Chapter V

Summing Up

The purpose of Comparative Literature is not so much to encourage an easy internationalism or propagate a comfortable though narrow nationalism, but to promote an awareness of literature as a total form in which each is a part of the other. (Chellappan Literature 42)

A comparative study of the African American and Dalit literatures is highly rewarding in that it helps one understand and examine the life of the Blacks and the Dalits. In the history of the world, the Blacks have been the most humiliated and tortured race. The White supremacists have always tried to annihilate them both physically and culturally. During the period of slavery in America and all over the world, the Blacks were uprooted from Africa, and sent forcefully to new places to undergo untold hardships.

The American Blacks have been slaves for centuries. They have been compelled to adapt to a changed life situation and to train themselves in a new language and follow a new religion. All these have been painful to them. African Americans have to fight naturally for their liberation in all forms. The talented African American writers give expression to varied feelings and emotions of their unfortunate fellow men in their writings. The African American literature is born as the result of the yearning of the Blacks for their ancestral homeland, Africa and the search for identity in the White dominated society. Besides, tracing the collective memories of the past and expressing the Blacks' desire of belonging, African American literature redefines and recreates the Black culture in White America.
The exile of the Blacks is truly mirrored in their writings. They have been nurtured by two centuries of sufferings. African American literature takes up its form and content from the Black folk art. Black folk literature is rich and it has a long tradition. Hence, African American writings aim at recreating their native culture in America and they do achieve it, owing mainly to their inherent folk narrative.

In addition to the proclamation of the Emancipation Act in 1853, the First World War also brought about real progress in African American literature. The Harlem Renaissance between 1920 and 1940 sent a wave of enthusiasm among the Blacks in America and created an image of "New Black" with the collateral Black pride. The modern African American literature is almost a century old, and it has various artistic manifestations of the Black life in America in both form and content. It has its roots in the combined oral and literary traditions. At present, the Black writers portray their life in their characteristic English language. The African American literary tradition ranges from the roots of their early life to modernism and post-modernism. Since 1960s, the African American literature has become a holistic socio-cultural history of the African Americans.

In comparison, the plight of the Dalits in India is more or less the same as that of the Blacks in America. However, paradoxically the Dalits do not suffer in a foreign soil but in their own native land. Dalit literature in India, especially in Tamil, has not struck a good deal so far. As stated in the main text of the present dissertation, as an organized movement, it began its journey only in the 1960s in Maharashtra and 1980s in Tamilnadu. Hence, the real stories of the Dalit society
remain untold in full measure. Further, Dalits' folk literature has not yet been examined to its fullest strength. Since the life of Dalits is interlinked mainly with that of their oppressors in religion and culture, they do not have a unique folk culture of their own. Even the available folk forms of the Dalits like their theatre arts and music are either absorbed by the Hindu culture or practised by the high caste academics. As a result, the artistic manifestation of Dalit culture in literature has not evolved in adequate measure so far.

Not surprisingly, Dalit literature in Tamil is a newly developed movement and it has to struggle hard for its existence against the high caste dominated mainstream literature. Hence, issues like revival of folk form and pride in the culture have not yet appeared effectively in Dalit literature. This has led to the accusation by the non-Dalit writers that Dalit literature does not go beyond caste boundaries. Yet, writers like Civakami, make bold attempt to widen the scope of Dalit literature in Tamil beyond caste limitations. Having been associated herself with the various forums for the deprived women and Aravanis – the androgynous persons – with her broader outlook Civakami redefines the sufferings and reclaims the cultural identity of the Dalits against the backdrop of cultural conflicts and the dangers of assimilation.

Taking these issues into account, a critical assessment of the identity politics in both African American and Dalit literatures has been attempted in the thesis. Exploring the construction of their respective ethnic identities, the present study provides a narrative critical approach to the novels of McKay and Civakami. It begins with the assumption that realisation of the self and negating the constructed
other help the oppressed to re-establish their identities and positively reintegrate with their respective communities. The present thesis highlights the process of identity and establishes the hypothesis, "getting down to native and building up from our own people is not savagery. It is culture".

McKay's position as a writer in African-American Literature and the Harlem Renaissance in particular is very complex and idealistic. He believes in the hoary of African culture, Black folkways and solidarity within the Black community. He also feels that Africans all over the world should not follow the so-called intellectual legacy of the West. Since McKay disapproves of the Black intelligentsia and their Talented Ten policy, James R. Giles views him as follows:

McKay did not intend for his art to serve a 'promotional' or evangelical mission in the Harlem Renaissance sense of 'uplifting' the masses. His fiction is primarily a realistic description of a valid way of life. Ironically, it is also the most complete and detailed investigation of a concept of positive blackness produced in Afro-American fiction during his lifetime. (22)

In the preceding chapters, it is highlighted that McKay's trilogy, HH, Banjo, and BB centre on the theme of cultural dualism and Black pride. All the three novels foster the positive Black and the negative White values. In them, he apparently proposes his views that Black masses possess the inherent strengths requisite for liberation. As Giles underlines, "on the more basic level, the conflict in the three novels centres around black characters who are attempting to retain their ability to respond instinctively to such 'natural' pleasures as sex, comradeship, and
music and dance in the face of a pervasive materialism that threatens all such 'simple' delights" (71).

McKay's concept of black identity, as Jacqueline Kaye observes, is "White defined" (166). Many critics have argued that he attributed certain characteristics to the Whites – materialism, sexual inhibition, greed and to the Blacks – affinity with nature, sexual naturalness and generosity. His concept of black souls grows out of a negative definition of Whiteness and, therefore, ironically White-controlled. But, every African-American writer, who has attempted to define Black consciousness, has faced this kind of charges by the critics.

While re-discovering the Black identity in HH, McKay presents Harlem as "an oasis of pleasure and sensuousness for Jake" (Giles 73). It is the only place in the world in which Jake is free and comfortable. His joyous affirmation and the celebration of Harlem life wipe out the anxious memories of the past – as a Black soldier in the White army. He reclaims his Black identity in Harlem, because it is comparatively uncontaminated by White materialism.

Besides Harlem, Jake's natural sexual proclivity and his romantic encounters with women belonging to African race enable him to rediscover his Black identity. Jake's aim in Harlem is to enjoy the sensuality of Harlem, for he thinks that "without womens, there ain't no life anywhere" (HH 34). Jake's sexual life in Harlem underscores McKay's concept of sex. To him, sex is not only an essential need, it is also one of the most intense of pleasures, enjoyment to the relative black
freedom from the perverted White values. The Blacks’ response to sex is natural and spontaneous and Jake is no exception.

Jake’s sexual prowess forms the centre of HH, and as a happy prince, he roams through the Harlem nightlife. He attracts the attention of women and willingly assumes the role of a lover. As a mystical male, who casts his spell on women, Jake enjoys the warmth of all:

Jake was a high favorite wherever he went. There was something so naturally beautiful about his presence that everybody liked and desired him. Buddies, on the slightest provocation, were ready to fight for him, and the girls liked to make an argument around him. (103)

Sexual spontaneity makes Jake healthier both physically and mentally. His sexual relationship with women like, Rose and Laura are primarily sensual. But, as pointed out in the earlier chapters, it is therapeutic and helps him form his Black self. He finally aspires to make home with Felice and towards the end of the novel he achieves it. His home making with Felice and further compromises with himself symbolise the Blacks’ matriarchal dominance over men. As a Black mother, who loves and cares, Felice enthrals Jake and alleviates his personal and racial conflicts.

McKay's portrayal of the Black's inner sense of alienation and placelessness is characterised by Ray in both HH and Banjo. Ray's exile in America and France symbolises both the spatial and the psychological consequences of a Black Diaspora. A Haitian-born Black intellectual in America, Ray sees himself a denigrated outsider and scorns the idea of becoming, "one of the contended hogs in
the pig pen of Harlem, getting ready to litter little black piggies" (HH 263). His rootlessness in France is complete to the point that "he enjoyed his role of a wandering black without patriotic or family ties" (Banjo 136).

Ray represents the eternal search of a Black individual for his roots. He is leading "a mighty life of a restless searching within and without, and energetic living to find himself until the very end" (Banjo 66). Ray's rejection of White materialism and his initial struggle to accept his Blackness represent the consciousness of the uprooted Black society. It is propounded in the previous chapters that his self-hatred and denigration are the results of the impact of occidental civilization on the Blacks. However, when he educates Jake by introducing Black history to him, Ray recreates and reassures the Black pride in himself. His lessons do not entirely aim at Jake but himself too. By giving Jake his lessons, Ray re-aligns his Black personality in HH. In other words, by teaching Jake, he learns what the race means to him. His realization that White structured education has no relevance to the Blacks revives the Black consciousness in him.

Finally, Jake, with his inherent natural instinct, and everlasting love for Ray remains the medium of Ray's identity and self-realization. Ray, despite his formal education and surreptitious hatred for his race, becomes friendly with Jake instantly. The friendship that develops between Ray and Jake is reciprocal and both try to identify with each other. In their friendship, they both discover their "absent selves" – Ray, the intellectual, his instinctive self, and Jake, the emotional, his rational self.
George. E. Kent distinguishes Ray's Black identity based on three main principles; his individuality or sense of self; his view of the universality of White prejudice and corruption; and his constantly evolving sense of black identity (41). In *Banjo*, despite having made an intellectual acceptance of his race, Ray still has some difficulty in emotionally relating to his blackness. But, his association with the beach boys and Banjo give him a positive feeling of wholesome contact with his racial roots. He resolves his cultural and personal ambivalences by deciding to associate closely with Jakes and Banjoes of his race. His emotional resolution to be always with the Black masses and to leave for the West Indies with the beach boys proclaim his reaching out to the roots.

Apart from the Black protagonists Jake and Ray, Black music figures strongly in the background of *HH* as a symbol of Black identity, which forms the central narrative of *Banjo*. The title, *Banjo* itself signifies the epitome of Blackness “The sharp noisy notes of banjo belong to the American Negro's loud music of life – an affirmation of his hardy existence in the midst of the biggest, the most tumultuous civilization of modern life” (*Banjo* 49). The complex self of Banjo is elevated. He is self-centred and hence untouched by Ray's intellectual arguments. He takes life naturally and easily and, more significantly, he accepts it. He never aspires to have formal education and never does he regret that he is not educated like Ray. Throughout the novel, he remains what he naturally is. His self-assertion and craving for social recognition as a Black help him determine and form his racial self and Black consciousness.
Banjo's ambition to form a Black orchestra in France manifests in itself the Blacks' struggle for identity in the White world. He gathers the beach boys and leads a typically organized African life in Marseilles. With his music, Banjo recreates the lost glory of Africa and reclaims his African spirit. The Black orchestra in Banjo reveals to the world the African potentials and it helps Banjo and the beach boys, "the sweet dancing thing of a primitive joy" (Banjo 58).

The theme of identity in McKay's last novel BB highlights all the points pertaining to Black pride and White corruption. As a Jamaican Black, he rediscovers the Black identity by portraying a colonised native woman, Bita. Her metamorphosis from a miracle of Christian upbringing to African mother earth reclaims her racial identity. In BB, McKay through his female protagonist advocates explicitly that Western civilization is the Blacks' hurdle and that it should be rejected in favour of the simple values of the folk. By returning to the surroundings, that he was most familiar with – his native Jamaica – McKay succeeds in both the development of form and theme. He allows the simple peasant life in Jamaica to define the conflict between the native folk values and European civilization.

Like Ray in both HH and Banjo, Bita is alienated from her ancestral roots by her Western education and imposed Christian values. But, upon her return to her native village she finds the rigorous Christian life at the Mission unnatural. Squire Gensir, the White folklorist enables her to overcome the alienation of colour and culture. Her rejection of the matrimonial choices made out by the White
missionaries and the approval of Jubban as her husband testify to the fact that Bita reclaims her racial identity by asserting her sexuality.

Bita’s major conflict in BB is her colonized mind. But, she resolves her conflict without the agonizing uncertainties of Ray’s superior bearing. She asserts her confidence in herself:

I thank God that although I was brought up and educated among White people, I have never wanted to be anything but myself. I take pride in being coloured and different. [...] I can’t imagine anything more tragic than people torturing themselves to be different from their natural unchangeable selves. I think that all the White friends I ever made liked me because I was myself. (169)

Bita’s awareness of her native tradition and return to her folk culture are highlighted in the thesis as the return of a native.

In brief, in his trilogy, McKay rediscovers the racial identity by waging a war—both emotional and intellectual against the White supremacists and bringing the Blacks to their old familiar ways in African culture. By a return to roots, he does not mean a physical return to Africa but a cultural rediscovery.

Unlike McKay’s methodical onslaught on slavery and conscious attempt to restore the cultural roots, Civakāmi in her twin novels portrays only the hardships of being a Dalit in a casteist society. It is pertinent to note here that Dalit literature as a movement was evolved only in the mid 80s of the 20th century. The writers belonging to this period express only their emotions and sentiments against the established traditions. Even in this attempt, they portray only the sufferings of the
Dalits. African American literature inculcates Black pride among the Black readers. But, Dalit literature in Tamil as a newly developed literary movement, which is yet to gain the vigour and vitality of the social requirements, does not completely speak proudly of Dalit culture. As Civakāmi admits to this researcher in the interview, at present, Dalit literature as a movement does not create or recreate the culture of the Dalits in its entirety.

As a progressive literature, Dalit literature in Tamil relates only the existing social conditions of the Dalits and creates in them a literary experience. But, this kind of writing is still set in the mould of Marxist progressive literature. In other words, the Sanskritization among the Dalits and the acceptance of the high caste values also draw the Dalits away from their collective past and culture. It is apparent that Dalit writers in Tamil as novices of protest literature sometimes fall victims to the cultural and literary values of the high caste. But, as discussed earlier Civakāmi makes a solemn attempt to go beyond the shackles of mere casteism and presents the Dalit characters and their life style more objectively.

Civakāmi constructs Dalithood by exposing the exploitation of the Dalits and their emergence against the socio-economic disparity. Kāttamuttu, a Dalit political leader is after power, but he never betrays his people and never misses any chance that comes in his way to assert his Dalit identity. Throughout his political career and social interactions, he identifies with the Dalits, though not with the cultural affinities as in the case of the Black protagonists in McKay’s novels.
The realistic portrayal of Kāttamuttu and his dominance over the ignorant people are in striking contrast with McKay's Black protagonists. He is charged with Dalit consciousness. Nevertheless, his personal flaws and sexual penchant bring about his downfall. It seems Civakāmi, as a novelist, aspires for a spotless Dalit leader, clean in both public and private life.

In order to assert her political values, Civakāmi creates another political character Cantiran, who fulfils her wishes. Cantiran's left-oriented politics and his transformation from a coolie to a Trade Union leader exemplify Civakāmi's political values. Yet, Cantiran as a Dalit leader, though formally educated and a supporter of Marxism, does not protest against Dalit subordination. He is more like Ray, and empathetic towards his people. But, as stated in the previous chapters, his vain empathy will not help the Dalits.

A female protagonist, Kauri also highlights the construction of the caste identity in PK. Like Ray, she is also torn between her education and tradition. As a girl, she is afraid of her father and identifies her caste and its men with her father Kāttamuttu. She does not feel proud of her caste and suffers from self-denigration. The high caste values that she follows make her an exotic and she despises her father and the caste at first. In Kauri, the identity of a Dalit girl is first constructed in tune with her gender politics. Only her experiences and encounters later as a woman prompt her to negotiate with the caste differences. However, the resolutions of her gender and caste ambivalences are only partially achieved in PK. Still influenced by her formal education, she estranges herself from caste politics and identity.
Civakāmi in **PKAK**, which can also be called a bildungsroman, reconstructs and reclaims her Dalit identity through her careful re-examination of the fictitious past presented in *Pa!aiyana Kalitalum* and her real experiences. Through self-pride and self-assertion, she recaptures and reasserts her caste identity.

Kauri, in **PK**, suffers heavily from the loss of self and collective pride in her caste. But, Civakāmi, the novelist and also a character in **PKAK** seems to have realised her predicaments as a Dalit writer. Civakāmi, the protagonist, draws attention to her experiences and re-lives the life presented in **PK**. In **PKAK**, she redefines herself and portrays the evils of caste system.

By creating the character, The Critic, the counterpart to the Creator, Civakāmi lays bare the shortcomings of her previous novel and reasserts her political commitments in **PKAK**. The Critic is of the opinion that The Novelist of **PK** is led astray by her personal experiences of women exploitation and male chauvinism. Hence, The Novelist shifts her focus from Dalit problems to the problems of women. This realisation and the corresponding episodes narrated in **PKAK** reveal that the Novelist has matured in her views and able to rediscover her Dalit identity, both as a woman and as a novelist.

The issue of cultural identity and the marginalized people's effective restoration of it form the nucleus of the present thesis. The individuals and groups construct, negotiate and defend their identity or self-understanding. The protest literature by the marginalized has been an effective medium for the writers to express their inner consciousness. Traditionally, writings about the Blacks and the Dalits by others, especially by their disdainful oppressors have distorted the images
of the Blacks and the Dalits. But, at present, writings by the suppressed people bring out the labyrinthine ways of their life, its untold miseries and above all, their socio-cultural exploitation. The African-American and Dalit literatures portray the Blacks and the Dalits as the subjects of their own history. Their works are the conscious attempts, politically motivated, to regain their identity and create a counter culture against the racial and caste supremacists and their alleged "supreme" culture.

The present thesis has argued that the Black and the Dalit writers, while integrating themselves into their respective communities, redefine the identity of the Blacks and the Dalits not as slaves as perceived by others, but masters of their own history. As socio-psychological documents, both African American and Dalit literatures manifest Black and Dalit identities artistically and express their demand for social and cultural emancipation.

The second chapter "Realisation of the Self" examines the various concepts of the self and the novelists' quest for identity in their works. In the construction of identity, the realization of the self, is significant, because it perceives and preserves the inner worth of human beings. McKay defines the formation of the racial self and asserts it on sexual, political and cultural basis. In his trilogy HH, Banjo and BB, he constructs the Black identity through his chief characters Jake, Ray, Banjo and Bita at various levels. Jake in HH finds fulfilment in his unification with Felice, Banjo makes use of his music to achieve aesthetic realisation; and Ray, who is torn between his knowledge and instinct, finally, curses his intelligence and glorifies his instinct after his close association with Jakes and Banjoes. Bita in BB resolves her
cultural ambivalences and emerges as a native queen. Her intrinsic education enables her to analyse her problems and identify herself with her race.

This chapter also compares and contrasts Civakāmi's construction of the caste self with that of McKay's racial self. The researcher views that the construction of the caste self is not identical in all its aspects to the racial self. Like Negritude, Dalithood is the realisation of the Dalit consciousness. But, Civakāmi, in PK, while constructing Dalithood and imparting Dalit consciousness to the characters and her readers, has been perceptibly inconsistent. For, she views the problems more on the basis of gender and economy. It is not exactly based on the socio-psychological and cultural aspects as in the novels of McKay. But, like McKay, who matures comprehensively in his later novels, Civakāmi shows a tremendous sign of improvement in her next novel, PKAK. Like Banjo, PKAK is non-linear in its narrative and speaks vociferously on the Dalit consciousness and the novelist's viewpoints.

Kāttamuttu, in PK, unlike McKay's protagonists, asserts his Dalit self to recreate the social significance for the Dalits. As a Dalit politician, he makes every effort to gain social recognition for him and his fellow Dalits. He protests against the order of the day to reassert his hunted and deprived self. But, the portrayal of Kāttamuttu is distorted and misrepresented in Dalit political context. Owing to the autobiographical overtones of her father Paḷanimuttu, Civakāmi sketches the character of Kāttamuttu with her personal hatred and convictions. He is portrayed first as an unquestioned patriarch and then as a corrupt Dalit leader. Both the images of him are further tainted by his sexual proclivity.
In the third chapter, "Negating the Other" it is established that identity is constructed either in harmony with the external influences or in conflict with the differences that represent the other. The identities in African-American and Dalit literatures are formed in their negotiation with their constructed other. It is discussed that the Blacks and the Dalits, were once portrayed as ignorant, uncivilized, dirty and ugly. But, with the emergence of African American and Dalit literatures as movements, their respective identities are liberated from the otherness to rediscover and reassert their cultural identities. Both McKay and Civakāmi, in their works, demonstrate the cultural restraints and protest against the allegedly superior bearing of their oppressors. Negation of the otherness is a significant revitalising process, because it frees the subjugated self from its inferiority complex.

The construction of identity in *HH* in terms of the negation of the other is foregrounded through the two protagonists Jake and Ray. Jake, a war deserter, narrates his painful experiences of being a Black soldier in the White army. His experiences in the army, which fights against German fascism, are ironical in the sense that while fighting for universal brotherhood, a Black soldier is ill-treated within his army. The differences, he experienced in the form of colour prejudice and exploitation in the predominantly White army, force him to negotiate with his White oppressors and ultimately he deserts the army, not out of cowardice, but as a real champion of his race. Jake’s experiences as a stoker in the ship and a waiter in the railroad are also remarkable in that they reflect his own words about his fellow black soldier, “Poor boh. Was always belly aching for a chance over the top. Nevah got it nor nothing” (*HH* 21).
The negation of the other in *HH* is not complete with Jake alone. Ray's sense of alienation and his cultural ambivalences make him an outsider and negotiate with the constructed other. He is suffering from the outsider-insider conflict. His personal, socio-cultural conflicts in the U.S. enable him to negotiate with the other. As a Haitian intellect in the U.S., Ray's interpersonal relations with his fellow Blacks in the railroad and Harlem are strange. He, being a pompous Black, rejects the common norms, laws and prescription of his fellow Blacks. Though he is empathetic towards the Blacks, he hesitates to identify with them, owing to the influence on him of the American Whites' negative perception of his race. His sense of placelessness alienates him, first, from the emotional and natural life of the Blacks, and, secondly, from his own self.

Ray's self-alienation and intellectual inhibition get resolved, when he realises the predicaments of Western civilization and education. From then, he defends his Black self by negating the negative perceptions attributed to the race. Jake in *HH* initiates Ray's growing stature as a Black male and, therefore, he becomes vociferous in negating the other in *Banjo*. Ray's hatred for the Whites in *Banjo* does not simply issue from his emotional association with the beach boys in Marseilles, but it springs from his learning and perfect understanding of his race. He responds to the subtle racial discrimination in France intellectually, and observes that the Whites claim supremacy over the Blacks on the strength of their material prosperity and civilisation. He draws a parallel on the White supremacy over the Blacks all over Europe and asserts that the Whites have "dollar complex" (*Banjo* 144).
While negating the other, Ray does not spare the White religion. For, in HH he calls Jesus White and bastard begotten (176). In Banjo, he laughs at the White missionaries and the Black Evangelists. Apart from his criticism of Christianity, he declares that the Whites are perverted in sex and defends the Blacks' naturalness in it. He asserts, "Negroes were freer and simpler in their sex urge, and as White people on the whole were not, they naturally attributed over sexed emotion to Negroes" (Banjo 252).

The contemptuous attitudes of the officials in France also highlight Ray's awareness of the racial differences and the resultant justice. For being a Black, he is physically tortured by the police in France. He, later tells Crosby that the policeman's fist is a perfect expression of the official attitudes towards the Blacks in France and justice does not exist in the mathematics of life (Banjo 197). Ray in Banjo, realises the differences of being a Black in the White world, confronts the otherness and thereby rediscovers his Black identity.

McKay's BB focuses primarily on the Black-White encounter. Bita, a Jamaican Black peasant, is fostered by the White missionaries and educated in England as "an experiment" to prove what one Black girl might become by careful training. But, on her return to Jamaica, Bita is inevitably torn between her natural native emotions and artificial upbringing.

Through the simple portrayal of Bita, McKay constructs the Black identity and the denial of the otherness effectively. The negotiation with the otherness in BB revolves around the Whites' perception of the natural Black sexuality of Bita. It functions as a redeeming resource. In other words, a perceptive reader can discern
that the masculine and the wavering sexuality of Jake are sublimated through Bita's stable and feminine sexuality.

Bita's interactions with Hopping Dick, denial of Tack Tally's offer and her refusal to marry Newton embody her simple native sexuality, and underscore the fact that she never assumes and complicates herself. Her native sexuality is formed clearly and asserted when she encounters the White supremacist Arthur Glengley. For him, she is "only a black girl" (BB 265) and he condescends to kiss her. Later, her contemplation over the episode enables Bita to realise the sad plight of the Blacks and prompts her to reunite with her roots.

Bita's participation in Tea meetings throws light on the Black girl's affirmation of her folk culture. Though it is condemned as evil by the church, Bita attends it as a way of protest against the Christian perception. Finally, her marriage with Jubban, her drayman implies that she has overcome her Western education and civilisation in order to reclaim her native identity.

Like the Black identity in McKay's novels, the Dalit identity in Civakami is also constructed by the characters' encounter with the constructed other. While examining the negation of the other in Civakami's novels, the researcher is led to opine that the negation in Dalit literature is not distinctly as cultural and political as that of African American literature. In the novels of Civakami, the victimisation of Dalits by the upper castes has been made more on the basis of economy, sexual exploitation and the Dalits' poor living conditions.
In the quest for identity, the novel **PK** revolves around Tańkam's rape by Utaiyār, an upper caste old landlord. Utaiyār frequents Tańkam, a helpless widow amorously, for he believes firmly that, after all, she is his farm labourer and a Dalit. The sexual victimisation of a Dalit woman by an upper caste male creates a furore among both the Dalits and the upper castes. While the relatives of Utaiyār "punish" Tańkam for her affair, Tańkam's relatives do not find fault with Utaiyār but disown her at once. The indifferent attitudes of Tańkam's relatives highlight the fact that Dalits are mute in their subordination and they have not yet gained strength to protest their oppressors collectively.

When Kāttamuttu, a dynamic Dalit politician, intervenes in this affair, the Dalits in Puliyyūr gain confidence to oppose the exploiter and his men vehemently. But, ironically, the voice of the voiceless goes unheard amidst the twist and turns of the events in **PK**. Tańkam's rape becomes inconsequential with the fire accident and the wage problems.

Civakāmi, in **PK**, presents the exploitation of the Dalits more realistically and hints at the fact that any attempt to protest the exploiters and negotiate with the otherness is defeated to the advantage of the upper caste. Ironically, including Kāttamuttu, no one bothers to speak in the presence of the government officials about Tańkam's rape, which is the crust of all the problems.

The subjugation of a Dalit woman in **PK** is underscored by the Dalit males’ attitude towards their women. Though the Dalit society is primarily matriarchal, as the Black society, it is said that the dominant settlers of India and their culture have infused male chauvinism among the Dalits. Despite the physical strength and hard
labour matching their men, the Dalit women are doubly oppressed first by the upper caste men and secondly by their own male counterparts. It is manifest in Civakāmi's novel that Dalit men are resigned to their subjugation. At the same time, they exercise their impotent anger on their women and try to dominate them. It is argued that Civakāmi in her novel claims equality with and liberation for Dalit women first from the Dalit men and later from all others.

The ironical narration of the subjugation of Dalit woman ends more pathetically, when Kāttamuttu, a male chauvinist keeps Taṅkam as his third wife. While presenting the marginalization of women, especially Dalit women, Civakāmi does not exaggerate their plight. Taṅkam's end testifies to the fact that Dalit women, in the present context, have no will of their own but have to remain always as mere subjects to their men.

The researcher, while analysing the constructed otherness and its impact on the Dalit society in the novel PK argues that for the Black and the Dalit women, the fight for liberation is as much a racial, communal issue as it is a gender issue. From Kauri's perspective, PK is a novel of maturation and it presents her as an emergent woman.

Kauri, like Ray, is formally educated. Her self-alienation and intellectual inhibitions do not allow her to view the problems of the Dalits with the emotions that they deserve. Her knowledge of the problem and the realisation that a Dalit woman is doubly oppressed do not inspire her enough to get herself involved in Dalit problems. Instead, she turns romantic and, like Ray, despises her fellow
beings. She grows partially assimilative and feels happy to be one among the girls in the college untouched by the intricacies of casteism.

It is significant to note here that though Kauri resembles Ray mostly, Ray differs from her in his perspective of the race. His self-hatred issues only out of his helplessness. But, Kauri’s hatred for her caste mainly emerges out of her personal hatred for her father. Growing from girlhood into womanhood, she begins to negotiate with the differences of the caste system.

Both McKay and Civakāmi absorb the racial and caste consciousness and nourish communal pride in themselves and their readers. While McKay reorients his characters in the African cultural background, Civakāmi suggests that the rediscovery of the Dalit identities is possible by overcoming self-denigration and self-hatred.

McKay in *HH*, while re-construction the Black identity, presents the happy Harlem life of the Blacks in order to depict the demoralizing effect of the West on the Blacks. He reassures the emergence of the Blacks by portraying his characters Jake, Ray, Banjo and Bita as individuals, who withstand the onslaught of the culture of the Imperial West.

Jake’s nostalgic memories, his return to and celebration of Harlem life prove that Harlem does not exist simply as a space to the Blacks, but as a land inseparable from the African American life and culture. To the Blacks, Harlem is Africa transplanted in America and every African American yearns to live there. Besides his spatial experience, he constructs his collective identity through active participation in Jazz and Blues. It is established that the rich art forms of Africa help
Jake rediscover his racial identity through its wild rhythm. Throughout the novel, Jake, as an instinctive Black male, prefers to live among the Black folks. And, the happy natural life of the Blacks relieves him of his emotional ambivalences.

Ray, another spokesperson of McKay's Black ideology, regardless of his earlier doubts, reconciles himself with the simple life of the Blacks in Harlem. His racial reorientation and self-realisation help him re-integrate his troubled self with the Black community. Ray's realisation in HH that Western civilization is dehumanising and Imperial education as an anachronism underscores the fact that Ray has shed all his intellectual inhibitions in favour of the emotional simple life of the Africans.

In Banjo, Ray detests the impostors of his race and happily identifies himself with the beach boys in Marseilles. His emotional association with Banjo and the beach boys and his rational responses to the exploitation of the Blacks in France once again prove that Ray is reassured of his racial identity. Further, Ray in Banjo leaves out his racial scepticism, resolves his cultural ambivalences and quite voluntarily integrates himself with the African community. His harangues upon White education, civilization, business, honesty and sexuality point at the adverse impact they create on the Blacks. In turn, he glorifies the naturalness and simplicity of his race and towards the end of the novel Banjo, he prefers the great vagabondage of the African life to his White education and civilization.

The Black's conscious resistance to Western civilization and the restoration of African cultural values form the central theme of McKay's last novel BB. Quite interestingly, Squire Gensir brings out Bita's inherent Black values. As a friend,
philosopher and guide to her, Gensir strikes a contrast to the Craigs, the White couple in the missionary. He brings her back to the familiar African culture and inspires her to discard the assimilated Western values.

Regardless of her careful Christian grooming, Bita's realization of Obeah as a primitive god and acceptance of obi as an African religion mark the growth in Bita's attitude towards her race and its culture. Besides, her innate racial consciousness and the resultant re-orientation are obviously brought out by her native sexuality. Her earlier encounter with Crazy Bow, wilful attachment with Hopping Dick and a forced betrothal with Herald Newton play a vital role in reclaiming her native sexuality. Her rejection of the sophisticated Black suitors and choice of Jubban prove that the rustic male, is in no way a hindrance to the intellectual side of her life. By marrying Jubban, she re-establishes her link with her culture and nature.

McKay, in all his novels, advocates the return to Blackness as a possible remedy to rediscover the lost identity of the Blacks all over the world. For, his novels traverse through the Black Diasporas obtaining in America, Europe and Caribbean Islands and recreate the glory of Africa with genuine pride.

Reclamation of Identity in Dalit literature in the cultural context is still in the offing. The researcher feels that identity of the Dalits is reclaimed more by erasing out the self-imposed and thrust upon denigration in their psyche than by re-integrating with culture like the Blacks. It may be because of the fact that Dalits are not racially different from the majority of Indians. Since the language, religion culture and history of the high caste have been forced on them, the Dalits are
marginalized in their own country and hence they suffer from a sense of inferiority. To retain and rediscover the Dalit identity, the Dalits need to fight against the caste supremacists and overcome them.

Civakāmi in PK and PKAK venture to instil hope and Dalit consciousness in the oppressed people. The analogy between McKay and Civakāmi lies in that McKay suggests re-integration with the community as the revitalising resource to rediscover the racial identity while Civakāmi reclaims Dalit identity through self-pride and self-assertion.

Kauri in PK, despite her awareness of the casteism and its consequences, initially fails to identify herself with her caste. She takes no pride in her community and, like many educated Dalits, prefers to live concealing her caste identity. Kauri is an embodiment of many contemporary Dalits, who hate their selves and are never empathetic towards their people. Though she is exposed to the caste differences and herself a victim of it in the college, she lives in a utopian world and, ironically, yearns for the unity between the oppressed and the oppressors. Kauri's apathetic attitude towards Kāttamuttu and his Dalit politics suggests that she has no hope and faith in Dalithood. Instead, she hails Cantiran and his leftist politics hoping that the unity among the working class will erase the caste system in India.

However, as a novelist, Civakāmi matures herself and handles the theme of Dalithood evocatively in her metafiction. As a continuum of her first novel, PKAK resolves Kauri's ambivalences and strikes a positive note on the Dalits' identity and reintegration with the community. As a writer and also a character in PKAK,
Civakāmi re-examines her real life and recreates a rebellious Dalit identity with caste pride.

The conversation between The Critic and The Novelist throws sufficient light on Civakāmi as a Dalit novelist. It also examines how far she has achieved her objectives of writing a Dalit novel. It is to be noted here that both PK and PKAK are autobiographical. Many Dalit critics have pointed out that the characterisation and the theme of Dalithood in PK are rather weak and Civakāmi has betrayed Dalits by presenting a Dalit leader as a womanizer. But, she proclaims on various occasions and also to the researcher in the personal interview that she has only presented the misery of the Dalits and their exploitations both by the upper caste and the Dalit politicians as the central theme of the novel.

However, the caste consciousness in PK is only in its formative stage and it brims with sheer confidence in PKAK. From being the sceptical Kauri in PK, she becomes the assertive Civakāmi in PKAK. It is evident that towards the end of the novel PKAK, Civakāmi proudly and unhesitatingly calls her "Parayar" (90). The assertion of the caste identity proves that Civakāmi has shed all her inhibitions and re-integrated herself with her community.

In the words of Dangle:

Dalit literature is one, which acquaints people with the caste system and untouchability in India, its appalling nature and its system of exploitation. In other words, Dalit is not a caste but a realization and is related to the experiences, joys and sorrows, and struggles of those in the lowest stratum. It matures with a sociological point of view
and is related to the principles of negativity, rebellion and loyalty to science, thus finally ending as revolutionary. (264-65)

True to this statement. Civakâmi in PKAK realises the importance of being a Dalit writer and recreates her experiences in the past to assert her identity and thereby rebel against the social exploitations. Her voluntary identification with the joys and sorrows and the participation in the struggles of the marginalised people underscore that in her novels the experiences of Dalits are not simply stated but their meanings are explained in the socio-cultural context.

Comparative Literature plays a vital role in taking any literature to the international arena. Many researchers, who have compared Indian writers—particularly Tamil writers—would have realized the problems of comparing regional literatures with those of international literatures. The present researcher also has experienced this problem. African American literature has already established itself and become an inevitable part of the American mainstream literature. Dalit literature in Tamil, on the other hand is yet to mature as its American counterpart. But, the point of comparison has been made clear; comparison of two literatures of the suppressed people and the agony of the suppressed is the motif of the whole thesis. The American school of comparison believes in universality of literature and universal literature is possible only through comparative studies.

Literature as a tool will work for and create a brave new world. Comparing Dalit literature with African American literature the researcher finds that Dalit literature as a political movement is yet to attain the elevated level of the African
American literature. In this context, it can be argued that the African Americans' revolt for liberation through literature is almost complete. The trends in contemporary African American literature are commendable in that it transcends mere the suffering of the Blacks. It demonstrates, at the same time, both the cultural heritage and the social conflicts prevalent in the Black society. In the case of Dalits, the socio-political awareness has just been taken up in their literature. But, the awareness, found among the Africans and the knowledge of the revolt of the Blacks could also inspire the Dalits, providing them with a more positive and healthy approach towards liberation. If this socio-psychological dimension is achieved, the purpose of evolving universal literature will have achieved its goal.

For a quicker and more effective awareness and achievement of liberation, Dalit literature can take new dimensions, which will strengthen people politically and socially. As in African American writings, psychological and socio-cultural dimensions could be brought into Dalit literature. Dalit folklore is yet to achieve its priority. Projection of Dalit folklore will facilitate to create a counter culture. It is accepted that Dalit literature is an extended arm of Dalit politics. It revolts against oppression and exploitation and demands social and economic justice. Since, in India, the national politics is a mix-up of religion and caste, Dalit writer's participation in politics is inevitable. Political themes may dominate Dalit literature to change the structure of the society and erase caste oppression. By doing so, as Dangle observes, "The future of Dalit literature may not be glamorous but it is certainly dazzling" (266). Future researches may concentrate on the semblance of the folk narrative of both African American and Dalit Literatures. They will
explore the cultural roots in all aspects and be highly rewarding to the researchers of
cultural studies. The radical discourses of both Black and Dalit feminism, which
crave for the liberation of women from suppression, can also be compared. The
works of Black women writers like Zora Nealle Hurston, Alice Walker and Tony
Morrison can be compared with the writings of Dalit women writers like Civakāmi
and Pāmā.