Conclusion

The preceding chapters discussed some aspects of Indian women autobiographies. These autobiographies reveal pictures of Indian past and Indian society as only women autobiographies can. Mira Behn knits her life to music, Nature, animal life and Gandhi in a uniquely feminine manner. The medieval poet Mira stood for devotion and rebellion. Madeleine Slade resembled her in significant ways. Daughter of an Admiral of the British navy, she gave up, like Mira Bai, her aristocratic background and joined the arch-enemy of Britain: Gandhiji. Gandhi’s renaming of Madeleine as “Mira” is of immense significance. Mira represented a feminine Nationalism of a rare kind in which intense political activity could not be separated from environmental concerns.

Mrinalini Sarabhai’s autobiography points to a dynamic blend of body and spirit in dance. All the contraries in the world meet in a dynamic relation, and the world itself gets concentrated in dance. Lakshmi Sahgal’s autobiography provides a real picture of women as soldiers in Netaji’s INA. Only a feminine sensibility could register these rare pictures. Similarly the predicament of human being as spirit lodged in a decaying body could be proposed—not logically according to man’s
method but in an essentially woman’s way by Indira Goswami through agonizing images of ruin. Amrita Pritam’s autobiography in this study reveals the elevation of the writer above woman.

The tone of voice of these autobiographies is convincing because of the experiential value. Each of these autobiographies begins the story of self with an account of childhood, not because it is convenient to do so, but because of an acute sense of responsibility to the life around.

The tone of voice of these writers is convincing because there is awareness in them of dual conflict: an inner conflict with the self and an outer conflict with the society. This awareness to a great extent acts as a pointer to the self-corrective strain in them.

It is on the hypothesis that each individual is unique, that the analyses and interpretations of the autobiographical works have been made. Hence for a fully justifiable reading every little detail that the autobiography mentions must be taken into account. However this is impossible in any study—as it is for the autobiographer to recall every detail from her life. The autobiographer—without a conscious intention perhaps—selects events from her life. This study selects portions from autobiographies the same way the autobiographer
selects certain episodes from her life. The study’s hope is for justification in identifying, like the autobiographer, the prime idea that stands for her (autobiographer’s) life.

One can see that Sunity Devi’s autobiography—in many ways remarkable no doubt—does not come up with that pivotal idea representing her whole life. The tone of voice is rather confused in this text.

An Interview with Faustina Bama is appended, as it is felt that the study of autobiography should not become a mere academic exercise, and that a live word from an autobiographer is more invigorating than tomes of dissertations. It is perhaps for this reason that Ranjana Harish has, in her two books (mentioned in this study) included excerpts from the writings of women autobiographies.

The main thrust of this thesis is on recognizing the tone of voice in Indian women autobiographies. In the process, the effort has been to read life as becoming the idea. This has been mainly a literary exercise applied to some autobriographies that are prompted by inner compulsions. Autobiographies of popular public figures (such as sports persons, film actors) that are written for marketing purposes only, may not be amenable to the method of analysis here employed.
An Interview with Faustina Bama

Q. What percentage of you being a woman contributed in making you a writer?

A: Hundred percent. Being a woman, I am more sensitive and am able to be part and parcel of the events, situations and characters that I meet with.

Q. Do you have model/ideal writers and model/ideal persons who were crucial to your making as writer and human being?

A: Not exactly. I love Periyar and Dr. Ambedkar and their writings.

Q. Some readers view your Karukku and Sangati—both as autobiographical novels. In this connection, what is the value of fiction in autobiography? In what senses do fiction and autobiographical writing validate each other?

A: They are fictions in the sense they are universal, societal and have human dimension. Fiction deals with larger dimension. Autobiography deals with an individual. The reality of caste oppression is not individual oppression. Both Karukku and Sangati speak about caste oppression. They deal not only with my story but with the story of my community.
Q. Is a woman’s experience of loneliness more intense than man’s?

A: Yes, Man has diversions and greater freedom. A woman doesn’t have these. Woman is made to believe that her home is her world, whereas for man the world is his home.

Q. Do you think that there is an essential change in your vision of life, over the years?

A: Yes, there are changes in my perspective of the world, human life, relationships, society, God and Spirituality and the meaning of my life.

Q. Which of your works has given you greater satisfaction as a writer? And why?

A: My short stories. I learn a lot from the characters of my short stories.

Q. Has any social taboo ever seriously affected you as a (woman) writer?

A: No.

Q. Apart from his influence on your academic career, how crucial is your brother Raj Gouthaman’s role in your literary career?

A: He introduced me to the works of various writers and that created a taste in me to read.
Q. In an interview, you express all admiration for your maternal grandmother Velliamma for her language, creative and critical abilities and practical wisdom as well. You also describe her as a source of "singular strength and energy". Do you see yourself as an extended and also more facilitated (because of formal education) version of Velliamma?

A: To a certain extent, yes. She is a role model for me to live my life as a single woman. I am inspired by her and draw a lot of Strength, Courage and Confidence from her.

Q. How far has formal education affected your individual identity?

A: It has alienated me from the earthiness of dalit culture and people, to a certain extent.

Q. How does education affect your association with upper castes and Dalit society?

A: I have become more independent. Education enabled me to show that I am second to none and I am on equal footing in any situation. It helped me to develop my critical ability to understand the society and created an urge to bring about a change in society. Dalits look upon as a role model building hope for upper social mobility.
Q. Where do you place yourself among contemporary writers?

A: I don’t know.

Q. You say in your works, humour is a weapon of the oppressed against the oppressor. It also appears to me as a self-defensive mechanism of Dalits against the odds of existence. What other literary devices do you employ in your works?

A: Language of the people, style of narration, stories based mostly on dialogue, with no single hero or heroine, giving importance to all the characters.

Q. In Sangati you portray two dimensions of Dalit women.

i) Strong Dalit women who have grown beyond their stereotype images.

ii) Weak Dalit women who are possessed.

Is not there a need for them to find equilibrium?

A: Why to find equilibrium? Let them be themselves.

Q. A tribal woman like C.K. Janu says, “Dalits although were originally Adivasis, have no choice but to fight for political power which is not the case with Adivasis who can survive without political power”. Do you agree with her? Then, could conversion to other religion be a strategy of politicising the Dalit issue?
A: I don’t agree with that. I think Adivasis also need political support.

No; I don’t think conversion to other religions is a strategy of politicizing the Dalit issue.

Q. Do myths like Nallatanga, Muniyandi’s appearance in the night, and also Ayyangachi troupe in gardens hint at any cultural significance of Dalit’s beliefs?

A: They come from oral tradition, some sort of supernatural belief. Dalits can talk to God and to Devil and deal with them.

Q. When you say that uninhibited strong outbursts of abusive words is a device of Dalit women to retain their sanity, don’t you think that such outbursts make them neurotic at least at that moment? And is it not paradoxical that to retain sanity (or to keep inner peace) they have to look neurotic?

A: All outbursts need not be considered as neurotic. I don’t accept the connection between outbursts and neurotic behavior. In fact, these outbursts help dalits not to become neurotic. It is not a problem limited to dalit women.