual prisoners, but it also compels the girls to depend on it once again and come back with shame and disgrace as single mothers. The tone of the book at this point sounds sarcastic at times as it refers to the dormitory as a haven of protection and also as a virtual jail. The use of the very word protection is ironic here for it is the last thing that was available to Aborigines colonised by whites. Indeed, it was in the name of protection that whites ruined the indigenous people and indigenous culture.

When Ruth Hegarty goes to a white household as a domestic, she does not forget the precautions she has to take as a grown up Aboriginal girl. She has her own room, her own toiletries and her own toilet, for which she had longed as a dormitory girl. But she still feels miserable as a domestic not only because she is treated even more badly by the white master and mistress, but also because she experiences terrible loneliness. She misses the voices of the children who formed one big family and the warmth of the dormitory and finds an emptiness, a deadness in her domestic situation. Definitely this is
not a longing for the constrained dormitory life but a longing for the company of her fellow girls. She misses the community life that she had experienced as a child, the remnants of which she had experienced in the company of many other stolen children like her in the dormitory. She finds company in which she cannot share her happiness because she has no happiness. She finds company to share her woes silently and generate happiness from that deprivation and humiliation. She does not miss the menial jobs that she had to do in the dormitory like emptying the pots every morning, but she does miss her friends who accompany her to the toilet at night, braving the presumed existence of spirits. She does not miss the nightmare of going out alone at night but misses the peers who also suffer from the same nightmare which became worse for them in the absence of their people and parents.

If Glenyse Ward finds herself sandwiched or chooses to be sandwiched between her Aboriginal identity and dormitory girl identity, Ruth Hegarty puts forth a voice which is overt, direct, assertive and firm about her Aboriginal identity. There is no final acceptance of her predicament as it is seen in Glenyse Ward, although she herself uses it as a strategy to obtain the maximum response and empathy from the readers. Ruth Hegarty feels dislocated, dispossessed and displaced in the dormitory and she is aware of the fact that it is her Aboriginal identity that is responsible for her dormitory life. She conveys this forcefully in her book. She is also aware of the fact that she is deprived of motherhood as well as childhood as a dormitory girl/woman. This deprivation aggravates her sense of loss and dislocation.

Thus and hence, it is the voice of a stolen child that is most striking in Ruth Hegarty’s autobiography. It is the voice of the child, and adult or rather an adult's voice
recollecting her childhood; a child who is an Aboriginal, institutionalised, away from her society, parents, culture and liberty. Although Glenyse Ward is also located in the same context, consciousness of the situation and right indignation mark the autobiography of Ruth Hegarty, whereas acceptance and a seemingly passive response mark the autobiography of Glenyse Ward. And this contributes to the difference between the voices of Glenyse Ward and Ruth Hegarty, even though both of them speak as stolen and institutionalised Aboriginal dormitory children and domestics.

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Although Sally Morgan says that working class consciousness dominates in My Place, it is in some of the other autobiographies that we find working class consciousness more dominant and poignant. For instance, Ruby Langford Ginibi's Don't Take Your Love to Town and Monica Clare's autobiographical novel Karobran, apart from Glenyse Ward's Wandering Girl. Sometimes this consciousness is marked by Aboriginal solidarity, and sometimes not. That Wandering Girl has working class consciousness does not mean that Aboriginal consciousness is completely absent. She speaks as an Aboriginal domestic too. In the very first page of her autobiography, Glenyse Ward says:

You see in the early days of survival and struggle, there was a lot of hardship and agony amongst the Aboriginal people. Through the misguided minds of the earnest white people we were taken away from our natural parents. This affected all of us. We lost our identity through being put into missions, forced to abide by the European way. (Ward 1987: 1)
But this consciousness does not turn into activism as it happens with some other Aboriginal writers, especially women writers. This autobiography or writer does not take the stand that personal is political though it/she consciously or unconsciously hints that to be born as an Aboriginal is political. It is not a battle to rescue the race but it is a struggle for her own release from the cage of discrimination based on race. On the other hand, though gender consciousness is not completely absent, as Glenyse Ward presents her experience of being a woman, the working class consciousness eclipses it.

She discusses the issue of her Aboriginal identity as has been shown elsewhere in this chapter. Although she discusses and comments on the Aboriginal situation and identifies herself as an Aboriginal girl, her working class consciousness comes to the fore. According to her, she is a black domestic. Irrespective of the racial differences, like Monica Clare in *Karobran*, Glenyse Ward makes friends with white men who belong to the working class and finds solace, encouragement and awareness in their company. She derives sufficient inspiration from a white worker to faintly protest against her white mistress. It is from him that she learns that her mistress has behaved badly even with the other maids who previously worked there.

The contribution of Monica Clare’s *Karobran*, an autobiographical novel, to the working class consciousness cannot be ignored or denied. Although it is Isabelle’s identity as a half-caste child that takes her away from her father and brother and orphans her at a very young age and makes her scramble about in search of her people and work, it is her working class consciousness that brings a realisation to her about the Aboriginal situation. She learns about the facts of working class life from the workers’ meetings, becomes one of them, but feels the absence of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal voices
in those meetings. She has many failures and frustrations in life as an Aboriginal girl who is in search of her people and of a livelihood. But it is the awareness and consciousness that she acquires in the company of workers and in the workers' union that turns her attention towards rural Aborigines and Aborigines in the reserves. Isabelle's identities as an Aborigine, as a woman and as a worker are intertwined. They are not distinct from each other, they are not isolated and unconnected. Her identity as an Aborigine directs her towards the working class; her identity as a woman imposes limitations on her livelihood; her Aboriginal woman's identity becomes a hurdle at every point of her working class life.

Thus the boundaries of race get thinner here for it is the working class consciousness which binds Monica Clare, like Glenyse Ward, to her Aboriginal maid's identity, and it binds her to her fellow workers, whether they are black or white. In both the books, we see a kind of an acceptance of the predicament and also a protest against it. They go through the experience of domestics as well as independent workers and this contributes to their class-consciousness with racial issues integrated into it. The working class voice emerges dominant here, but that is the working class voice of the Aboriginal woman.

Another autobiography worth mentioning by an Aboriginal woman in which working class consciousness dominates is Ruby Langford Ginibi's *Don't Take Your Love to Town*. Her autobiography is her struggle to get ahead in life as a mother. She takes different kinds of jobs in order to be able to look after her children. Her identity is of an Aboriginal worker and her Aboriginal motherhood is what leads to this identity. Like Monica Clare, Ruby Langford Ginibi is also inspired by the workers' meetings and
lectures. She shows concern for the Aboriginal issues, not only on the basis of race but also on the basis of class. In the case of Ruby Langford Ginibi race, class and gender all work together, which results in the working class Aboriginal woman's consciousness against the background of which the autobiography is set. She expresses solidarity with self-reliant Aboriginal women like her who had/have to shoulder comparable responsibilities. It is her constant search for work and shelter that characterises her autobiography. It is the story of a lower middle class or lower class Aboriginal woman for whom finding work is the main concern of life. Although race and gender matter very much in association with working class identity, it is this working class identity that decides the stability and standards of urban life. In her Acknowledgements, Ruby Langford Ginibi says,

> It is a true life story of an Aboriginal woman's struggle to raise a family of nine children in a society divided between black and white culture in Australia.... Dedicated also to every black woman who’s battled to raise a family and kept her sense of humour. (Ginibi 1988: n.p.)

It is not merely a woman's story or an Aboriginal story. It is an Aboriginal woman's story. This Aboriginal woman has nine children dependent on her and she has to struggle to look after them for she does not have economic and familial security. In addition, she has to survive in a society which is racially divided and discriminating. It is here that Ruby Langford Ginibi’s identity finds expression in multiple dimensions. Here is a poor, single Aboriginal mother of nine children, struggling for livelihood, struggling against discrimination, in search of social, economic and familial security. Although she does not achieve all these goals, her longing to achieve them makes her speak in different
voices. Black, working class, poor, woman, urban, mother, independent, individual—all these are the multiple identities which encourage the multiple voices that articulate her concerns, and commitments, agonies and anxieties. Her dedication of her autobiography to every black woman, whose life is a battle hints that Ruby Langford Ginibi identifies herself with such women and is an evidence of her admiration for the traditional Aboriginal image of woman and her assumption of her identity. This in turn determines the voices in her autobiography.

Not only does Ruby Langford Ginibi discuss the issue of silence that prevails among Aboriginal people about women's business but she also reveals that she learnt in her childhood that there is a clear distinction between women's work and men's work, but not exploitation of the woman. This distinction according to her is a division of labour and responsibilities. Although her "eloped mother" always remains an oasis in her memories and provides solace to Ginibi amidst all kinds of hardships, she is not Ginibi’s model in any sense. Only disappointments, desertions, frustrations and violence come Ginibi’s way in her married life. As the title of her book reveals, she takes her love to town repeatedly with a hope for care, companionship, protection and familial security, but always in vain. In spite of this, she does not lose confidence in the institution of marriage or companionship. What she expects from this relationship is definitely not economic security, for she is self-reliant throughout her life, but a longing for the sense of family and bonding. These are typical of Aboriginal life and it is these aspects of it that she dreams of and seeks. Not only does she look forward to a husband or a companion but also a father for her children and wishes that they should grow up safe and healthy within the institution of family. Here, her voice echoes the anxieties, dreams and
aspirations of a lone woman, self-reliant, bold, capable, not aspiring for a "single life" but trying to pave the way to a "happy home".

When she longs for a man who would love her and shoulder the family responsibilities, Ginibi is not unaware of the fact that it is very difficult to find such a man. But the Aboriginal woman in her with a strong inclination towards "family" keeps her dreams and aspirations alive and fresh. The insecurity of employment and accommodation keeps her family always on the move, but she is never dispirited or shattered. It is not only this Aboriginal woman's perseverance that keeps her going, but also the determination of a mother that leads her in her repeated search for the ideal. In spite of surmounting difficulties, her motherhood is never adversely affected. When Ginibi repents of being a "permanent Eve", eating the apple and having babies, it is the mother in her who says, "I was the mother. I didn't know how to be not-mother" (Ginibi 1988: 202).

As a woman, her first priority is her children. Her consciousness of being a woman and her longing for familial bonds are, consequently, the crucial themes of her autobiography. Nor was everything smooth and easy for her in the process of asserting her identity as mother. She herself confesses: "though the association was wearing thin I tried to keep us together for the kids' sake. If he [her companion] was using me I was using him just as much. My first priority was the kids and it helped to have someone bringing in a wage now and then..." (Ginibi 1988: 81). This statement reveals not only a woman's urge for a companion and a father for her children but also her working class needs for another earning hand in the family. This voice of Aboriginal woman/mother is strongly rooted in Aboriginal culture but violently dislocated and displaced from it.
Ruby Langford Ginibi, who gets only bashings and kicks from her husbands and companions, turns out to be sensitive to violence against women. It is the mother in her who retorts to her daughter's boy friend beating up her daughter and it is the woman in her who questions him when her son beats up his girl friend. Her motherhood thus extends itself as she gives shelter to the needy and adopts them, in spite of her own poverty and struggle for survival. The untimely death of some of her children provokes thought; the presence of her surviving children reminds her of who she is and what her future activity should be. This awareness leads her to a search for her roots and makes her aware of her nostalgia for Aboriginal culture, and ultimately paves the way for her writer-activist career. When Ginibi's son is waylaid and beaten up by a gang of white kids and her daughter is called "dirty abo", she faces this situation boldly. When she realises that in Australian jails there are ten Aboriginal prisoners for each white prisoner and that many more blacks die in prison than whites, she gets motivated towards activism for Aboriginal issues.

This development of her personality and scope of activity is not only significant in the sense that Ginibi accommodates more people in her family as her children in spite of her poverty and insecurity, but also in the sense that at that time Aboriginal women, as many other Aboriginal women writers point out, had no rights over their children and were deprived of their motherhood. Against this background, where Aboriginal women had no control over their bodies, roles or relationships, where sexual atrocities, abortions, removal of children and the phenomenon of unwed Aboriginal mothers were an introduction to Aboriginal life, Ruby Langford Ginibi emerges successful as an Aboriginal woman. Although she is a failure as far as the material and romantic aspects
of her life are concerned, she is successful as a truly contemporary Aboriginal woman. She asserts and reiterates her rights and responsibilities as a woman, as a mother and as an Aboriginal mother.

She subverts the power politics of the dominant society by deciding on the number of children that she can have, not only her own children, but adopted ones too. It is a triumph against the political, economic, social and cultural inflictions and indictments. She reinscribes the rights and capabilities of an Aboriginal woman in a colonised and institutionalised society, where she is not the coloniser but the colonised, not part of the institutionalising stratum but of the institutionalised. Thus she regains and retains the power of an Aboriginal woman who believes in and works for preserving and protecting the institutions of marriage and family. When she speaks as a mother, it is most definitely the Aboriginal mother who is voicing her protest and her determination.

Ruby Langford Ginibi realises that her family is a microcosm of the Aboriginal situation in Australia. Readers also realise that Ginibi's experiences are not merely personal but can be extended to the condition of most Aboriginal women and children in a similar situation. The realisation about the question of colour dawns on her when she is taken to the mission-this seems to be the first step in the learning about the discriminating process of Aboriginal children. She says that the "black fellers" were identified and alienated everywhere, and in school, hospital and picture hall, there were separate seats for blacks and whites. While the Aboriginal children were given baths with handfuls of caustic soda used to wash linen instead of soap, they were not provided any medical care. Ginibi wonders if caustic soda was meant to change their black colour. Even if it was true, this colour does not fade but becomes a strong marker of identity and
a factor in the segregation of Aboriginal people. This colour is not merely a biological fact but also a political factor. The fading of colour by assimilation is one of the major concerns of Aboriginal writers. Ginibi’s detailed account of their baths with caustic soda works as a metaphor as well. Aboriginal people were considered dirty, unclean, black and ugly and so they were bathed with caustic soda so that they may shed their "uncivilised" physical traits and habits. This in itself is a cruel imposition on the Aboriginal people. In spite of this imposition, they were not considered clean and civilised. As a metaphor, it also throws light, therefore, on the whole Aboriginal situation. Whites tried to "clear up" Aboriginal culture, languages and religion in order to "reform" and civilise the people, by imposing measures that the whites thought were perfect and apt. This behaviour is atrocious in itself, but in spite of having undergone it, Aboriginal people were not considered equals to the ruling whites.

Ruby Langford Ginibi recollects how as a child she was made conscious about her colour by the same treatment. She also speaks as a child who was not trusted in school and was asked to repeat tests to prove that she was not cheating. Perhaps this is what gives her confidence and a battling spirit in her later life, a perseverance to prove herself against all odds. She also speaks as a child who has always seen only white teachers but never black teachers. She contemplates, "Every teacher I’d ever seen was white. I tried to imagine black kids being taught by black teachers, then I tried to imagine white kids with black teachers" (Ginibi 1988: 37). This is the voice of a person who has never been trusted, who had to prove herself at every step. Probably this is what gives her the strength to move ahead.
It is very interesting that Ruby Langford Ginibi refers to "underprivileged children". She was herself deprived of privileges and remained underprivileged like many of her people. Although she is by no means underprivileged in intelligence and capability, she is underprivileged as a colonised girl in her constant poverty. When she refers to the experiences of children like her in the mission, it is the voice of the underprivileged that speaks. But, when she overtly refers to "underprivileged" children, there is no attempt on her part to identify with them though she does not seem to suggest that she is herself privileged.

If her colour consciousness in the mission teaches Ginibi that she is different from others, her next phase of colour consciousness begins when she joins Aunt Nell as an attendant when she goes there from the mission. Not only as a young Aboriginal attendant, but even after settling in a family in her own house, can Ginibi not escape from colour discrimination and humiliation. The group of Aboriginal families living in Green Valley, of which hers is one, is a butt of sarcastic comments from the white neighbourhood on the government's policy on integration. These are the families that are dislocated, alienated and who are isolated from their Aboriginal societies. In fact, it is not only alienation, but also a kind of imprisonment that it can be compared to the dormitory life. For even as grown ups the Aboriginal people are expected not to create noise or to disturb the white neighbourhood. It also reminds us of the reserves when Ginibi says that they could not entertain guests unless they had permission from the Commission. They live away from their Aboriginal surroundings, but remain Aboriginals in mind and their identity. They escape from the clutches of missions and reserves in order to lead independent lives but still they have to go through a similar experience in
the new state. Alienation, isolation, discrimination and restriction equally haunt them and torment them. Here, Ginibi's voice represents the voices of Aboriginal people who are restricted, belittled, silenced and dictated to. It reminds Ginibi of the mission. This lifestyle drastically affects her Aboriginal self. For in their Aboriginal existence they often depended on being able to stay with friends and relatives. Whether they were inside a jail or outside, there was not much difference because both ways they were restricted and harassed.

These memories find a prominent place in Ruby Langford Ginibi's work. As an Aboriginal woman, she also writes about the common theme of the "belonging place". On her visit to her ancestral place, Bribie Island, she feels that the sun there returns her to life by soaking through her. She finds out how theories of human cultural development strategically prevent white students of culture, and Aborigines themselves, from acquiring respect for the latter. She wonders how her ancestors survived in Bribie Island. She feels proud to belong to such a tenacious race. She is also fascinated by the natural beauty and greatness of nature: "It made me think of our tribal beginnings, and this to me was like the beginning of our time and culture. Time was suddenly shortened to include all of history in the present, and it was also stretched to a way of seeing the earth that was thousands of years old" (Ginibi 1988: 234). Being culturally displaced, like other displaced persons she simultaneously feels proud of her roots and nostalgia for them. This dilemma typifies contemporary Aboriginal culture in Australia. It is also what divides her voice into two. One speaks of her nostalgia and the other expresses her immense respect for and concern over the lost ancestors and cultural roots.
One of the subjects rather prominently unstudied in many Aboriginal women's autobiographies is that of atrocities against women within their own society. But in *When the Pelican Laughed* Alice Nannup does refer to Aboriginal practices, such as the attempts to "widow" her mother: "You see, it's law that when a woman's nyuba (partner) dies she's got to have all her hair cut off to make herself ugly for somebody else" (Nannup 25). The same society that thrusts widowhood on an already deprived and grieving woman later forces her to marry another man. It is hardly a saving grace that the enforced widowhood is not "permanent". Both actions on the part of society clearly violate a woman's right to make such crucial decisions herself, it converts into mere custom what may very well be the turning points in individual life. Society thus not only restricts a woman's existence in the external world but also encroach upon her inner world. It is, therefore, surprising that even after raising this subject Nannup does not voice a significant protest against such customs.

Rape is another phenomenon that defines atrocity against women the world over. It does figure in some works in the scope of our study. For instance, in *Mum Shirl* Shirley Smith does refer to this phenomenon in contemporary Australia. Whether it was an unusual or unheard of crime in indigenous society or not we may never know. But in contemporary society it seems to affect women. Aboriginal women are not infrequently raped. (Interestingly, on the other side, Aboriginal men are subject to accusations of raping white women.) Smith does indicate that rape of Aboriginal women is often brought on by the fact that they are Aboriginal, that is induced by the cultural situation that has resulted from colonial subjugation of their societies. It is, therefore, one of the
hazards of Aboriginal identity, as is the automatic suspicion that if a white woman has been raped, an Aboriginal man must have committed the crime.

Shirley Smith says, "Rape is another such crime that white people come down on the Black community for, even though through all the years very few Black men have raped white women and a great many white men have raped Black women" (Smith, Shirley 33). She continues by saying that until recently it was unusual for an Aborigine to rape an Aboriginal woman or any other woman, for it is not the "Aboriginal way". She says that this threat of rape especially by white man instilled fear in Aboriginal girls. This holds a mirror up to the traditional Aboriginal societies and also to the predicament of Aboriginal men and women in a racially discriminating society. It is not just the question of culture conflict but also the issue of oppression and atrocities. Shirley Smith puts the centuries of white atrocities on Aboriginal women in a nutshell when she says that a great many white men have raped Black women and they have never been punished for that.

Shirley Smith's concern for Aboriginal women does not stop at the point of exposing their problems in a colonised society where their traditional roles are subverted. It also extends to the atrocities on Aboriginal women. She says that the Aboriginal identity is subjecting Aboriginal women to rape and Aboriginal men to accusation of rape in a white dominated society. Whether Shirley Smith discusses the condition of Aboriginal women in a cultural vacuum or the strength of their determination, it is the voice of an Aboriginal woman that speaks through her. It is the voice of an urban activist Aboriginal woman that speaks with a consciousness of her complex identity. It is full of concern for the violently displaced race exploited on the basis of gender as well.
Ruby Langford Ginibi quotes from Pam's speech which sounds like the shot guns aimed at the colonisers and their atrocities against indigenous people.

"It says a lot for what invasion has done to our people when we see our women suffering domestic violence, rape, incest, and problems of addiction.... Can you imagine what it's like for a Koori woman, raped and beaten, to have to go for help to the same organisations who stole her kids originally and the same lot who are killing her brothers - can you imagine how she feels about her so-called rights and protection? She knows she hasn't got any." (Ginibi 1994: 50)

Aileen Moreton-Robinson also throws light on the double bind of race and gender on Aboriginal women. She says that white men's assaults on indigenous women are attributed to indigenous women's promiscuity and their availability whereas indigenous men's sexual assaults on indigenous women are described as part of "murri lovemaking" by white male lawyers in court of law. In a similar tone, Payne argues that unlike white women, indigenous women are subject to three types of law: "white man's law, traditional law and bullshit law, the latter being used to describe a distortion of traditional law used as a justification for assault and rape of women" (Payne 10).

Such treatment of this and other subjects related to the sufferings of women is, however inadequate and infrequent in Aboriginal women's autobiographies. Sustained and critical treatment of indigenous violence and atrocities against women would have made the autobiographies of Aboriginal women even more important cultural and political statements. It would have provided a complex set of comparisons between indigenous and colonial atrocities, allowed us to distinguish between them, defined
women’s predicament better. If among the multiple voices heard in their autobiographies, some had been raised against any atrocity, our sympathy and understanding would have had a sharper edge. It is, on the other hand, not unlikely that such neglect is ‘natural’—for virtually the whole attention of our writers seems focused on colonially induced circumstances and experiences.

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In her *Pride against Prejudice*, Ida West not only expresses her Aboriginal consciousness but also echoes the voice of a bold Aboriginal woman. Throughout, life is a battle for Aboriginal women in contemporary society; they have to fight their battle all alone. Whether they emerge triumphant or are defeated, it is their fighting spirit that is important for Aboriginal people, without which they cannot survive in their struggle for existence. Ida West says, "We had to fight our own battles. We got a hammering if we came home and said someone called us black. We stuck up for ourselves and weren’t allowed to come home to tell tales. We had to get back in and fight" (West 22).

The problem of "half-castes" is another burning aspect of colonised Aboriginal life. Both Ruby Langford Ginibi and Shirley Smith express concern for and raise the issue in their autobiographies. Although most Aboriginal writers are half-castes, and consequently this becomes one of the major issues in their texts, it is in Ida West that the half-caste experience comes out most powerfully. Her Tasmanian childhood haunts her like it does in the case of many Aboriginal children. She does not go through the experiences of the stolen generation and dormitory life. But she has equally horrendous experiences in her childhood. That the whites considered Aboriginal people cannibals is one of the childhood memories that haunt Ida West. She understands and faces the fact
even as a child that Aboriginal identity becomes a label and that everyone is born with a
handle to her name. Discrimination in dance hall and church, her attempts to lighten her
complexion with the help of powder and cream, whites talking to her in private but not in
public—her childhood is marked by these memories. With all these experiences and
memories, Ida West speaks in the voice of an Aboriginal woman, who attempted
assimilation into white society with her lighter complexion, but who also realised that the
boundaries and segregations were marked by strong discrimination and that she could be
white in complexion but remains a half-caste in identity.

While Glenyse Ward narrates her unconscious actions of protest in her
autobiography, Ida West narrates her conscious efforts at assimilation into white society.
Glenyse Ward's unconscious efforts succeed but Ida West's conscious efforts go astray,
for the discrimination is so strong that assimilation is impossible. Looking back at her
past when she was a child, and her endeavours to become one with whites, Ida West not
only comments on white discrimination but also on the futile assimilationist hopes of the
blacks which had always been ultimately shattered. She describes what a tough struggle
life has been for her, which reflects the Aboriginal consciousness of the writer and the
relentless spirit of an Aboriginal woman, which is recurrently echoed in other Aboriginal
women's autobiographies.

Ida West speaks in the voice of a half-caste who is neither accepted by whites nor
admitted into their community by Aboriginals. Colour is the decisive factor in obtaining
entry into either white or Aboriginal societies since racial identity is basically recognised
on the basis of colour. Pamela Rajowski, in *Linden Girl: a story of outlawed lives*
(1995), informs us that children of mixed blood were not highly valued in Aboriginal
societies as full-blood children were. Full-blood children were perceived to have the right to be given knowledge of ancient beliefs, laws, traditions and customs. Aboriginal elders believed that a part Aboriginal child did not have the spiritual connections that a child with tribal parents had, and thus broke the family's line with their ancestral spirits. West is too light skinned to get an entry into Aboriginal society. But she is not light-skinned enough for entry into white society as well. She remains an Aboriginal with her strong inclination towards Aboriginal life, culture and lineage, in spite of failure to be admitted into Aboriginal society. Anxiety for the loss of Aboriginal identity, culture and traits, predominant in most Aboriginal women writers, characterises Ida West's narrative as well:

I think now and am proud of what we are and our talent…. we are not afraid to think ourselves as good as the next one. Its been hard but we'll all get there. Some people think we don't know anything, probably we don't, but we still have feelings and love people, love our religion, our Saviour. We're not greedy, but I am afraid some of them will be before very much longer because they're learning greedy ways…. There is no love-no-one to give into people, no one to help one another in sickness. Money—you're no good without it, but you're no good with it. (West 54-55)

Alice Nannup, in her autobiography When the Pelican Laughed, states: "I never knew my grandfather, but his name was Sam Singh, and he was an Indian…. I'm Aboriginal, English and Indian - a real international person. You hear people run down the English but I never do, because that's a part of me, just like having Indian blood"
This statement reveals the writer's ready acceptance of the historicity of her identity as an Indian-Aboriginal-Australian woman. But what is her identity in the eyes of white Australian society? What is society's attitude towards her? Although the writer seems to be very clear about her identity in this statement, her autobiography does reveal her battle with society and in this battle her Aboriginal identity becomes the foundation, shield and weapon in different contexts.

It is not just colour, according to Alice Nannup's autobiography, which creates differences among Aborigines. As some of the interviews in Kevin Gilbert's Living Black: Blacks talk to Kein Gilbert (1997) reveal, tribal identity and regional differences also play a very important role. For instance, let us examine two of Alice Nannup's statements:

We were Nor'westers, see, we all stuck together. We loved one another, all the Northies always loved one another. We all belonged to the one country, never mind if you're not related by blood, it's the North and that's our country. (Nannup 120)

and

we put the fire out because we could hear Aborigines a long way off and we were afraid. See, these were tribal people, and we didn't know what they'd do if they found us in their country. (Nannup 144)

Nannup's statements throw light on her concept of identity and the way she differentiates herself from "other Aborigines" or the way she identifies "other Aborigines". This is a clear example of the fact that the Aborigines are not a "homogeneous group". In the
recent self-conscious awareness-protest era, however, they have often tended to come together despite specific tribal identity and cultural difference.

Lionel Fogarty’s poem "Identity" strengthens Alice Nannup's statements:

In today's society the whites work on the divide and conquer
One is to divide the identity to create the power.
They have a full blood Aboriginal who says
I know more about Aboriginal identity than an Aboriginal from the city.
A half-caste will say
I'm more intelligent than those full blood Aboriginals
The blackfella whitefella say
I'm more white than both of you put together. (Fogarty 33)

Thus Aboriginal women writers offer resistance in their autobiographies to the domination they suffer as women, as Aborigines and as Aboriginal women. The experience and expression that Jackie Huggins discusses in Sister Girl holds a mirror up to the consciousness that is expressed in the multiple and complex shift of voices of Aboriginal women writers in their autobiographies:

As women we have all been subject to divide and rule socialisation, and racist and sexist ideologies. However, the overwhelming evidence and the experience of Aboriginal women points to the fact that Aboriginal women remain discriminated against due to their race rather than their gender. For example, a cosmically apparent Aboriginal woman is regularly stereotyped on the basis of being a boong, coon, nigger, gin or abo far in excess of being a "woman". The lack of recognition and real understanding of this political difference is a major issue still to be resolved by the white women's movement. (Huggins 1998: 25)
There are other kinds of consciousness and voices that emanate from and prevail in these autobiographies. For instance, Christian consciousness/identity and westernised lifestyle. These will be discussed in the next, the fourth chapter "Conflicting Identities". These identities come into conflict with indigenous identities of the writers whereas in the case of voices discussed in the present chapter, with all their differences, they contribute to the harmony among the writer's voices.