Chapter 5

CONCLUSION

It is difficult to conclude a study of a contemporary and in many ways a controversial subject like Aboriginal women's autobiographies. Particularly difficult it is to arrive at definitive views or judgements because a great number of issues emerge from a study like this and there is a danger of omitting, misinterpreting or misrepresenting some. But keeping in mind that no study can be complete and perfect, I will make an attempt at indicating at least some tentative conclusions as well as at pointing to a few directions which a study of this kind may lead us to.

In this concluding chapter of the present study, we shall briefly bring in Australian Aboriginal men's autobiographies so as to help contextualise the women's work. A substantial comparison between these two sets of writing will not fit in the present study of Aboriginal women's personal narratives, which have been the focus of this thesis. The comparison indicated here does not mean to dismiss men's writing, or to make sweeping generalisations about it, but only to set down a few of the more significant areas of difference between attitudes and values that characterise the women's as opposed to the men's writing.

In the same spirit, and to open up the possibility of future work, at the end of the chapter we shall bring in a subject that holds tremendous potential for comparison, women's autobiographical writing from the Aboriginal and otherwise oppressed communities in India, generally identified by the term "dalit".
Before that, it will be worthwhile bringing together what we have encountered in our survey of Australian Aboriginal women's autobiographical writing. First of all, all the basic issues and concerns of people in comparable situations to theirs—predictable, yet most significant concerns—are found in their work. How are women treated? What roles did they play in traditional "native" societies? How do women perceive their traditional roles? How are "native" women treated in situations of large scale colonisation? By the native men, by native communities? And most crucially, by the colonising race or community? How did the women react to their treatment? Did their situation change over time? Why? Did it improve, or become worse?

In this set of general questions that confront the women writers examined in this study are included more specific questions. What was the case of their gender? Did it become a special locus of exploitation? How did their emotional nature fare in encounters with white people? How did their original womanly aspirations fare? Were they assigned new roles, and if so, what were they and how did they reiterate the colonial situation? Did they, in fact, remain on the fringes of the colonial situation or did they become the locus of a major facet of colonisation? What were the deprivations imposed on them? Physically, socially, emotionally, economically, spiritually, sexually, in terms of class and gender, as mothers and wives? Did they gain anything or lose everything as colonisation progressed? What was the tenor of their consciousness of such deprivation and oppression?

This thesis has also tried to raise and answer questions such as: How do the above mentioned and many other related concerns and issues reflect the standpoint of Aboriginal women in a colonised situation? How does autobiography as a genre help
them? How do they mend and bend the form autobiography, to suit their purposes? How and why does "silence" play such a crucial role in Aboriginal women's lives—traditional and colonised—and literature? How do their strategies in all these contexts contribute to Aboriginal women writers' effort to protest against discrimination and exploitation in the form of autobiography? Do their lives become texts for others or messages? When an autobiography deals with the writer's effort to conceal facts which are revealed to readers, as is the case of Roberta Sykes, what is the function of such an autobiography?

What kind of a self-identity do these writers construct and what are the voices that speak in the process of its definition? What is the consciousness that motivates them and guides them? Where does their identity crisis in a colonised society lead them to? What are the conflicts that prevail in their lives between them and the society, and within themselves? What kind of an impact do controversies about their Aboriginal identity have on their identity crisis? When they write, are they trying to enrich literature, construct history, deconstruct white versions of everything that is "Aboriginal"?

These and related questions are tackled by the autobiographies examined in this study. No two works are identical; no two women report the same life, the same viewpoint, or the same answers to these and other questions. Each has a significantly individual and valid viewpoint as well as world-view. The world-view, among other things, is a particularly significant aspect of these works—for it is in this that the women definitely link their current state and status with their traditional "Aboriginal" situation. It is this that brings in the whole range of questions and topics we have listed, from family to spiritual affairs, loss of freedom to loss of language. It is also this factor that
allows these writers to explore avenues of reaction, to participate, in varying degrees, in the process of self-definition and protest against being externally defined.

The autobiographies studied in this process bring to light the crucial fact that no matter where a genre originates, in practice an indigenously engendered work always modifies it significantly. That is why, once again, in a considerable variety, we find the women's works ranging from fictionalised autobiography to indirectly reported autobiographical reminiscence. The content, too, varies considerably between works, from reconstruction of several generations to recollection of parts of individual lives, from attention to individual experience to family experience, from cases of awful upbringing to worse adulthood. Everywhere, yet without repetitiousness, are to be encountered the language and forms of re-memoration, recovery and reconstruction discovered by these writers to fit their bewilderment, pain, suffering, deprivation, ill-treatment and exploitation. These facts do not come before us as types or statistics but are recorded in voices that speak with poignant individuality, so that even omissions silently signal suffering or protest.

The works examined reveal the independence that typifies women's writing elsewhere as well--each writer, regardless of consequences in terms of reception, sets down the degree of pain, suffering and protest or accommodation she feels. None attempts to fit any literary or social mould, therefore the works are refreshing eye-openers even when at times the "contents" appear similar or familiar. Different ages are represented in these works, different degrees of distance from the dominant mainstream society, different degrees of closeness with Aboriginal origins, different degrees of consciousness of that origin and of questions of identity that arise from having a long
history that was first rudely disrupted by colonials and then equally rudely kick-started in
a new game of oppressor-oppressed. From the near hatred to overt assimilationist
tendencies, the women's reactions, too, vary greatly. From activism to near-fatalism, we
find the attitudes speaking to us in more than one voice, the apparent voice of the surface
of the text, and the many, changing, unsettled, unsettling, defined, undefined voices that
emerge from between the lines of these autobiographies.

It seems clear from my study that this writing by Aboriginal women must be
treated as a significant body of expression of the Aboriginal situation that will yield a
great deal of understanding of "how it was" and "how it is" for Aboriginal women and
Aboriginal people in Australia. Without thorough consideration of both the contents and
the voices in these autobiographies, any study of the general Aboriginal situation will
remain grossly incomplete. Although such is the case wherever women's voices are
concerned, in any time or community or predicament, for an appreciation of what has
happened during the past 200 years in an Island that had been inhabited by its "natives"
during the hundred thousand years that preceded the colonial experience, these works are
indispensable. What these works add no other works can, the viewpoints about
Aboriginal situation that they make available will not be available elsewhere. What is
available in the form of autobiographies and autobiographical fiction helps reconstruct,
correct, revise history successfully, to add those aspects of that history which are missing
from or distorted in "the Australian history".

Even as the Aboriginal women's autobiographies studied here discuss history,
identity, conflict and consciousness in a protesting voice, there is a sense in which all of
them also attempt a reconciliation with the facts that they may have to co-exist with
whites, and that neither a policy of "back to the roots" nor an attempt at total independence as an Aboriginal Australia is likely to work. But their uncompromising demand is for equality and justice. It is therefore not surprising that Aboriginal women's autobiographies are sometimes criticised for being accommodative or that there is a feeling that they either accept or seek to come to grips with white dominance. It is also said that Aboriginal affairs are entering a stage of post-activism in that the emphasis is on "sharing and understanding" rather than on justice. Sally Morgan's *My Place*, in particular, has been attacked for being a personal history only, and not a part of a general Aboriginal movement. But all Aboriginal women writers—except perhaps Shirley Smith, who says that she does not understand the relationship between Aborigines and politics even though she is actually associated with politics—have declared that to be born an Aborigine is political and that the personal is also political. Neither *My Place* nor any other Aboriginal woman's autobiography deals merely with the past nor is any of them a "death book", to use Mudrooroo Narogin's term. For all these autobiographies reveal hatred of injustices committed against Australian Aborigines, agony for the deplorable colonial past, as well as hope for the future. They express anguish for the deaths and look forward to births. Thus these autobiographies are books of commitment to life and future.

There is certainly a voice in these autobiographies that speaks of reconciliation and co-existence. For instance, while Sally Morgan clearly voices the urge for reconciliation in her *My Place*, Alice Nannup, in her autobiography *When the Pelican Laughed*, bemoans the fact that in Australia equality was seen only during wartime years: "because they were in uniform, those boys were allowed to go and drink in a bar with the
white soldiers. They all reckoned wartime was the only time they ever felt they were equal" (Nannup 174). This statement, apart from pointing out the discrimination, clearly and strongly implies a wish for equality in peacetime as well. There may be sarcasm in the statement about the government's policy of implementing equality, but it definitely insists on a permanent equal status for Aborigines. Aborigines have fought in the war on behalf of the white government yet Alice Nannup does not even question the decision that made Aborigines participate in the war, only the temporary status of the "equality".

Ida West's version of Aboriginal participation in the war presents another dimension of the relations between Aborigines and the white government. In Pride against Prejudice she speaks proudly about Aboriginal participation in the war and her brother's shaking hands with the Prime Minister. Such instances are examples of the writer's wish for Aboriginal people to be equal citizens in Australia, and show an attachment to the concept of the Australian nation. She throws light on the aim the Aboriginal movement and its literature may pursue: "Yes, it's going to be a long time before we all can be on even terms with the Europeans, not that we want to be any better but just so we can speak and try to do our work and have our own land" (West 47). There is, however, much more to this. For, at the same time, this attitude can be traced to the implicit Aboriginal concept of man belonging to the land and not the land belonging to man. The works of the writers examined in our study assert that they are fighting against racial discrimination and not white imperialism.

In Stradbroke Dreamtime Oodgeroo Noonuccal laments:

The island is different now. Civilization and man's greed have chased away our shy nautilus shells. Motorcars belch fumes over the land,
and the noise of industry drowns out all other sounds of life. Men's machines have cut and maimed and destroyed what used to be.

Stradbroke is dying. The birds and animals are going. The trees and flowers are being pushed aside and left to die. Tourists come to soak up the sunshine and bathe in the blue Pacific, scattering as they go their discarded cans and cigarette packs and bottles and even the hulks of cars.

Greedy, thoughtless, stupid, ignorant man continues the assault on nature. But he too will suffer. His ruthless bulldozers are digging his own grave. (Noonuccal 1972: 4)

In this elaborate and heartrending description, nowhere do we find an overt reference to racial conflict and imperialism but only to the untoward impact of European civilisation. It is implied that this so-called civilisation was introduced and established by whites. Nor is there any reference to the original white invasion of Aboriginal land. Thus it once again proves that her voice is raised not against the whites as a race and as invaders, but only against the attitude and world-view of the whites. Her statement in her interview with Gerry Turcotte, "Recording the Cries of the People", in which she says that decent people have been her audience, supports this. She elaborates this by her reference to "whites as well as blacks. The humanitarians - who wanted to know more about the Aboriginals - welcomed it [her writings] with open arms..." (Rutherford 19). The question Is That You Ruthie? reasserts the purpose and inspiration of Aboriginal writing and the repeated and reiterated Aboriginal experience. Ruth echoes here the same spirit of Aboriginal writing:
This book, however, was never intended to place blame, but to record our experiences and to remember the past for the sake of all who lived through it. I cry when I remember my sisters, we would be a forgotten generation if I didn't write about what we experienced. I write for them so that their lives and the treatment they received will always be remembered. (Hegarty 43)

When asked about the Aboriginal struggle against the whites, citing the example of India's freedom struggle, Roberta Sykes says, "I think Aboriginal people are realistic. And there is no point in wanting to put the sun in your pocket. And so you have to have achievable goals. And I don't think that the white people are going to go. Largely because they don't have anywhere to go to. You can't squash 18 million people back into Europe..." (Personal Interview. 9 January 1998).

On the other hand, there is a conscious effort from within the movement to convince the readership that not all whites are prejudiced and discriminating. Whether it is the writer's own voice or the interference of the editor, this kind of an establishment of the concept of "good whites" may also be perceived in some of the Aboriginal women's autobiographies. Monica Clare's autobiographical novel Karobran, edited and "improved" by Jack Horner, is the best example of this. The narration is quite interesting in the sense that it presents white atrocities and immediately tries to argue that not all whites discriminate against the Aborigines. This does not happen only once but repeatedly, wherever there is scope. This proves the writer's or improver's desperate attempt to prove that she is not arguing against the whole white community but only against atrocious and discriminating whites and specifically government policies. In
Karobran, the descriptions of dry, muddy and dirty land where the reserves for Aborigines are built, starvation, suffering, illiteracy and poverty that prevail among the Aborigines are countered by statements like this: "sometimes she would feel like shouting at them, when they would tell her how much they had come to hating white people for ever coming to this country. She knew that she could tell them about people like Aunt, Uncle and Bill..." (Clare 87-88). Whether the writer attempted to suppress this protest or the editor does so may remain beyond the reach of the reader, for the writer is no longer alive and the work has been interfered with. When Isabelle, towards the end of the novel, declares that Aborigines should make the whites understand that Aborigines are not children and that they are capable of looking after themselves, we can ironically hear an acceptance of the need to be heard and understood by the whites. It only acknowledges that they are convinced that they are taken care of by whites as children are cared for by parents or elders. It may have cropped up due to the writer's experience and opinion and her identity as a lighter complexioned Aboriginal girl; yet at the same time there is every chance of the editor's opinions and intentions having crept in.

There is a clear urge for reconciliation and co-existence in Monica Clare's words when she says, "Isabelle needed no reassurance from her Mum's people like Aunt, Uncle and Bill, whom she knew would teach their young children to understand that black was not a dirty word, and that together with white it would mean strength for equality and human rights" (Clare 94). It is not a condemnation of whites' attitude towards the word black and the existence of blacks. It is, however, an attempt at convincing herself of the greatness of the word black and it is an attempt at amalgamation of the two colours. The voice of the narrator changes as we enter the second part of the book. In the first, we
come across a clear condemnation of the discriminatory policy of the whites and the 
white government and specifically white attitudes towards blacks. But gradually this 
condemnation limits itself to one section or type of whites who inflict inhuman treatment 
on the blacks. In the first half too we find white characters who are generous and 
understanding, and the characters who haunt us are those who, like Tom, harass the 
innocent children due to their prejudice against the blacks. There is only an indirect 
argument or evidence of the small section of whites who take care of Aborigines, like 
Uncle, Aunt, Tom’s wife and others. Also, in the second part, apart from this, there is a 
direct argument in favour of the whites. The reasons and factors behind this are debatable 
and throw a provocative riddle before the reader. On the one hand, many of the women 
writers are also active protestors against both colonial invasion of native life as well as 
discrimination. On the other there are writers like Monica Clare who seem to suggest that 
the wrong is neither very deep nor particularly humiliating. This situation of loud and 
angry protest riding alongside assimilationist tendencies clearly parallels that in the 
history of many other colonised countries’ reaction to domination by outsiders.

Anita Heiss articulates the intentions behind Aboriginal women's writing and her 
words may provide us with a clue to some of the mysteries mentioned above in 
Aboriginal women’s writing:

I have gained an insight into the reasons why black women have chosen to 
take up the pen instead of the sword in order to win our war.

Our war is sometimes against the ignorant non-Indigenous 
population. Sometimes it's a war against our own emotions and thoughts. 
At other times it's a war against the man who's been beating them for too
long. For some, at times like me, it's a war against the wahgin (white woman) at school who thought she was better than anyone else. (Reed-Gilbert 37)

Thus, it is a war not so much against colonisation as against discrimination. While it has not been possible in the present study to compare Australian Aboriginal women writers’ role in such protest with women writers with similar backgrounds like African American, Native American, Native Canadian, Maori and Indian Dalit, that would be a study worth undertaking. Similarly, to understand the specific reasons why Aboriginal women writers in Australia leaned towards milder forms of protest than militancy, again in comparison with the other above mentioned situations, would also be worth study.

*****

Although it is not only gender consciousness that dominates Aboriginal women's autobiographies, these autobiographies can uniquely be distinguished from men's autobiographies, in their concerns and perceptions from women's point of view. Now, to change direction, Aboriginal women's autobiographies and the issues that they raise provoke thoughts in readers about Aboriginal men’s autobiographies as well. At some stage it would become inevitable to look at men's autobiographies alongside the women's, since they might provide material for a more complete Aboriginal perspective of their own predicament between the two worlds.

The basic questions that crop up when we look at Aboriginal writing divided as men's writing and women's writing are: What is the effect of the gender identity of the Aboriginal writers according to themselves and according to society? How do the men writers identify themselves with Aboriginal women as a class? Who do they identify
themselves with, Aboriginal women or white men? What is the purpose and function of Aboriginal men in writing their autobiographies? Does their memory work selectively in their autobiographies? Which phases of their lives are "selected out" and which become the central point of their autobiographies and why? Where do they locate themselves as Aborigines, as men and as Aboriginal men?

When we consider these questions and others that come up when we compare Aboriginal men's and women's writing, more differences can be perceived than similarities. For instance, in his autobiography *A Bastard Like Me*, Charles Perkins describes how Aboriginal children were prevented from entering Alice Springs except on Saturday nights. He focuses here on the geographical, social and racial boundaries that were created for Aboriginal people. He introduces himself as a stolen child, dormitory boy, "half-caste", "scum", and "unwanted" in white society. He is a "half-caste", and therefore belongs to nobody and nowhere. He identifies himself with other "half-castes" like him who feel that something is wrong with them, that something is missing in them. They are all dissatisfied with most things in life. Having been identified by white society as a bastard, the worst of both the worlds, Perkins longs to be recognised as a human being.

Such are the common issues that both Aboriginal men's and women's writing raise and throw light on and which are of great concern to them. But, for the rest, men writers take a different view of the Aboriginal situation. While the women writers, by and large, keep silent about the internal problems of Aboriginal and mixed blood societies, men writers sharply criticise the attitude of the mixed blood people towards Aboriginal people, apart from discussing their trauma of belonging to neither Aboriginal
societies nor to white society. It is very interesting that Charles Perkins distinguishes his Arunta tribe from other Aboriginal tribes on the ground that his tribe is more flexible in its attitude towards whites and it can easily admit whites into its society without any grief or vacillation. But he does not raise the question whether the whites are ready or willing to be admitted into Aboriginal societies or whether the whites are ready to accept the Arunta tribe into their society.

Not only does Perkins assert the flexibility of his tribe, he also attacks the attitude of the mixed blood people towards Aboriginal societies. Perkins says, "Unfortunately some part-Aborigines resent and even hate the fact of their existence. I know of many in Alice Springs alone who are ashamed of their ancestry and condemn at every opportunity tribal relatives or people. I feel sorry for them. They are lost people" (Perkins 11). He also reveals that many part-Aborigines are very vocal in condemning tribal or other Aborigines. They relish the thought that between them and the gutter there is somebody, the Aboriginal people. On the other hand, he says that most "half-castes" hate Aboriginal people because that is what the government wants. He also recollects his childhood as a dormitory boy during which the children were not allowed to meet Aboriginal people and were cut off from tribal life. In that case, is he different from mixed blood people who move away from tribal societies? Is it not a part of the conditioning, as he himself says, of Aboriginal people to admire whites and hate their own people? Although women writers also hint that there are differences among Aboriginal people, they do not really devote much space to these attitudinal problems of "half-caste" people towards Aboriginals and tribals, except referring to the struggle of the mixed blood people to fit into the white society and their anxiety about not being
admitted into Aboriginal society.

Against this background, it is worth noticing how Charles Perkins looks at Aboriginal women. He says, "The pioneer men decided to get rid of all the dark women they were having relationships with, women who had helped them build their cattle stations up to what they were" (Perkins 10). Apart from revealing Perkins' historical consciousness, the above statement reveals his awareness of the predicament of Aboriginal women. He tries to define an Aboriginal motherhood on the basis of Aboriginal mothers' suffering at the deaths of their children by saying that they suffer great emotional strain and physical injury and thus creating a separate category of Aboriginal motherhood. But, when he refers to his own affairs, he states that Australian girls bore him to tears because they are crude and common, lacking class and warmth. Yet in no other way does he refer to his association with Aboriginal girls. When he says that white girl friends were ashamed of Aboriginal boys and were scared to meet them in open, he does not even refer to his response to Aboriginal girls or their response to him. Does he deliberately ignore his association with or his reactions to Aboriginal girls? Why? Does he create boundaries between himself and Aboriginal girls? Does the fact that he subsequently married a white woman influence this part of his life, does it give rise to selective memory?

In some ways, Perkins speaks with the same militant spirit that pervades Aboriginal women's writing when he says that the more the whites criticise the Aboriginal people the more determined he is to learn to fight them and answer their irrational criticism. But his general approval and support of England also raises several questions about the factors that contribute to his opinions. Does he forget that Australian
whites were descendants of migrants from England? Does he ignore the attitude of the British towards blacks in England? Again, is it his location in white society that influences his opinions about the British?

John Moriarty is another Aboriginal writer who expresses his admiration for England in his autobiography *Saltwater Fella*. He says, "If you were a likeable person, they didn't discriminate on colour - at least the people I met didn't" (Moriarty 137). What does likeable mean? Likeable to whom? Does likeable mean successful? Does it mean unresentful and docile? Who are these "people" he refers to? Surely, many other factors besides being "likeable" are involved in interracial encounters. So, can the attitude he reports be taken as the general British attitude towards coloured people?

Of mixed blood, a stolen and dormitory boy like Charles Perkins, John Moriarty also presents both his childhood and adulthood during which he faces discrimination and adverse conditioning at every step. As a child he has been told, "You must forget your language, your culture and things like that. Stop acting like an uncivilised Aborigine" (Moriarty 18). Like any other institutionalised Aboriginal child, John Moriarty was also conditioned to forget his language, culture and people. This made him express his concern, as an insider, for the predicament of Aboriginal people and anger towards the attitude of the government:

Governments, both State and Federal, didn't acknowledge our most basic rights - they still had a policy of assimilation. Before that, their policy had been to "smooth the dying pillow". They thought we were all going to die out, and that the aim, therefore, was to make our extinction as painless as possible. At various times we were classified as full-bloods, half-castes,
quarter-castes, octoroons - all measures of blood and various shades of colour which determined how an individual was treated. Full-blood? Left to die. Half-caste like me? Taken. Quarter-caste or octoroon? Taken sooner. (Moriarty 176)

Like Charles Perkins, Moriarty also reveals that, being a "half-caste", he was refused by the girls. Only his identity as a successful soccer player brought him what he had lost as a half-caste. Like a typical Aboriginal person, he emphasises the importance of home, security, sense of belonging and reiterates that their home is their Aboriginal culture.

It is very interesting and important that he creates his identity. He is a "half-caste" stolen boy who is in search of his parents and roots. He locates his mother, who is an Aboriginal, and also his father's people in Ireland. In a way it is a typical Aboriginal writer's search for roots. But recollection is different from other Aboriginal writing, especially women's writing, because the writer here also goes in search of his white roots. Interestingly, he tries to connect Aboriginal people with the Irish in their attitudes, saying that the Irish, like the Aboriginal people, accept relatives irrespective of their colour.

Although his own sense of identity is very clear to him, the question as to who he identifies with remains unanswered. He fails to get along with an Aboriginal girl and comes to the conclusion that Aboriginality cannot be the only factor that binds two people, and so he marries a white woman and lives happily ever after. Here it seems as though he is speaking as a man rather than as an Aboriginal man. It seems as if he is trying to create another category within that of Aboriginals with reference to his contemporaries who failed to identify with their Aboriginality as he did and were terrible
failures in life: "Maybe it is a little simplistic, but part of me wonders whether they got into difficulties because they couldn't find the inner serenity that would enable them to take pride in their Aboriginal heritage" (Moriarty 272). Is this an un/conscious attempt to blame Aboriginal people instead of finding the loopholes and injustice in the system? Is he trying to elevate himself above common Aboriginal people?

Already Moriarty is different from other Aboriginal people in the sense that he is a well-known soccer player, a businessman and a successful individual. He is not every Aboriginal person but a rare and outstanding example. Apart from material achievements, is he in his argument trying to claim spiritual achievements? He reveals that successful people are always acceptable and there are many film stars, sport stars and businessmen who are black and yet well accepted into white society. But the question is, is it fair to determine acceptability on the basis of such extraordinary examples of success? Is Moriarty happy because he and a very few people like him are successful and so are accepted in society? Does he feel or express concern for those who are not successful for various reasons and hence are not accepted in or by white society? Once again, any genuine enlightenment regarding such attitude seems to be conspicuous by its absence in the writing of Aboriginal women.

In the same manner, Charles Perkins also stands out from fellow Aboriginal people in general. He is a reputed soccer player, an activist, and successful in life and powerful in politics. Can he, then, represent every Aboriginal man's experience and expression? Perkins himself pinpoints his extraordinary status: "First Aborigine out of university. First Aborigine in a professional soccer team. First Aborigine to work overseas in a coalmine. First Aborigine to lead the Freedom Rides and now... first on the
kidney machine!" (Perkins 151). This is not, even if in the end it becomes a little sarcastic, a voice that speaks on behalf of the experience of the community. This is not the voice that identifies with every black man/woman. In this aspect of Aboriginal writing, too, the women seem far more concerned about and involved with the life and situation of the Aboriginals as a community, as a race. Their gender concerns do not, obviously, overshadow their community concerns, as the men's seem to do. One may even venture the possibility that it is gender that allows the women to extend their interest beyond individuality, given their traditional role and responsibilities. At any rate, all the women's autobiographies examined in the present study evince concern for the overall situation of Aboriginal people in Australia.

Women writers differ from men writers also in their discussion of sex and sexuality. While women writers elaborate only sparingly on their affairs and sexual abuses, men writers treat at length and in detail their affairs and advances to girls, their disappointments and frustrations in love life. As it has been discussed in earlier chapters, women writers do not cross these boundaries as far as sex and sexuality are concerned. Jackie Huggins declares, "Until there is a real understanding of racism in this country and genuine moves made towards racial equality, many Aboriginal women will not be prepared to talk publicly, to audiences of 'others', about the oppression they suffer through sexism" (Huggins 35). Although Roberta Sykes is more overt while discussing these issues compared to other women writers, in her case it may be an attempt to liberate and detach herself from the trauma of rape. While men writers express anxiety regarding being accepted in white society, women writers protest against their not being acceptable in white society despite being victims of sexual abuse and exploitation by white males.
They express far greater anxiety about not being accepted by or being alienated from mainstream society—in fact, they seem genuinely concerned about belonging to Aboriginal society. They attack the other’s discriminatory attitude, of all white society.

If Aboriginal consciousness is expressed in women writers' search for their roots, is it a consciousness tinged with dominant white attitudes that is expressed in men writers' search for roots? What is the purpose of men writers in writing their autobiographies? It certainly does not seem to be to record collective experiences the way women like Ruth Hegarty do in their autobiographies. The men's narratives, by and large with exceptions like Mudrooroo Narogin's autobiographical fiction, seem to bring us individual experiences of successful people who have gained acceptability. They seem to function more as inspiration for Aboriginal people towards assimilation and reconciliation. Although Mudrooroo Narogin attacks women's writing for being favourable to assimilation and reconciliation, it is really the men writers who seem to deserve that criticism far more.

It is therefore not surprising that John McLaren's autobiographical novel *The Sweet Water-Stolen Land*, unlike Clare's *Karobran*, presents history with the coloniser in the centre. The white man, not the Aboriginal, seems to be the real protagonist. Although the historical consciousness of the writer is commendable and his reconstruction of history deserves appreciation, it is a history that revolves round the white protagonist. The Aboriginal story remains only a sub-text in this autobiographical novel. Such is definitely not the case with Aboriginal women's autobiographical fiction.

****

With these and several other arguments and conclusions we have been able to
arrive at regarding Aboriginal women's autobiographies, to sum up our present study, let us try to locate them in the general picture of the marginalised literatures. It may not be possible to comment on or analyse the situation all over the world, for marginalisation may take place on the basis of several factors in any society and in any era. At times it may have been brief; at times it may have lasted long enough to appear permanent. It may be marginalisation of individuals or it may be marginalisation of entire communities. Individuals do not belong to one single category nor do they remain in the same category forever except in some given situations in which they are, for long periods of time, discriminatorily classified by others. As we have seen in the previous chapters, Aboriginal women writers come from different backgrounds, are interested in different issues, write in different tones and have achieved different purposes. The difference may be great but Aboriginality is the uniform factor that facilitates a study of all these writers under one category.

Throughout human history, imperialism has subjected cultures and peoples to subservience that has resulted in the elimination, enslavement or degradation of indigenous peoples and cultures. These peoples and cultures, although virtually eliminated or subdued forcibly and violently, may succeed in raising a voice of protest, however faint, in spite of paradoxical efforts towards appropriation and alienation at different levels. In modern history, Native Americans, the Maoris of New Zealand, Native Canadians and many other peoples have fought the battle and are still fighting it. This battle against colonialism may, indeed, seem to have receded into the background today, but the battle against discrimination and their lament over the loss of their "original identity" still continue and provide the thrust to their movements and their
literatures.

If two hundred years of colonisation, discrimination and exploitation have given rise to the present Aboriginal situation discussed in this study, what happens when some sections of society are subjugated, isolated, eliminated or oppressed, by non-European, non-white, non-technological, and pre-modern oppressors for thousands of years? This is exactly the scenario that the Indian dalit and tribal situation and their literatures represent. There may not appear to be any direct basis of comparison between the "dalit" situation and dalit literature in India and the Aboriginal situation and Aboriginal literature in Australia. Some of the issues are different, the predicaments are different and the movements are different. But colonial phenomenon presents common fact. Consequently, the voice of the suffering, discriminated and exploited people is, essentially, one and the same all over the world. It is a voice that bursts out from the crushing silence of decades, centuries or even millennia. It is a voice that heartrendingly expresses the agony and also fiercely and indignantly expresses the protest. Indian dalit literature and Aboriginal literature provide such a relevant context for an Indian student of Australian literature and politics of oppression.

Extending the scope from Australia to India will open up many avenues for discussion and comparison. India has gone through the stage of colonialism for several millennia. And the last two centuries of the rule of the British, will be crucial in comparison of the history of Indian and Australian Aborigines. For this is the phase during which the modern concept of the Indian nation came into existence and culminated in the freedom struggle. Like other fourth world countries, India has also suffered a crisis of loss of culture, language, lifestyle and identity. The process of at least
partial absorption and assimilation, which one proclaims took place during earlier periods of colonisation, did not work with the British rule. The British always remained the "other" for Indians. Literature, life and the movements have all echoed the demand for independence from both British as well as indigenous oppression.

It may not be true that independent India is completely free from oppression. There are fourth world societies in India in the form of the castes and displaced and dispossessed Aboriginal communities. Even today, serious displacement is taking place of Aboriginal people from locations of major river dams, for instance. The caste system of India had ostracised certain sections of society as untouchables. These people are marginalised and alienated by the mainstream majority society. In order to glorify certain sections and put them on a higher pedestal, the dominant strata of society have portrayed and treated the outcastes as subhuman. In the political game of control of wealth and power, caste has been used as a weapon that has been actively and seriously bolstered by religion. Some sections like the Aboriginal people of India, on the other hand, were driven into the forests and mountains. Their situation differs significantly, therefore, from that of outcastes.

Tribal gods and goddesses have been absorbed by mainstream society. Several cultural and other practices have been assimilated. Medicinal systems have been learnt from them. Tribal peoples and cultures throughout the length and breadth of India have contributed immeasurably to the mainstream culture and society over long stretches of time. In spite of all this, the lower caste people have always inhabited the fringes of mainstream society, always at hand to be exploited. In contrast, the tribals have always remained genuine outcastes, that is to say, they have been forced right outside the
pernicious caste system also. Some have lived in reasonable isolation but total neglect; some have kept contact with mainstream society by occasionally selling forest products; some have taken up special professions (e.g., the Ramoshis of Maharashtra worked as night watchmen in villages); some have suffered directly at the hands of mainstream society, for instance by being branded as criminals. Hundreds of tribes in India have been living in forests and co-existing with beasts, experiencing poverty, suffering and diseases from times immemorial—their ways corroded, their lands encroached upon, their women raped, and in general their existence being squeezed from all sides. From this has emanated their literature, which is nothing but a record of their life and their anguished protest. Most of it being oral, it has tended to vanish with the passing of time. Whatever remains is, by and large, inaccessible because of language barriers and the thrust of the mainstream languages on the tribals.

Like other fourth world literatures, the mainly oral literature of the marginalised sections of Indian society has begun to gain momentum in the recent decades, building their movement on the pillars of protest and resistance. The term "dalit", which means people who have been ground down, came into existence as part of this struggle for identity and restitution. Like the terms "native", "indigenous" and "Aboriginal", the term dalit has also become debatable with some disagreements regarding inclusions and exclusions. For instance, only untouchables are dalit according to one view; tribals, backward castes and minorities including those converted to other religions are dalit according to another. In this process, in fact, India’s Aboriginal people have been further marginalised. Despite all these sub-categories and controversies, however, still the dalit movement and dalit literature have grown considerably in the past three decades in the
path of revolt. Whether literature is the weapon of the movement or not, the common
degraded treatment and condition are inseparable, interdependent and contributory in the
literature of both the caste dalits and Aboriginal dalits in India.

It is difficult for an outsider to deal with dalit literature because of lack of
exposure and shared experience and also because this literature is mostly written or
composed not even in India's regional languages, but in the far less known Aboriginal
language. This obstacle redoubles the difficulty. In spite of all these hurdles, dalit
literature has been able to capture the attention of the readers and critics and contributed
to a major change in viewpoints in society and literature mainly because of a strenuous
and useful translation effort.

Reference to these historical, social and political issues is inevitable when we
regard these literatures, since they are the products of that background. Without an
introduction to the background it would be difficult to understand and interpret these
literatures, although the heartburn and outburst of suffering may be felt without even an
awareness of the specific content. In comparison to caste-dalit literature, however,
Aboriginal literature has not been well documented. Consequently, contemporary tribal
literature has not yet gained momentum comparable to that of the literatures of other
sections. As the Aborigines still live, by and large, in isolation from the main areas of
habitation, culture and language of mainstream society, illiteracy and lack of awareness
of their condition and the world outside contribute to this slowness in the movement of
tribal written literature.

Like Australian Aborigines, Indian tribals too have lost their lands, languages,
cultures, liberty and identity. They do not find a proper place in "Indian" history.
Although they have revolted a number of times against local kings and also the British rule, the tribals are "invisible" in history and in literature. Some of the issues that Australian Aboriginal women writers raise and for which they express concern, hold the mirror up to the tribal situation in India. For instance, the concern of the writers for the gradually disappearing Aboriginal culture and traits finds a parallel in partial tribal assimilation into the mainstream society as in general isolation from it; elimination of their culture in the name of assimilation and the disappearance of their tribal traits are other factors that are common. Ignoring their attachment to land, they are evacuated in the name of excavations, explorations and development, thus leading to displacement and dislocation. The concern that Monica Clare expresses for the displacement of Aboriginals in the name of productive projects reminds one of movements with active tribal participation in India such as the "Chipko" movement for protection of Aboriginal forests, and the "Save Narmada" agitation against displacement of tribals to make way for a major dam in Central India. The above examples provide hints as to where these two situations meet and where the need is for them to be juxtaposed in any comparative study.

Like the Australian Aboriginal people, whenever Indian tribals have been the subject of literature they have been portrayed as subhuman or they have been glorified as noble savages. They have always been stereotypes in the minds of Indians, whose characteristics were mainly negative, human sacrifice and cannibalism being the prominent among them. Their image vacillates between the noble savage and the savage strictly according to convenience or ignorance of reality. Writers like Mahasweta Devi in Bengal and V. Madgulkar in Maharashtra have helped in transforming this image into
that of a human being, although an exploited human being. Still no matter how much others have written about the tribals, it is still a major drawback that no comparably powerful and assertive voice has emerged yet from among the tribals themselves. There have been scanty efforts to record and publish oral literatures of the tribals.

Contemporary dalit literature has become a force, which has shaken the foundations of caste-ridden society and literature. It has definitely contributed to a change in the attitude of society, and affected some degree of change in attitudes in literature, although it may not as yet amount to a radical reversal of the previous situation. The traditional tribal and dalit literatures pose problems because, like much Australian Aboriginal culture and literature, they were basically oral. Hence it was difficult to preserve them, just as it was difficult to understand them because of the language barrier. This language barrier is also still significantly imprisoning contemporary dalit literature. Since the literacy rate is low among dalit people, it is not easy for them to write in mainstream regional languages. It is all the more difficult for them to publish also because most of this literature is radical in substance and rarely entertains attitudes of reconciliation. Unfamiliarity with English forces the dalit writers to remain invisible to a large number of readers outside the regions they inhabit. There are scanty translations of dalit literature from one Indian language into another and from Indian languages into English.

Since literary writing itself, thus, remains somewhat rare for dalit people, writing in English becomes all the more difficult. Some regional literatures in India have accommodated dalit literature to some extent. Within dalit literature, again, some genres like poetry have a higher standing and are extensively written and genres like
autobiography and theatre are particularly unexploited by Aboriginal literature in India. Although there is a strong and long tradition of storytelling and women have always been the carriers of it, men writers dominate in number and popularity in Indian Aboriginal literatures. Not many dalit women writers have published in regional languages and almost none in English. Hence, dalit woman's experience in all its dimensions still needs to be expressed. For the time being, comparison may have to limit itself to caste-dalit writing.

It is true that dalit literature has been chiefly autobiographical. Yet Aboriginal literature has as yet only thrown up a few autobiographies. Marathi literature has dominated in writing autobiographies, including autobiographies by women. But the only autobiography by a dalit woman translated from Marathi into English is an excerpt from the autobiography of Kumud Pawde (Dangle 1992). It is about her successful attempts to learn Sanskrit. As a dalit and as a woman, she is twice prohibited from Sanskrit by tradition. But, she protests against this prohibition and takes a postgraduate degree in Sanskrit. It is not only her protest against this prohibition that is presented in her book but also the overt and covert discrimination and discouragement that she receives from people in her struggle to learn the classical language. In a way, however, she herself conforms the notion that Sanskrit is the supreme and sacred language that contains the treasure of knowledge even as she protests against the age-old alienation and deprivation. Thus doubly discriminated, Kumud Pawde uses a double-edged weapon against the discriminatory attitude of society. She reveals that it is not until she suffixed her upper caste husband’s family name to her name that she obtained employment as a Sanskrit teacher, thus unravelling her ultimate compromise with society as a dalit woman. Kumud
Pawde chooses resistance as well as reconciliation as the theme of her autobiography.

Another dalit woman's autobiography that has been translated into English is Bama's *Karukku* (2000) from Tamil. This autobiography brings out a different aspect of a dalit woman's life. Like Kumud Pawde, Bama also goes in search of education thinking that it will save her from discrimination and exploitation. When she discovers, to her utter astonishment, that such is not the case, she tries to join a nunnery, which supposedly should not be a place for differences and discrimination. Even this remains a dream for Bama because nunneries too are divided on the basis of caste that the nuns come from before their embracing Christianity. Bama remains a dalit Christian and hence deprived of access to some of the services of the church. Disillusioned, Bama leaves the church. This is the story of a dalit woman who tries to change her destiny by toiling hard to confront challenges. She is a dalit woman who is not considered either as intelligent or as reliable. Her life is also the struggle of a dalit woman who has embraced another religion in the vain hope of betterment. Bama tries to overcome the hurdle of caste discrimination by achieving "equality" with the privileged sections. But one's status in India is still dependant on the basis of one's birth and not on the basis of capabilities and achievements. Bama faces disappointment and failures at every step but refuses to give up her hope and determination. Her life is an incessant struggle with the double bind of caste and gender.

Since dalit literature is mostly written in regional languages, it will make sense here to bring in at least two contemporary dalit women writers from Telugu, the language with which I am familiar. For instance, Challapalli Swaroopa Rani and Vinodini have raised their voice against the predicament of dalit woman in a caste-ridden society.
Although they have not written autobiographies, their poetry reaches readers as the expression of their selves. While Challapalli Swaroopa Rani presents her dalit experience, Vinodini raises questions about her dalit Christian identity.

Some of the issues that dalit women's writing raises in general are those that interrogate the writer's identity. As is the case of Australian Aboriginal women writers, refusal to fit into the identity dictated by society is the primary concern of dalit women. The colour black also represents dalit people, their identity and their situation. Not only do they interrogate such enforced masks of identity but they also interrogate nation as negated people. Religion, which is a burden for them, becomes the greatest enemy of these dalit women writers. Various individuals and sections depending on their locations, to be specific, have narrated "Nation" in various ways depending on their contexts. The dalit movement and literature aim to deconstruct the very set notion of society from the viewpoint of the segregated and exploited sections and to reconstruct various aspects of Indian life from a dalit perspective, from a marginalised people's perspective, raising a voice that has been silenced for ages. The nation that is brought into discussion is not the nation that has so far been glorified and idealised in literature and society. This is a nation, which has shamelessly disowned/alienated/segregated/ill-treated some sections of its society, and this situation resembles both the notion of Australia as a white nation and Aboriginal women writers' protest against it.

Dalit women writers, like Australian Aboriginal women writers, feel that they cannot fit in this society, that they have no place in this society. According to them it is a country where birth decides dalit identities and they are labelled the minute they are born. What kind of a label is it? Challapalli Swaroopa Rani says in "The Forbidden History":

219
Even as I was taking shape
in Mother's womb
I was labelled as untouchable
and the stamp of low-caste
preceded my birth.
The day I was born
I bore the imprint of an unchaste woman
thrown into the drainage of traditions
and dust bin of customs.

I became the forbidden one. (Rani 91)

This "label" reminds one of Ida West's words that every Aboriginal is born with a
"handle" to one's name and Roberta Sykes' statement that whatever her capabilities, she
is basically a black, and therefore different, according to whites. Challaplli Swaroopa
Rani identifies herself as a dalit woman who belongs to the country that has subjected her
to the double-edged weapon of discrimination and exploitation on the basis of caste and
gender and yet significantly questions the notion of such a country.

This insecurity, indignation and protest mould the writings of Vinodini as well.
Her poetry bristles with the minority Christian consciousness in a majority Hindu
country. Her Christian identity helps only to throw her into the world of new risks and
dilemmas, apprehensions and prejudices. In her poem "All Indians are My Brothers and
Sisters" (Unpublished) she comes across quite contrary to what her title suggests. She
declares that all Indians are not her brothers and sisters. She is never treated as one of
these brothers and sisters even as a Christian. She does not ignore the fact that, in spite of
her embracing Christianity, her Mala identity does not disappear. She faces contempt as
a Mala and as a Christian woman. As she rightly puts it, there is a Mala well in front of
her and Christian pit behind her. All dalits, whether caste-dalits or Aboriginals, wear a
thorny crown on their head like Vinodini.
This dilemma between Qharacteri and Christian religions brings us back to the parallels in Aboriginal women's writing, although with a significant difference. Here, indigenous religion is as antagonistic towards them as Christianity is in Australia. Vinodini’s poem echoes not only her insecurity but also her loss of faith in both religions. She says that the coin of faith that she has been carrying securely in her fist has slipped away somewhere at some point of time. Is she referring to her faith in secularism? Her fear haunts her like a trident, adding religious connotations to her concept of faith. In another poem "The Single Pole Hut", (Vinodini 3-5) she portrays an agraharam, a Dharact locality of a village, as she steps into it in search of her upper caste lover. This is the microcosm of Indian society, for she has no place there at all and is thrown away like a "menstrual pad".

Like Australian Aboriginal women writers, dalit women writers also refuse to dwell on the internal exploitation of women within dalit societies. For they speak not as women but as dalit women. Not many dalit women writers discuss the exploitation of women within dalit societies, whereas they are quite vocal about their exploitation outside. It is mostly the urban, educated experience with a certain level of acceptability in society that has been expressed in dalit women’s writing so far rural and remote communities still remaining unknown or invisible. Still the experience and protest of the common dalit woman in all her poverty, illiteracy and exploitation need to be voiced in literature and compared to, say, Australian example, where they have been voiced. Decisive aspects and experiences of dalit women as labourers, joginis and sex workers, which are the worst forms of caste and gender discrimination, have not yet really been explored by dalit women writers. Dalit literature also has gone through and is going
through dilemmas and controversies similar to those that Australian Aboriginal literature has faced. For instance, the questions of definition and boundaries of dalit literature, who should write about or should others write about the, and so on. Attempts to reconcile and assimilate have but been terrible failures; protests and attempts to alter the existing society naturally these two movements and literatures. All these form the core of dalit literature as they form the basis and essence of Australian Aboriginal literature.

We may, therefore, conclude with some force that (a) Australian Aboriginal women's autobiographical and other writing forms a most significant locus for both a historical study and a responsible social study; (b) comparisons of this body of writing with Australian Aboriginal male writing are bound to throw significant light on the subjects of colonialism and racism within Australia; and (c) comparisons of their predicament and literature with similar predicaments and literatures elsewhere (as in India) may lead to a wider perspective in the general domain of both Aboriginal studies and colonial studies.

***