CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Literature, a glass that reflects society, many times voices the hopes and aspirations of the voiceless. Literature is, sometimes, born out of suppression, repression and revolt. When people are marginalized and looked down upon as insignificant, by the mainstream interest they resort to vigorous articulation and their voice is then heard all over the world. There are several minor ethnic groups in pluralistic societies like USA and the UK today, in the postmodernist era. These groups have posed a serious challenge to the mainstream countries in their attempt to move towards the centre. In England, for example, the voice of the Caribbean and that of the Asian women is louder than the voice of the white male there.

Marginalization is the social process of becoming or being made marginal. Being marginalized refers to being separated from the rest of the society and forced to occupy the fringes and edges and not the centre of things. Though marginalized people are a part of the society, they are assigned a very insignificant part. Marginalization can be understood in four levels: Class, Race, Gender and Caste.
Class marginalization which can be seen in European countries has come to an end with the explosion of the French Revolution. Racial marginalization has been in the world since 16th century when the Europeans, particularly the English, started colonizing Asia, Africa, and India. Slave trade undertaken by the English laid foundation for the racial marginalization in America. Africans bought as slaves by the Americans were treated as animals. African – Americans were denied freedom, though America was declared as a free country by England as early as the eighteenth century. Even after the American Government passed law stating that all African–Americans are independent since 1865, the Africans were not treated as equals.

Marginalisation is experienced in communities, particularly by the Aboriginals and women. Marginalisation of Aboriginal Communities is also a product of colonialism. Having lost their land and source of income, these communities were forced into destitute areas and excluded from the labour market. Additionally, they lost their fundamental rights in the respective society. Today, various colonized communities continue to be marginalized from their society due to politics and programmes that “meet the needs of white people and not the needs of marginalized group themselves” (Yee 93). Although Canada is one of the world’s most secure and prosperous countries, its indigenous peoples i.e., Aboriginal Canadians who make up nearly three percent of its population, are significantly disadvantaged. Over a million Canadians today can claim at
least partial native ancestry. Native population continues to increase; and
interest in native culture and heritage, by natives and non-natives alike,
continues to grow.

Canada’s constitution specifies three categories of “aboriginal people”: Indian, Inuit and Métis. The term “Indian” is, of course, a
misnomer, being derived from Christopher Columbus’s mistaken belief
that he had reached India. Today the term continues to cause confusion,
and yet a few awkward attempts to be more specific (Red Indians,
Amerindians, etc.) are unsatisfactory. This is the most heterogeneous of
the three categories, with a wide range of languages and cultures across
Canada. Modern legal distinctions further divide this group, between
those who are recognized as “Indian” by the federal government, a status
enjoyed by over 400,000 Canadians, and those who are denied this
recognition, the so-called “non-status Indians”.

The Inuit cannot be included in the general category of ‘Indians’. They have a separate origin, being relatively late arrivals from Asia.
Along with their relatives in Alaska and Greenland, they are most closely
related to other Arctic Mongoloids, such as the Chukchi of Siberia. Since
the 1970s, the term ‘Inuit’ has almost totally replaced the earlier use of
“Eskimos” (generally believed to mean “eaters of raw meat” in
Anglonkian).

The term “Inuit” (“Inuk” is the singular) is preferred by the natives
of arctic Canada as it is how they refer to themselves in their own
language. Theirs is a relatively homogeneous ethnic category, with a common origin and single language across the entire Canadian Arctic.

Unlike the Indians and Inuit, who long pre-date European arrival, the Métis emerged during the historic fur trade. They are a product of the union between male fur traders, most commonly of French – Canadian origin, and native women, particularly Cree. The resultant population of mixed ancestry forged a common identity and life-style that led to aspirations for the creation of a Métis Nation in the Canadian west. Such aspirations were crushed when Métis provisional governments under the leadership of Louis Riel were suppressed by military forces, first in Manitoba in 1870, and then, decisively, in Saskatchewan in 1885. The federal government, which assumed that the Métis would be assimilated into the general population, took no responsibility for their administration and refused them recognition as ‘native people’.

The Métis, of course, did not disappear. Small communities survived, a largely forgotten minority, across the Prairie Provinces and in parts of the Northwest Territories and the Yukon. Only in latter years have the Métis re-emerged in Canadian consciousness. Particularly important was the 1982 recognition in the constitution of the Métis as one of the aboriginal peoples of Canada. Public attention was also focused on the Métis during 1985, when a number of conferences and other events marked the centennial of the ill-fated Métis uprising in Saskatchewan.
These three groups (Indian, Inuit and Métis) can be collectively referred to as “natives”, “native people” or “aboriginal people”. Another term favoured by many native Canadians is “First Nations”, with its implication of many separate, formerly sovereign entities. The recent change in the name of the national organization representing status Indians in Canada from “the National Indian Brotherhood” to the “the Assembly of First Nations” reflects this new preferred terminology.

In literatures written by the White Canadians there were representatives of the Natives who formed part of a landless dying race, who lived in poverty, or whose drunkenness was the result of corruption by the whites. Here, the Natives were seen through the eyes of non–Native writers and many of these portrayals have been limited. Subsequently, the Natives also penned down their experiences. The literature that came from these people is New Native Literature; it is literature produced by the Natives.

For the Natives from a tiny grain of sand to the largest mountain, everything is sacred. They feel that their living saints are the evergreen trees. The greatest gift that indigenous peoples on this planet have is their knowledge of herbs, the environment; and most of all, they look for ways and means to live in harmony. Native Canadians have their own legends, tales and folk-songs. The legends of the Native Canadian focus on two central figures: a cultural hero called Glooscap (in Eastern version); an evil trickster remaining as a strong tradition is the other major
influence on many Native writers. Rita Joe’s the **Song of Eskason** reflects her mimic spirit and her love for her land. Jeannette Armstrong’s “This is a Story”, Peter Blue Cloud’s “Weaver Spider’s Web” and Thomas king’s “The One About Coyote Crowing West”, all these take as their main character the ubiquitous trickster figure, Coyote.

The most important relationship in Native Cultures is the relationship which humans share with one another, a relationship that is embodied within the idea of community. That sense of group and family history, the idea of community, is the focal point in Tomson Highway’s play, **The Rez Sisters** and Jovette Marchessault’s novel **Mother Of the Grass**.

In the 1980s Native women such as Jeannette Armstrong, Beatrice Culleton, Joan Crate, Lee Maracle, Lenore Keeshing, Tobias, Emma LaRocque, Beth Cuthand, Ruby Slipperjack and Marie Annharte Baker began to write themselves into recognition. Among men, Thomas King has emerged as the most successful native promoter / writer of First Nations literature in Canada. Basil Johnson and Jordan Wheeler are also authors who have made significant impact. This remarkable outburst of Native literary activity led the mainstream literary scholars on a voyage of exploration to test their critical theories. Basil Johnston, in particular, followed up his early **Moose Meat & Wild Rice** (1978) with a personal and collective memoir of his generation in Indian Schooldays.

An Ojibway writer known internationally for his many publications on Ojibway people, their culture and language, Basil Johnston is a
member of the Department of Ethnology of the Royal Ontario Museum. Born on Parry Island Reserve, and educated at Cape Croker Indian Reserve Public School, Spanish Indian Residential School and Loyola College, Montreal, he has worked in various capacities as hunter, trapper, administrator and educationist. The Winner of several awards and medals, he has published books of tales from the oral tradition, as well as numerous articles on native languages, education, culture and history.

After successfully launching Ojibway Heritage and Ojibway Ceremonies, Johnston chose to write Moose Meat & Wild Rice because “Native people like humour, not subtle humour like Canadians want” (233).

Not all literature by and about Native peoples is about the agony of a segregated and marginalized existence. Johnston’s Moose Meat bears testimony to the fact that a rollicking sense of humour lies beneath the surface of the stoic Native temperament.

Tomson Highway, a Native writer, strongly believes that the only way for the natives to survive is to go back to their traditional way of life, medical and spiritual practices. In Dry Lips, Simon Starblanket wants his own baby to be born in the hands of Rosie Kakapetum, the only medicine woman among the natives. The native mythology is made use of by Tomson Highway in his use of the trickster, an important figure in the dream world of North American Indian mythology. He goes by many
names as Weesageechak in Cree, Nanabush in Ojibway as Raven and Coyote in still others.

Ruby Slipperjack’s novels *Silent Words Honour the Sun* and *Weesquachak Lostones*, her short story “Coal Oil, Crayons and School books” reveal the essential aspects of Native life and art. Ruby slipperjack is not only a writer but also a cultural worker. She was born in White water Lake, Ontario, where she was raised on traditional stories and crafts. Like Armstrong, Ruby is also greatly concerned over the plight of the Indians who roam the towns aimlessly. In all her novels, one can find an undercurrent of Nativism in its pure, uncorrupted form.

Native Canadian women writers establish the roots of their oppression on the basis of race, sex and class in Canada’s colonial history. Some of the consequences of sexism, racism and classism for Native women in Canadian society are documented in Beatrice Culleton’s *In Search Of April Raintree*. However, in *Slash* Jeannette Armstrong (an Okanagan writer) provides racism, sexism and classicism as the by-products of colonialism.

Breaking generations of silence, of being silenced, by naming the oppressors, and the effects of that oppression, is part of the political and spiritual path to healing and change. *Slash* moves beyond purely political activism to end the material oppression in the lives of his people, to spirituality which provides him with the understanding of connections that makes change possible: his is the kind of faith which believes “that we
have power to change our lives, save our lives and acts accordingly” (Moraga, xvii). Based on people’s own definition of their priorities and integrated with political analysis and activism, this faith is the foundation for pro-action rather than re-action.

**Slash** is about the fork in the road and the choices it represents: about perspectives as much as colonialism, about solutions as much as problems. According to Armstrong the traditional approaches to any issue or problem, however, has virtually nothing to do with the white oppressors and everything to do with Native people who actively determine their own futures. It offers them the opportunity, forces them, even to set their own agendas and gather the strength of self-sufficiency. It is this kind of approach, the “Indian way” which has the potential to alter the future. This solution is neither easy nor naïve, but one which provides the means to continue the struggle by ensuring the survival of the people in the face of genocide. The road leading up to the fork is presented and understood via Armstrong’s unflinching analysis of “political realities, even when such observations are painful” (Ryga 11) and her clear understanding of the colonial legacy. A return to tradition and spirituality does not isolate and disconnect Slash from the physical world and those painful political realities; rather, it connects him to himself and community.

The Natives’ common theme of search for cultural Identity and self identity can be seen in the novels of Lee Maracle and Beatrice Culleton. Lee Maracle says that her book addresses the Native people in desperate circumstances of their lives. In her book **I am Woman** Maracle writes
forcefully, angrily, passionately, sadly and poignantly about what it is to be a Native Woman in Canada.

Maria Campbell’s collection of stories presents another initiative to carry on and revitalize the Native tradition, their storytelling; but it is clearly an expansion of the oral tradition into creative new stories. Instead of recounting existing tales, the book moves a step further encouraging young people to create their own stories, moving from historiography to fiction, but nevertheless bearing in mind the responsibilities of the traditional storytellers.

Next to the Natives’ oral tradition, autobiography is the most frequently used form of literary self-expression and self-definition by the Natives. The most famous autobiographical works are Howard Adams’ *Prison of Grass* (1975), Lee Maracle’s “as-told-to” *Indian Rebel* (1975), and Maria Campbell’s highly literary account of a similar career, *Halfbreed* (1973).

Emily Pauline Johnson is the best-known Native author in Canada. Her works had long been almost forgotten but have been unearthed, republished and re-acclaimed in recent years as part of ethnic pride and interest in Canada’s Native peoples, as well as part of feminist literary criticism. In her autobiographical essays and biography of her mother, *The Moccasin Marker*, she scathingly criticizes the racism, ignorance and cultural chauvinism of white Canadians. Her best-known poem, “O Canada” is a documentary of a double alienation – alienation from her
Native heritage and alienation from her gender; the chorus of the poem reads:

And we, the men of Canada, can face the world and brag

that we were born in Canada beneath the British flag.

*(Canadian Born 1-2)*

It is in the novel as a genre that the Native authors and more recently Native women, in particular, have made the greatest impact. Beatrice Culleton’s *In Search of April Raintree* was published by Pemmican Press Winnipeg in 1984. It has been reprinted several times since and has also come in a “purged” version as a school textbook. It is a text halfway between fiction and personal historiography, thus fitting into the line of Métis woman’s autobiography and so far there has been no second Métis novel to follow suit.

It is a story that profoundly touches Native and non-Native readers alike. The child narrative perspective in the first chapter makes the effect even more impressive because gruesome details of a Métis family being broken to pieces on skid row, and subsequent institutionalization of the sisters who gradually become victims of so-called Native girl syndrome are seen first through the uncomprehending eye of a child and then perceived by a young girl unable to understand that her dream of social upward mobility within a racist society can only be achieved through the annihilation of her personality. Moreover, the two sisters are the exemplary protagonists within a non-fictional tragedy, acted out day by day in various Non-American cities and communities.
Probably the first novel ever written by a North American Indian woman is Mourning Dove’s (Hum-Ishu-Ma’s) *Cogewea: The Half-Blood*, published in the U.S. in 1927, almost ten years after the completion of the manuscript. The author, Hum-Ishu-Ma (1888-1936), was an Okanagan, and it seems fitting that the first novel written by an Indian woman from Canada half a century later should also be written by an Okanagan: Jeannette Armstrong’s *Slash*. The older novel, the *Half-Blood*, is the story of a Halfbreed girl who is caught between the two cultures, while temporarily being rejected by both, and she is torn, also between wanting to leave her rural surroundings and feeling tied to the land and life on the ranch at the same time. By contrast, Jeannette Armstrong’s novel, *Slash*, has a male protagonist, Thomas Kelasket who, after a bloody fight with two drug dealers and several policemen, receives the nickname “Slash”.

As the Black race is marginalised in America and the Natives in Canada and Africa, the Dalits are marginalised in India. Blacks and Native Canadians are marginalized by the whites who came and settled in these countries. Similarly, the Dalits in India are marginalised by their own people, in their own country. Dalit (Oppressed or broken) is not a new word. Apparently, it was used in the 1930s as a Hindi and Marathi translation of ‘depressed classes’, a term the British used for what are now called the Scheduled Castes.

Dalit is a self – designation for a group of people in India traditionally regarded as the ‘untouchables’. The Dalit people of India
have been the most widely oppressed caste for more than three thousand years. Indian Dalits comprise nearly one fourth of the total population, a massive 250 million men, women, and children. Dalits are considered the “outcasts” of Indian society – the “untouchables”.

A Dalit is not considered to be part of the human society, but something beyond that. The Dalits perform the most menial and degrading jobs. Sometimes, they perform important jobs, but not socially recognized. This caste system became fixed and hereditary with the emergence of Hinduism and its belief in pollution and rebirth. The Laws of Manu (Manusmitri), which dates roughly to the 3rd century A.D. and parts of which form the Sanskrit syllabus of graduation studies in Gujarat even today, preach the sanctity of the varnas and uphold the principles of gradation and rank. They refer to the impurity and servility of the outcastes, while affirming the dominance and total impurity of Brahmins. Indeed, as Hinduism spread from northern India to the southern part of the peninsula establishing itself as the dominant religion by the pre-Christian era, so spread the caste system and its ideology justifying the superior standing of the system’s aristocracy.

Within the Dalit community, there are many divisions into sub-castes. Dalits are segmented as into leather workers, street sweepers, cobblers, agricultural workers, and manual scavengers. The latter group, considered the lowest of the low and officially estimated at one million, traditionally are responsible for digging village graves and disposing of dead workforce in the agricultural sector of the economy. A majority of
the country’s bonded labourers are the Dalits. These jobs rarely provide
enough income for Dalits to feed their families or to send their children to
school. As a result, many Dalits are impoverished, uneducated, and
illiterate.

In addition, discrimination for Dalits does not end if they convert
themselves from Hinduism to any other religion. In India, Islam, Sikhism,
and Christianity maintain some form of caste, despite the fact that this
contradicts their religious precepts. As a result, dominant castes maintain
leadership positions while Dalit members of these religions are often
marginalized and flagrantly discriminated against. For example, Dalit
Christians are provided separate burial areas from non-Dalit Christians.
These Dalits who are banned from all the activities of Hindu social life
start voicing their sufferings. Dalit literature in India is a movement, a
revolutionary struggle for social and economic changes. The primary
motive of Dalit literature is the liberation of Dalits in particular and the
liberation of the oppressed in general. It is fundamentally a cultural
activity coming under the broad movements of Dalit political liberation. It
is cultural politics. It takes the form of protest.

In their search for alternatives, Dalit writers have rediscovered the
low caste saint poets of the Bhakti movement. They found relevance in
Buddhism. Referring to folklore, they make an assertion that Dalits are
members of an ancient primitive society and are uprooted by the alien
Brahminicial civilization. These writers make a fervent plea for a
complete overhaul of society. As Arjun Dangle, the Marathi Dalit writer
puts it, “Even Sun needs to be changed” (210). Thus the contribution of Dalit literature has been immense:

First and foremost, it effectively threatened the Brahmanic hegemony from literature. Secondly, it concretized Dalit masses for assertion, protest and mobilization. Thirdly, it stirred up thinking in Dalit intellectuals and catalyzed creation of organic intellectuals of Dalits. Fourth, given that the level of literacy been particularly low among Dalits, the emergence of Dalit literature, where both the writers and readers are mostly Dalits, is itself an evidence of a profound change taking place in Indian society. Like Black literature, Dalit writing is characterized by a new level of pride, militancy, creativity and above all, it sought to use writing as a weapon.

The view of life conveyed in Dalit literature is different from the world of experience expressed hitherto. A new world, a new society and a new human being have been revealed in literature, for the first time. The reality of Dalit literature is distinct, and so is the language of Dalit literature. It has the uncouth, the unrefined language of the Dalits. It is the spoken language of the Dalits. This language does not recognize cultivated gestures and grammar. It is said that language changes after every twenty miles, but this arithmetic turns out to be wrong with respect to Dalits. In the same village, differences are evident between the language of the village and the language of the untouchable quarters.
For their writing, Dalit writers have used the language of the quarters rather than the standard language. Standard language has a class. Dalit writers have rejected this standard language. Cultured people in society consider standard language to be the proper language for writing. Dalit writers have rejected this validation of standard language by the cultured classes, because it is class-oriented arrogance. To Dalit writers, the language of the Dalits seems more familiar than standard language. In fact, standard language does not include all the words of Dalit dialects. Besides, the ability to voice one's experience in one's mother tongue gives greater sharpness to the expression.

Dalit writers have used those images and symbols in their literature that are appropriate for relating experiences. Use of distinct images and symbols is seen particularly in Dalit poetry. However, Dalit writers cannot forget that Hindu religious literature has nourished the unequal caste system. Therefore, they have decided not to use religious symbols in their writing. Dalit critics have encouraged Dalit writers to construct new myths instead of using the existing symbols and metaphors of Hindu sacred literature. When the Dalit writers did employ religious symbols, it was to deconstruct them, infusing them with new meaning and purpose.

The nobleman Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar’s great capability is instrumental in making Dalits stand with self-respect. The clarity of Babaurao Bagul’s thinking is seen in the depiction of his heroes. Bagul, through his stories, stands strongly and firmly, on the side of the Dalits.
To clarify this, he writes in “Jeevha Mee Jaat Chorli Hoti” that appears in *Swagat*, his anthology:

> I am a Dalit by birth. Economically too I am a Dalit.

> But in my thoughts, life and principles, I was on the side of the Dalits. When great men like Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar, Bhagavan Buddha side with the Dalits, getting rid of all Temptations, and many revolutionaries sacrifice their lives to change the lives of the Dalits, then why shouldn’t I take their side? Why shouldn’t one who has seen pain, experienced it, be with the Dalits? (21)

These stories represent the life history and philosophy of the only Dalit leader, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar. The subtle nuances of the incidents of Babasaheb’s life and thinking have been very artistically presented as stories by Bagul. The stories in Ambedkar Bharat will have to be considered as the most special feature of Bagul. His stories in *Jevha Mee Jat Chorli Hoti* and *Maran Swasta Hot Aah*, like the stories in Ambedkar Bharat, reveal his deep contemplation of Ambedkar’s philosophy.

Critical reception to Dalit literature in Tamil is not rooted in a well articulated critical paradigm. A nuanced, theorized reading of Dalit
discourse is imperative in a context of impressionistic responses and biased readings, governed by the caste identity of writer. Dalit literature witnessed a rather late start in Tamil as compared to its counterpart in Marathi or Kanada. As a result, theorization of Dalit writing or a systematic critical corpus has not been yet put in place. Such a critical exercise requires to be evolved at the earliest to keep pace with a vibrant, multi-faceted, articulate and radically innovative Dalit creative output in Tamil.

Dalit voice in literature could not find its distinct place in Tamil literary domain until late 1980s or early 1990s. The Dravidian politics that made its presence felt in Tamil Nadu during the nationalize movement, and the subsequent coming to power of political parties with their Dravidian ideology in the sixties to eighties of the twentieth century led to an effective silencing of the Dalit voice in literary / cultural domain.

The seventies and the eighties witnessed a generation of writers whose writings were influenced by Marxist ideology and were marked by experimental narrative structure and positing of debates concerning ethical and social issues that influenced the Tamil Culture. The Dalit identity was subsumed, by these writers within a class identity. The Dalit was represented as a worker and his oppression in an unequal social structure was defined strictly within the paradigm of capitalist oppression of the working class. This was also the period when Tamil literature (novel short story or plays) was increasingly invading the middle – class
culture with its anxieties centered on honour, social prestige, women’s chastity and erosion of moral fabric in the face of women entering the workplace.

Discrimination of Dalits and social injustice were discussed by a novelist or two but not with the radical force that characterize Dalit writings of the early 1990s. Poomani’s early novels that were published between 1979 and 1982 were mild interventions that foregrounded Dalit lifestyle in rural society polarized by caste and social hierarchy. But the Dalits in his novels are not invested with a radical, Ambedkarite consciousness or organized solidarity. Their protests were largely individuated or marked by black humour that sought to subvert caste hegemony over their lives. Daniel, a Sri Lankan Tamil writer, whose novels in the 1980s, brought up the issue of persecution and oppression of Tamil Dalits in Sri Lankan, left considerable impact on young writers in Tamil Nadu. Daniel, however, foregrounded class-strife as primary source of social discrimination. Dalits in his novels are shown to offer an organized protest against their landed tormentors, but only under the able leadership of upper caste, Marxist comrades who vow to work for their upliftment.

It is only when the Dalits take to recording their experiential reality in autobiographical or fictional mode, Dalit literature managed to carve its own space in the Tamil literary landscape. The romanticized,
sentimentalized Dalits of Poomani and Daniel find an authentic voice and affirmative presence in the writings of Sivakami, Edayavendan, Unjai Rajan, Abimani, Bama, Anbadavan, Gunasekaram, Imaiyam and others.

In 1927, Kalki’s *Vica Mantiram* (The Poisonous Mantra) satirized and ridiculed the old beliefs and their practitioners. Dalit literature in Tamil until 1980s was regarded as a literature written by the Dalits for the Dalits. Later, it has developed itself into a genre that speaks for all the oppressed including women, and protests against all traditional social establishments.

The self-expressive writings by Bama, especially her novels *Karukku* (1992) and *Sankati* (1994) in Tamil, unravel the miseries of a Dalit women in the Christian nunnery. In this sense, like any progressive literature, Dalit literature is also a cultural phenomenon that craves for social recognition for the Dalits.

D. Selvaraj’s *Malarum Carukum Carukum* (The Flower and the Dry Leaf), published in 1966, marked the beginning of Dalit novels in Tamil. Poomani’s *Piraku* (1979) (Afterawrds) and *Vekkai* (1983) (The Heat) are said to have been the pioneer Dalit novels in Tamil literature. K.A. Gunasekaran is a professor of Theatre Arts at Pondicherry University. His Musical collection *Manucankata* (We are people too) was the first of its kind in Dalit art form. His play *Pali Atukal* (Scapegoats) is considered to be a pioneer work in Dalit Theatre. Raj Kautaman, a
lecturer by profession, is well known among the literary circles in TamilNadu. His **Dalit Panpatu** (1993) (Dalit Culture) and **Dalit Parvaiyil Tamil Panpadu** (1994) (Tamil culture: A Dalit perspective) are the most celebrated books on the historiography of Dalit culture. Abimani’s **Nokkadu** (1993) (The Pain), **Panaimuni** (1998) (The Imp) are collection of short stories in which he unearths the sad plight of the Dalits in the Southern Districts of Tamilnadu.

Imaiyam in his novels **Kover Kalutaikal** (1994) (The Mule) and **Arumukam** (1999) exposes the inner factions and politics among the Dalits. Sivakami’s literary career started with the publication of the first short story collection **Ippadikku Unkal** (Realistically yours) in 1987. After becoming an IAS officer, she published her first novel **Palaiyana Kalitalum** in 1989. It portrays the communal imbalance and the inferiorization of the Dalits. She published her second novel **Anantayi** in 1992 which unravels the miseries of the peasant woman in a feministic perspective. Her third novel **Pa Ka A Ku** (1997), a Dalit metafiction, authenticates her objectives behind writing the novel **Palaiyana Kalitalum**. Later she herself translated **Palaiyana Kalitalum** as **The Grip of Change** in 2006. Her fourth novel, in 1999, **Krukku Vettu** (Cross Section) is a psychological enquiry into the hypocrisy of Indian marriages. Sivakami’s **Pazhaiyana Kazhidalum** (1989) was the first Dalit work and only after its publication the discussion of Dalit literature was opened up. It discusses the issue of Dalit leadership and points out pitfalls inherent in an imitative model wherein Dalit leaders duplicate corruption and
manipulative politics prevalent among empowered, upper caste politicians.

The novel advocates the need for an organized, educated, Dalit youth that stands united by ideological commitment and sincerity of action towards empowerment of Dalits. In her second novel, *Anandhayee* (1992), Sivakami focuses on violent exploitation of woman’s body and points out how the family as institution is embedded in patriarchal, oppressive system that is blatantly unjust to women. In her works Dalit women’s sexuality is violently contained and repressed. Sivakami was one of the earliest Tamil Dalit women on account of gender and caste, at the hands of the upper caste men as well as Dalit men.

Tamil Dalit writers have employed various genres for self-articulation. In every genre that they choose to write they make significant reformulation and make their choices political, interventionist ones. Their writings have begun to leave a positive impact on mainstream literature. The short story has been used by Dalit writers as a powerful tool to underscore oppression of Dalits, their fight against their oppressors, and also to point out certain regressive anomalies within the Dalit community. Apart from Sivakami’s three collections and Bama’s two, there have been many more writers who have brought out collections of short stories and continue to publish in journals and little magazines. Some of the short-story writers have written novels, poetry and plays as well. Abimani has brought out three collections: *Nokkadu* (1993), *Tettam* (2001) and *OOrchoru* (2003). Edayavendan also has
three collections to his credit: *Nandanar Teru* (1991), *Vadai Paudum Vazhvy* (1994) and *Tai Mann* (1996). Imaiyam’s *Mann Baram* was published in 2004 while two of his novels *Koveru Kzhudaigal* (1994) and *Arumugam* (1999) have made a significant contribution to debates and discussions on Dalit discourse in Tamil Nadu.

Faustina Bama’s autobiography *Karukku* (1992), translated into English by Laxmi Holmstrom, is considered the first Tamil Dalit text by a woman and it went on to win the crossword Translation Award in 2000. *Karukku* means palmyra leaves which, with their serrated edge on both sides, are like double-edged swords. This novel is written at its finest—fearing nothing, unabashedly radical, shaped by the strength of personal experience. It forces the reader to sit up and pay attention to the texture of the narrator’s life, a texture, that is startlingly different from that of urban, middle-class, upper-caste life. *Karukku* was warmly received by readers and critics. Her collections of short stories *Kisumkbukaran* and *Oru Thathavum Aerimaiyum* represent a distinct contribution to modern Tamil short stories.

Bama’s *Sangati* (1994), an autobiographical novel, represents the dual oppression of women. The novel is one of the important Dalit autobiographies, and a landmark work of its author. It depicts the agony and anger of Dalit women at the dual oppression. The Dalit women who are the downtrodden section of the society have been exploited and oppressed not only by their men but also by the upper caste men and
women. As a result, they have become one of the most exploited and marginalized groups in the society. Bama’s novels are a journey for a Dalit towards re-building their self-esteem, from feeling a sense of shame at being born a Parayar, to a sense of pride and confidence in their breed. She has succeeded in expressing a consciousness so long suppressed.

In brief, the Dalits are able to express themselves to the world and their Dalit literary expression recorded in regional languages by major publishing houses like Penguin, Orient Longman, Oxford, Macmillan and Sahitya Akademi is an impetus for their development. The growing corpus of Native and Dalit writing underscores the need of the marginalized communities to voice their centuries-old experience of discrimination, humiliation and grueling poverty. Of these writings, the genre of autobiography has been used as a powerful tool of resistance, when these ‘silenced’ people “attempting the pen”, to use Gilbert and Gubar’s words, chose to break the silence by telling their own stories - stories which encompass myriad forms of atrocities experienced at every moment of their existence.

The present thesis that investigates the works of the Canadian Natives and the Indian Dalits is one more attempt to break the silence that surrounds their works and voice their voicelessness.
REFERENCES


CHAPTER II

THE VOICE OF MARIA CAMPBELL