Indian Journal *of* Australian Studies

Volume 6

Special Issue

on

LIFE WRITING

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Centre for Australian and New Zealand Studies
Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla

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Editor
PANKAJ K. SINGH

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Foreword

Traditionally seen as a narrative recording the glorious life of an exceptional individual that had great inspirational value, the genre of autobiography, as also of biography, has undergone radical transformation in the recent decades. The protagonists of these narratives are ordinary individuals, often on the lowest rung of social hierarchy, whose heroic accomplishment is their survival in the face of insurmountable odds, and their ability to find a voice to assert their humanity. In telling their side of the story the narratives also record the forgotten or erased history of the subjugated and the dispossessed.

From the field of biography and literature, life writing has virtually crossed over to sociology and history. In studying an individual self the question of identity also becomes central inviting serious philosophical and sociological thinking.

Life writing from the margins provides a counter discourse to the mainstream by positing resistance to oppression, by interrogating the dominant class and by putting on record the erased history of the subjugated. It has a healing function too as it articulates the pain and suffering of the persecuted and the dispossessed.

The thematic diversity of articles in this volume reflects the vast canvas of the genre and the multiple ways in which lived experience can find literary expression. I hope the journal will continue to bring other areas of contemporary interest into focus in subsequent numbers as well.

Professor Arun Diwaker Nath Bajpai
Vice Chancellor
Himachal Pradesh University
Shimla

From the Editor

Every individual life is unique and everyone is located in a specific time. Autobiographies and biographies provide rare glimpses into extraordinary lives expanding readers' awareness about human experience on the one hand and an understanding of the subject's time and milieu on the other. Having great inspirational value, life narratives are approached by curious readers also to learn some precious lessons for one's own self. These narratives can also be usefully read as cultural documents or as 'history of the people' which may not be recorded in the 'official' or written accounts of history. Yet one needs to read these narratives recollecting a life, with caution as despite claiming to be a true account of a life there may be an uneasy mix of fact and fiction.

Structured largely around memory, life writing can be an empowering site for a range of subjectivities, from leaders to subalterns, from glorious achievers to heroic survivors. The strategies of representing the self can vary from celebration of an exceptional self to confronting the failures of the self, from negotiating inner conflicts in a confessional mode to the conscious construction of a 'self' for public consumption.

Whether from mainstream or from the margins, the narrative presents a life remembered from a vantage point. However, instead of the free flowing associative memory, life narratives weave a *structured* memory that includes personal memory and collective memory, emotional memory and historical memory, to contest the lapses in *official* memory.

Built on the contraries of submission and resistance, of pain and pride, trauma and testimony, political activism and cathartic outpour life writing from the margins can perform significant political and psychological functions. In breaking the silence and articulating the pain it can heal the fractured self and act as 'scriptotherapy', as Suzette Henke puts it. Simultaneously, it can provide a site for political activism in interrogating the oppressors and asserting the subjugated, by putting on record the erased history of the subjugated, as history is not only written by the victors but also forgotten by the victors. The attempt

ultimately of the speaking subject is to share the individual life with others, to reach out to larger humanity in their quest for meaning or quest for justice.

In a way all writing is located in the author's life, in one's experiences, identity and culture, as one finds in the short story "Brass Bells" by Rashida Murphy, which is poised between memoir and fiction. A more professedly autobiographical memoir, Robert Dessaix's *A Mother's Figure*, can also combine fact, history and fiction as the author interweaves personal, social and national elements, as illustrated by V. Bharathi Harishankar in her article.

Jackie Huggins' article "Towards a Biography of Auntie Rita" takes one straight to the celebrated biography of her mother *Auntie Rita*, to the world of historical truths: about an individual life, about Aboriginal people, about activism, about bonding and so on. Pankaj K. Singh offers a study of two compilations of first person narratives of the subjugated, by mainstream outsiders, in vastly different contexts, and of the politics of silencing or erasing, on the one hand and articulation and self-assertion on the other. Neelima Kanwar's article examines the nuances of biography as a genre and how the writing process healed and revived the wounded self of the author as well.

Examining Aboriginal autobiographies by women, several articles illustrate how memory becomes a mode of contesting colonial myths, of resistance, reclamation and even reconciliation. Interesting parallels are found in Indian subaltern voices, such as the Dalits or as Anupama Vohra's paper lists the pain of loss as recorded by the families of those forcibly taken away by government agencies in the two countries at different historical moments. Some of the papers included in this volume were first presented at the seminar on Life Writing in March 2014 at the University.

Pankaj K. Singh

Towards a Biography of Rita Huggins

Jackie Huggins

In the 1920s the Queensland government pushed tribes out of their traditional areas and placed them onto mission stations and government reserves, ostensibly to protect them from whites but in reality to place them under the control of missionaries and government officials.

So commenced the fragmentation of oral Aboriginal tradition, customs and practices. The corroborees, ceremonies, religious beliefs and marriage laws as well as the use of tribal languages, were strongly discouraged and condemned by missionaries and managers. They saw Aboriginal customs and practices as belonging to an undesirable aspect of a heathen culture and set about trying to change Aboriginal people. When this change was considered to be achieved the Queensland government introduced new policies of absorption and assimilation aimed at replacing the former policy of protection and forcing Aboriginal people away from reserves into the white community.

Ever since those forced movements, firstly from traditional areas in the 1920s and then from isolated communities in the 1940s and 1950s, Aboriginal people have become more dispersed into rural towns and cities, resulting in the further fragmentation of Aboriginal history and oral tradition. When people were living together in larger and enclosed communities, history and tradition were passed on orally by the older ones, and while the community remained together traditions were retained. This was one of the many forms of resistance strategies that Aboriginals employed against the colonizing forces.

The Queensland government's long-term plan was to eventually absorb Aboriginal people into the white community so

that Aboriginal people and their cultures would become extinct. This plan did not succeed, and it is a testament to the power of the Aboriginal sense of history that Aboriginal people have been able to withstand these deliberate forces and intentions of complete annihilation. Aboriginal people still have a rich tradition of oral history, story-telling, philosophy, autobiography and biography, stored particularly by the older people.

Aboriginal studies are now concerned with the transformation of an `oral literature' into a written literature, without necessarily destroying the original form in the process.The written mode of expression releases material that was previously encapsulated to a large extent in a local or regional setting, and makes it available for more general distribution and reinterpretation.

Aboriginal writing is deeply concerned with history, with precise knowledge of the history of Aboriginal existence, gleaned if necessary from white records, and prized out of white archives. Although archives and documents are white inventions, Aboriginal writers have developed a stronger historical sense than their white counterparts, along with a more intense concern for social reality – with the existence lived by Aboriginal people today and in the past.

Recording the memories of elder Aboriginals is an urgent task, otherwise much information about Australian history will be lost forever. It will also help create a picture of what it has been to be 'on the other side' of forced assimilationist policies and of strategies for coping which have led to present survival. The life stories of older people illuminate much about what it was like to live in earlier days, and how people experienced the world they knew.

Women and members of ethnic groups and, more particularly Aboriginal women, are less likely to become famous through their work because they are under-represented as public

figures, although their contribution to their own communities may have been very great. The story of Rita Huggins fits this description and so makes for an interesting biography of a contemporary Aboriginal woman.

Rita Huggins was born Rita Holt on 10 August 1921 at Carnarvon George via Springsure, Central Queensland. She was born of two `half-caste' parents, Albert and Rose Holt whose traditional Bidjara-Pitjara area encompassed what is now known as the national park of Carnarvon Gorge.

Carnarvon Gorge is located approximately 600 kilometres north-west of Brisbane dissecting the sandstone tablelands of the Great Dividing Range in the Central Western Highlands of Queensland. Magic scenic attractions complement the history of Aboriginal occupancy for over 19,000 years. In a tangle of nature's gorges, ranges and tablelands, a number of Aboriginal tribal groups lived. They have left a wealth of rock art displayed in innumerable rock shelters. Some tribal groups living around the area were: The Bidjara, Kairi, Nuri, Karingbal, Kongabulla, Jiman, and the Wadja. Since the government removals a comparatively small number of descendants from these tribal groups, particularly those identifying as the Bidjara, are now scattered over a wide area of Queensland and northern New South Wales.

Rita was never given a tribal name that she could recall. She may well have, but this would most certainly have become redundant when her family was forcibly removed to Barambah, as Cherbourg was known in the late 1920s. The redundancy of tribal names was due to the white expectation that Aboriginal people would no longer continue their 'heathen' ways and practices, hence the attempted Anglicisation of every aspect of their culture and lifestyle and the concealment of the prime signifier of personal identification. Like Albert and Rose, Rita's brothers and sisters were also prescribed European names – Barney, Margaret, Clare, Harry, Thelma, Jimmy, Lawrence, Violet, Ruby, Oliver, Albert,

Isobel and Walter. It is known that the three eldest children had tribal names, however Barney's daughter, who instigated a wide search for her father's tribal name some years ago, has been unable to discover it. The person most likely to hold the key is the second eldest sibling Clare, who was a patient in a psychiatric nursing home.

Tindale's research into Aboriginal tribes in Australia, now held in the South Australian Museum, has also revealed Rita as 'Rita'. Aboriginal people despair at such lack of information about their people's genealogies and tribal names. However, Rita was able to trace her maternal grandmother in the Tindale documents – she was a nameless woman who was referred to as `a "full-blood" from the Maranoa'.

Anguish and confusion surrounded the Holt family as they awoke one morning to the clamour of horses and troopers riding through their camp. Rita remembered her mother shielding the children protectively from the troopers as her father cautiously investigated. Soon after they were transported in the back of a cattle truck to Barambah.

Rita recalls vividly her grandmother wailing as the `mob' were rounded up. `Don't take my gunduburris! `Don't take my gunduburris!' she screamed repeatedly. Much later Rita was told that her aged grandmother wandered off aimlessly into the bush that day and was never seen alive again. It is presumed she died alone somewhere out there with a broken heart. When her body was found it was taken to Wooribinda where her 'full-blood' relations lived. On the basis of skin colour the `half-castes' were sent to Barambah and the 'bull-bloods' to Wooribinda.

This would align with the coloniser's ideology that children who possessed strains of white blood would be easier to assimilate than their darker counterparts. Certainly, schooling was the prime site where Aboriginal children could be socialized and imbued with European education. The lighter-skinned children

were segregated from the darker children in classes to accelerate their acceptance as white people. Teachers and missionaries were astounded when this strategy did not succeed.

Rita attended school from the age of eight until the age of thirteen, or fourth grade as it was then. Subjects taken were basic reading, writing, arithmetic, with particular emphasis on European History, Captain Cook and sewing. Happy memories of school remained with Rita, not because of the educational content, but because it was a place where kids could socialize.

Outside of school other duties took precedence. As one of the middle children in the family, Rita became responsible for most of the jobs that her other brothers and sisters performed and in that sense the workload was fairly evenly distributed. The egalitarian nature of family relationships was such that no-one had specific jobs or felt `picked on'. At a very young age Rita helped gather firewood as well as attending to other chores, including washing up, cleaning the yard, helping to prepare dinner and looking after younger brothers and sisters while her mother rested. Rose Holt was a meticulous woman whom Rita described as a `spotless housekeeper'.

Her father Albert was a proud man whose disability in one leg as a result of a horse accident did not stop his mobility or his fondness for European swear-words. He was known as a 'bush-lawyer' because of his outspoken views regarding the conditions of his people on Cherbourg. In fact one paper of Department of Native Affairs Removals cites his occupation as “black stirrer”. Many people in his community trusted his ability to deal with the authorities.

Rita was sent to the mission dormitory at the relatively late age of 13 as punishment for dating boys. Life in the dormitories was one of control, regimentation and discipline. Boys and girls were segregated and were required to do a range of domestic chores such as making their beds, rinsing soiled linen, washing and

scrubbing out the dormitory and picking up papers. After breakfast the children would go to school for several hours, some play time filled in the rest of the days before prayers, dinner and bed. The dormitory routine did its damage in its attempts to sever ties between the children and their traditional life, and the considerable time absorbed in it succeeded in limiting the depth and richness of their traditional knowledge. Dormitory life also attempted to take away the disciplinary powers of the children's natural parents. The Aboriginals were now being managed, protected, taught and chastised like children and in this way lost much of the autonomy they formerly enjoyed. The main strategy was to segregate the children from their parents in dormitories as a form of social control.

Besides the devastation experienced by her forcible removal to another area, one of Rita's first impressions of Barambah was her amazement at the sight of strange buildings. Never before had she seen walls too straight. The sterility of the mass-produced substandard timber houses neatly slotted in even rows made Cherbourg a prison compared to the freedom of the bush that Rita had previously known.

Barambah was known by many names to Aboriginal people, some of these being `the mission', `settlement', `reserve'. Rita never felt Cherbourg was her `real' home as she yearned for nostalgic days she had known in Carnarvon Gorge. A dislocated person in a sense, she was physically located at Barambah on the one hand but emotionally and spiritually located in Carnarvon Gorge on the other. Unlike an immigrant to a new country who had chosen to relinquish his or her place of birth for `greener pastures', Rita would not and could not contemplate that notion. Her soul stirred for her traditional lands. She felt an outcast and a refugee in her own country, like so many other Aboriginals in the past and the present.

Around the age of thirteen to fourteen years girls went to

serve their apprenticeship as 'worthy housekeepers'. It was routine for girls to be placed in servitude as domestic servants by certain persons in authority. In this case the Aboriginals' Preservation and Protection Acts 1939-1946 empowered reserve superintendents to enter employment contracts on behalf of their residents, to hold funds they might have and to control their spending. Mr. Wallace Semple, the then Cherbourg superintendent, had arrangements with both local and distant policemen, pastoralists and farmers to supply a regular and steady flow of workers for those in `need'.

Rita remembered the expectation that all the girls, whether of her age group or younger, would fulfil their roles as domestic servants. Rita's first job in 1934 entailed long hours from dawn until late evening in the daily routine of cleaning, washing, ironing, preparing food and caring for the children. She performed domestic work for many years, before and after the birth of her children. Her background and experience as a domestic has, in a way, shaped most of her lifestyle. Rita didn't feel comfortable and a `whole' person unless she had spent the day in some kind of domestic activity, be it cooking or cleaning.

In 1940 when she was 18, Rita met Jack Huggins in Brisbane. He was a tall and handsome Aboriginal man with a Maori heritage. In the 1940s he was possibly the first Aboriginal person in Queensland to hold a position in the Post Office. It was not until after the Second World War that Rita and Jack re-met and married in 1951 in Ayr, North Queensland. Their union produced three children – two girls and a boy. Never fully recovering from injuries as a prisoner-of-war on the Burma/Thailand railway, Jack's life with his young family was brief – he died from a heart attack at the age of 38.

Devastated by the loss of her husband, Rita returned to Brisbane in 1959 to the comfort of her extended family network. Hers was one of the first Aboriginal families to live in Inala, now the most densely populated Aboriginal suburb in Brisbane. As the

population expanded, many Aboriginal people formed their own identifiable community groups. Rita excelled at providing a means whereby local Aboriginal families who were new to the city could get to know each other. She was able to operate in this manner under the umbrella of OPAL.

OPAL was formed in 1961 in Brisbane by Mrs Muriel Langford, a former Christian missionary in India. In her efforts to `help the Aborigines', Mrs Langford organized a meeting in Brisbane on 4 July 1961 which was attended by representatives of the Anglican, Catholic, Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches, Rotary, WCTU< YWCA, TocH and the Postal Overseers Union.

An opportunity to work for Aboriginal welfare outside the political arena, but encouraged by the government, was an attractive proposition for the early members of OPAL. The members of several church groups found their activities more satisfying in the sense that they did not have to engage in applying political pressure on issues of a civil rights nature.

The Department of Native Affairs was quick to recognize the value to the government of a group such as OPAL. OPAL's close relationship with the State government also led to criticism, firstly from members within the Aboriginal community. The late Pastor Don Brady perceived OPAL as a `government front'. OPAL State President Mr Neville Bonner responded that while OPAL had gained support from the government and various church organisations, the work OPAL had done in the field would speak for itself.

Rita migrated to Brisbane for social rather than economic reasons. Recently widowed her main motivation was to return to her brothers and sisters who had left Cherbourg for the city. Certainly, her family remained a strong institution of assistance, love and stability for her.

The Aboriginals in Brisbane were faced not only with the

difficulties of being newcomers but also that of being rural or small town people moving into an urban area. Additionally, Aboriginals were faced with problems engendered by racial prejudice and discrimination. Attesting to this, Rita and her family moved house fourteen times in three years, largely because of discrimination by landlords in renting premises to Aboriginals and their intolerance of the sharing of homes with transient or homeless relatives and friends.

This did not deter Rita from helping others. Rita would voluntarily assist and facilitate newly-arrived Aboriginal people from reserves and country areas in their contact with the Housing Commission; applying for benefits from Social Security; being placed in contact with relations; gaining access to schools for their children; applying for employment – an overall information and access billboard. She operated largely through OPAL, which became a self-help organization where Aboriginal people, for the first time, could make decisions about their own lives.

Rita was known as the `glamour' girl of OPAL. She was an Aboriginal woman who presented herself in a dignified and commanding manner – full of confidence, self-assured in every respect, who defied unfair authority and was the ultimate exception to Aboriginal stereotypes existing at the time. As Mrs Langford ironically stated, `she walked on the land as if she own it.'She knew firmly who she was and what she was and where she stood as an Aboriginal person and a facilitator between two cultures which were like chalk and cheese: the oppressed and oppressor. This is a difficult line to tread, but Rita did so with a certain ease and grace that only she could have performed so elegantly.

Within OPAL a cooperative and comfortable working relationship existed with whites. Rita recalled the hours spent listening to white people speaking; she was impressed by how they conducted themselves and learnt a great deal from these

interactions. This is what essentially appealed to Rita, a great humanitarian who `loved' all people of every colour, race and creed. To have had the opportunity to mix with them was also another great challenge; she excitedly talked about her family, people, culture, to those who had never encountered an Aboriginal before. First impressions may be the greatest, and Rita never relinquished her starring role as the Aboriginal people's Ambassadress.

The major areas of interest for all branches of OPAL, though in varying degrees, were welfare, housing, education, employment, socials, Badge or Tag Day activities and holiday camps. OPAL holiday camps began as an ambitious undertaking in the first three years catering for groups of 50, 90 and 140 children respectively. The number of children taking part in the camps increased with an average of around 220 from settlements, missions and outlying regions each year from 1964 to 1972. The reason for the holidays was to provide an opportunity for Aboriginal children, primarily from missions, reserves and settlements to come in contact with white children and adults. `A week was too short, and we felt two weeks were rather too long so we fixed on ten days, and the kids were left longing for more'.

OPAL bombarded all sections of the media. The Aboriginal people had been invisible for so long, that no wonder they had their rights abused. That was why we kept up media pressure making the most of every possible opportunity to get into print. The constant efforts to gain publicity were received favourably as OPAL still remains the best known Aboriginal organization in Queensland to both Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals.

The OPAL Younger Set comprised younger members of OPAL, mainly teenagers who formed into a social club organizing Christmas parties for children, bus trips, dances and other gatherings. Their first project was a ball on National "Aboriginal

Day, after which weekly dances were held. The OPAL Younger Set `gravitated' to Rita's house at 121 Inala Avenue, Inala for meetings. This was possibly because they felt comfortable at `Auntie Rita's' as she was affectionately known, and, more importantly, decisions could be made on a friendly, consensual basis. Rita would provide refreshments, even in off-pension week and greeted participants with a hearty hug and kiss. Her warmth was spontaneous and reassuring to all those who knew her.

Inala is a low socio-economic Brisbane suburb and was particularly so in the early 1960s. It is interesting to note that the `poor whites' in the neighbourhood also gravitated to Rita's house. She was able to assist them, always insisting that OPAL `helps both blacks and whites in need'. Food parcels, Christmas presents, holiday camps, were some of the offerings extended to many families in the Inala region. She thus became OPAL's official agent in the area. A former friend would joke that Rita would `go opaling' occasionally meaning that she would spread the good word of OPAL as far as possible, acting as a talent scout, recruiting some and `educating' people about the aims and objectives of OPAL.

The influence of OPAL on Rita's children was not realized until much later in their lives. While John and Jackie have always centred their career ambitions around Aboriginal affairs, the elder daughter Ngaire is now an early childhood teacher. OPAL was a large and sometimes annoying part of their lives as they recall constantly `dragged' around to dances, socials and talks on Aboriginal culture with their mother. Always displaying her very deep sense of pride in her Aboriginality, Rita was able to instil this in her children by talking for hours to other people about Aboriginals in the halls of OPAL. She not only educated others but also her children to respect Aboriginal people and recognize that they had worthy contributions to make to society.

OPAL also allowed Rita's children to communicate with

different groups of people from all walks of life, from politicians to traditional elders, without feeling inferior. In those days people in the OPAL circles were keen to listen. This ability to comfortably interact and socialize with different people and not feel `shame' has carried through to this day and, when asked what has attributed to this ,`OPAL' is the unanimous answer from all three.

Not only did the OPAL experience equip Rita and her children with social skills, but provided all with a political framework from which to operate. As a young teenager, Jackie became angry at the injustices dealt to Aboriginals and wished to pursue ways to overcome these injustices. She realized that an aggressive stance could have created a reactionary response and alienated even the best intentioned people. Therefore she has attempted to concentrate on an accurate and sincere yet cogent oral and written style of delivery which not only interests people but urges them to educate or re-educate themselves about Aboriginal people. Such was the influence of OPAL that Jackie is determined that her son will be encouraged to explore and deal with the political, social and cultural aspects of his Aboriginality through an organization such as OPAL. OPAL instilled a positive feeling that made an enormous impact on Rita and her family's life. Meeting Aboriginals and empathetic non-Aboriginals has provided lasting friendships, not only for Rita's generation but her children's.

Of all the protest movements in Australia, that for Aboriginal rights has been the most persistent and widespread. Aboriginals have initiated their own methods of dealing with racism by establishing solid community networks which attracted a good deal of public sympathy from non-Aboriginals. Until October 1972 OPAL and DAIA were the only two major agencies in Brisbane. Since October 1972 there has been an unprecedented establishment and development of Aboriginal and Islanders welfare agencies. Some of these include black housing, legal

service and health services.

Rita Huggins' biography is typical of the phenomenon of contemporary Aboriginal writing where a task lies ahead in not only addressing personal histories and life stories, but indeed a more equitable representation of Aboriginal women's history. It elucidates the story of a woman affectionately known as `Aunty Rita', the silent achiever who was duly awarded the highest Brisbane Aboriginal community award in 1985. The irony was that the ceremony was held at the OPAL Centre.

Notes for "Brass Bells"

Rashida Murphy

Recently I travelled through India on a research travel grant from my University in Perth, Western Australia, starting in Mumbai and ending in Shimla. In Shimla, with its colonial buildings and view of the Himalayas, I started thinking about the British legacy and how it affected my own family who had also lived in a British town on the other side of the country. The story, "Brass Bells" is not entirely autobiographical – it is a mixture of memories that are not exclusively mine. But as I continue to walk the line between memoir and fiction, I realise that stories are the way we make sense of ourselves and our surroundings. We try to make sense of uncertainty and doubt. We try to embrace memory, both personal and global, and link that to our idea of home – wherever that may be. We try life-writing as testimony.

I didn't go to Australia with the intention of becoming an immigrant writer. Initially, I just told stories about home to my daughter as she was growing up. Then I started writing those stories as a way of making sense of my experiences as a first generation immigrant. I realised that as my memories of home faded, I invented an India of the mind, an India of the spirit, an imaginary India, if you like. In my stories I do not lay claim to a historical 'truth' merely a narrative one. It is in this context that my experience, identity and culture become useful in constructing a narrative that pushes the boundaries and offers reinvention as a possible alternative to received historical 'truths.'

I offer the story "Brass Bells" in this spirit. It contains the essence of people I knew and loved. It provides a glimpse into a household similar to the one I grew up in. It is set in that other country – childhood, where things are often not what they seem. I

don't think we need to insist on the difference between fact and fiction or myth and history or narrative and memory in order to construct an 'authentic' world. When I finished writing this story I felt I was a little closer to knowing myself better.

Brass bells

Rashida Murphy

Brass bells were only put around the necks of elderly cows. The rest had copper or tin bells along with vermillion marks on their foreheads. On special occasions like Krishna's birthday, senior cows wore marigold and jasmine garlands and went right up to the big houses of the moneylenders who sought their blessings. Maybe it was something to do with the idea that cows were human, more than human, they were ancient mother goddesses whose patience was supposed to make us think about our own hastiness. We weren't allowed to cuss at them when they plopped their soft pats in the garden or thoughtfully chewed all of dad's prized dahlias or settled down outside the lopsided front door, blocking it completely. We were the interlopers, not them, and we had to be as gracious as they were about sharing the space.

Our house was an afterthought, added on after the cows in the barn were moved to the neighbouring field where the grass was fresh and the well filled with sweet water during the monsoons. A conglomeration of tattered boys would herd the cows past the house at 5 am every morning, bells ringing, voices mingling in a *hoy oy, aye a a aaa* chorus that signalled the end of another unquiet, chaotic night for me. There was a sweetness, an other worldness to the sound that even in its insistence was already a thing of the past.

The peculiar house that framed my childhood resembled the warehouse it had once been. My grandfather had been a shopkeeper during the dying days of the British Raj and posters of Quaker Oats, Nurses Cornflour and Bluebell Margarine were still used by my mother to line the insides of kitchen cupboards. Although our cuisine was devoid of margarine or Clive of India curry powder it never occurred to us to question these remnants of

raj regalia. A grand uncle who moved in with us once went to jail with Mahatma Gandhi and accused my father of being an Anglophile, a charge so deeply resented that the uncle was ushered out quickly to an adjoining communal home before things got ugly. One didn't accuse my freedom fighter father of Anglophilia, no matter how senile or advanced in years one was.

Rooms were added as the family grew. Grandmothers no longer capable of living on their own were installed in larger rooms in the house while children were moved to smaller ones. Distressed cousins were rehabilitated in the garden room and sisters broke their hearts in the dark. A confession not meant to be heard by me convinced me that I was either adopted or unwanted and made me look at my mother with suspicion for years. One afternoon I had been lying on my stomach listening to the aunties chatter and drop shelled peas into steel bowls when my mother came in. She didn't see me, her voice low and cranky as she complained about the amount of food the kids ate each day, a statement that provoked instant reproof from the aunts.

'Don't talk about your children like that,' said one, 'every child comes to this world with her own destiny.'

'But not her own food,' said my mother bitterly, 'I'm the food provider for all these destinies then, am I?'

'They are your children, are they not?'

'Yes, they are, even the ones who aren't think they are.' My mother's voice rose slightly as she turned to go, looking blankly at my suddenly upright frame and round eyes. That was the moment my ten year old self regretted what had just become my past. But an illicit look inside my father's diaries many years later laid those fears to rest; I was indeed theirs and could no longer pretend that my real family was somewhere in a civilised city home waiting for me to claim them.

My favourite uncle went deaf one evening when we were all playing cards. We didn't notice and he didn't say anything. His

wife complained he didn't listen to anything she said and my mother told her to be patient and not complain so stridently. I don't remember when it was discovered he was profoundly deaf and nothing could be done about it. Always hesitant, his speech dwindled completely. He gave up work and the old bicycle he used to ride everywhere and started walking purposefully through what remained of our childhood. One never knew where he would turn up. This became a major inconvenience to the girls growing up because it meant there were no secret places to be with boys that he would not walk into. He found the renegade cousin smoking in the abandoned barn and hauled him home by his ears, shaking his head softly and confiscating the cigarettes. He continued to favour me with an occasional smile and an indistinct mutter while ruffling my hair and years later he would do the same to my daughter and call her by my name. I told her how we used to call him Uncle Walker and imagined him in purple tights riding a horse, with a dog called Devil galloping beside them. We laughed raucously – my cousins and me, at the memory, while she, my daughter, looked at us politely with a shake of the head and a shrug and I felt dated.

It was easier to recall our childish cruelties with affection than talk about the crumbling of our collective memories along with the house. Easier to evoke the memory of the garden room where the soporific cousin was installed for several months, than think about what really happened in that room. Because after all, we survived that idyllic childhood, didn't we? Of course we had different coping mechanisms. For some it was easier to spend the teenage years in a hashish induced haze or tie tin plates to the tails of stray dogs for amusement. Some left and never returned, or worse, came back with foreign partners and asked, 'what happened to the house?'

And on that afternoon we don't talk about, we learned something vital. We learned that most things can seem normal in a

certain light. Especially when the afternoon sun is contained behind drapes and the shape of a child is lengthened till it's not really a child; so what we see is not really a crime. Yet another memory persists. Someone's mother crying; crying loudly, disgracefully, with loud wails and uneven hiccups while the aunties shush her and our grandmother leads her to the room where she must spend most of her days now. And we think, whose death does she mourn?

We hear the bells outside. It's Krishna's birthday. The rich moneylenders have moved on to the street markets where business is brisk and Ganesh is more popular but the cows still come home the old way, pausing outside the house to bestow blessings.

Mothering the Self: A Study of Robert Dessaix's *A Mother's Disgrace*

V. Bharathi Harishankar

Robert Dessaix's memoir *A Mother's Disgrace* (1994) has been variously described as "a journey of identity," "account of an extraordinary life," "instantly gripping and relentlessly forthright story of a life" and "intelligently moving autobiographical narrative." All these comments quoted in the blurb of the book foreground the personal nature of the text as well as an indication that it is a 'construct.' Both the personal elements and the artifact hinge on Dessaix's search for and the relationship with his mother. As Robert Dessaix remarks, "I'd probably had an unnatural number of mothers for one man as it was" (93). This study focusses attention on the gallery of mother figures in the text and how Dessaix uses the mother trope to unravel the autobiographical self. This idea explains the title "Mothering the Self." What is of interest is that the author does not present a linear self-narrative but interweaves elements of the personal, social and national effortlessly. Thus the mother trope expands to embrace mother tongue and mother land.

A Mother's Disgrace begins with the author surviving a near death experience in Cairo which paradoxically helps him "find his voice" (1). Robert Dessaix goes on to relate "how he was adopted at birth, grew up as unusual child (creating a Pure Land complete with history, religions, town plans and its own language) . . . studied as an exchange student in Moscow during the Cold War, eventually met his birth mother and came to understand and express himself as a homosexual" (Spearitt).

Dessaix's journey of self-discovery is framed into a 'playful' and 'teasing' narrative that stretches and expands the boundaries of

the autobiographical form. Even though the author uses the first person pronoun, there is an element of impersonality throughout the text. The act of reading the text is not always linear and 'with the grain' but the reader finds himself/herself pausing, pondering, retracting, accepting and interrogating the narrative. The opening epigraph from Jeanette Winterson "I'm telling you stories, trust me" sets the tenor of the text. In a voice that is "polyphonic" Dessaix weaves fact, history and fiction into an elaborate quilt of relationships.

The meeting of Robert Dessaix with his birth mother is the climax of the text. However, the steps leading upto the meeting involves several mother figures. The first mother figure we meet is Robert Dessaix's adopted mother "Jean Jones" who loved him "like a beautiful thing that might break" (10) and who fades away into oblivion in an asylum. The care and concern shown by Robert during the last days of Jean invoke the real spirit of a mother-son relationship. In contrast to the anxiety ridden Jean, Mrs. Z, Robert Dessaix's teacher "was mysteriously exotic coming as she did from Manchuria . . . with a pleasing autocratic streak. . .the sense she gave that this was how things were done, that nothing else would do." She is a composite of "culture, poetry, literature, music, fine cuisine and sophisticated conversation" (45). The aesthetic streak in Robert is shaped by his interactions with Mrs. Z.

As a student in Moscow State University, Dessaix encounters more mother figures – Lina Ivanovna Prokofiev, the "crotchety, aristocratic. . .personality" who empathises with the restrictions in the Russian polity even while condemning the "ordinary." Marya Timofeyevna and Olga Aleksandrovna, though very different in personality, share the passion to uphold their religious belief in the face of Communist restrictions. These mother figures shape the intellectual orientations of Dessaix.

Robert Dessaix's mother-in-law whom he calls Mum and his partner Peter's mother complete the gallery. It is interesting

that these two mother figures sustain a mother-son bond with Robert and do not allow his partnerships with Elizabeth, his wife and Peter, his partner to colour the bonds they have forged. After his divorce, when Robert begins "to explore the possibilities of emotional and sexual saisfaction with men," he tells his mother-in-law about his homosexuality.

> She was slicing carrots for dinner one evening in the kitchen of the vicarage in South Yarra. As she sliced, I told her I thought I preferred men sexually. She [said] . . . .. 'I see' and kept slicing. Nothing changed . . . . As a vicar's wife she couldn't have been expected to give me her blessing or approval . . . I wanted a sign that she didn't think any less of me. And she gave it to me. (124-125)

Her understanding is complete and unconditional. In the text, Dessaix places alongside the acceptance of his homosexuality by his mother and mother-in-law. Such a conflation reveals the author's constant attempts to get approval for his choices, which, in turn, reveals a literal and metaphorical umblical connection.

Much like a detective story, Robert Dessaix places a red herring in his search for his mother in the figure of Yvonne M whom he calls "Yvonne not my mother." In a certain sense, his fleeting meeting with Yvonne M triggers his search for his mother. Quite interestingly, Yvonne M makes some discreet enquiries and traces Yvonne, the mother in half-an-hour. The first meeting between Robert Dessaix and his mother happens in Yvonne M's house. Robert Dessaix's grand rehearsals of the conversation end in a simple and natural conversation: "What you say, it turns out, is 'Hello.' Then you kiss and then you just look and smile and want to laugh and laugh and say nothing and everything all at once. There's a kind of tumult you feel at the still centre" (96). For Yvonne, Robert's green hazel eyes bring back "after a lifetime, unhoped-for and unthought-of, my father's eyes were near again, a hand's breadth away" (96). For Robert, "in front of me....was the

mother who had always just been a story" (97). Instead of the bitterness and blame game, "we started....with deep, generous liking and thankfulness that the silence had been broken" (99). While in the rest of the text, Robert Dessaix plays word games with the readers, in this instance, he lets silence and simple 'truthful' language to do his bidding.

In a contrast to this direct impact, Robert Dessaix conjures a Pure Land "which is not a fantasy or game" children play but "a parallel world" that he inhabits (31). As Greg Spearitt succinctly remarks, Dessaix's Pure Land is "complete with history, religions, town plans and its own language." The Tibetan painting of Shambala gives him the geographical space for his Pure Land, which resembles Tibet, especially Lhasa. "There are no people in this round city, just houses and pavilions and a maze of alleys. Around this city, this Pure Land where perfection and non-being are one, lies in a ring of mountains, then a ring-shaped sea, then another ring of mountains, and another sea – seven rings of mountains in all and seven seas" (27). Such a description in a self-narrative raises certain interesting interpretations. The Pure Land is round thus suggesting a mandalic symbol of perfection. The seven rings of mountains and seas foreground both a fairy tale space and a Yantra symbol, much revered in Eastern mysticism. This Pure Land is both the "embodiment of myth and at the same time 'real,' lying just off the coast of India" (27). On the one hand, the Pure Land is a child's fantasy world and on the other, it reveals a circular inner geometry. As Dessaix explains, "as a Westener, I've been brought up to see life as linear, sequential and consequential . . . . Yet deep down I know that a life can be pictured, construed, made sense of in terms of a completely different geometry altogether. With nothing at its core (27). This understanding is highly spiritual and mystical even though Dessaix does not believe in conventional religion. Another aspect to consider is that despite providing detailed maps and features of the Pure Land, Dessaix

does not name it. “I hesitate to tell you what I call it – it's not that it's sacred or a secret, it's just that I want to keep it pure. And I fear your scorn” (28). Around the same time, the Arctic, especially Iceland and Greenland (the faraway exotic), and Russia (the real) mingle in his Pure Land. He uses these countries to fashion his own land. However, unlike these real countries, Dessaix's Pure Land is a “Righteous City” (28) and a personal “Motherland” (29). What begins as a child's fantasy continues into adulthood and Dessaix not only creates a Pure Land but “through the matrix of this imagined Motherland, unaware of what I was doing, I was working out and articulating to myself all sorts of religious, phiolosophical, sexual, psychological and other problems.” (29). Thus the personal expands into the social and the national and the private sphere touches the public.

In order to create a Pure Language for his Pure Land, Robert Dessaix decides “to set up my own loom and weave my own language” (30) which is an “Indo-European language of enormous grammatical and morphological complexity with a history going back to Pre-Roman times. . . with three scripts, two main dialects and several regional variations” (31). Like the Pure Land, the Pure Language is formed in childhood and continues into adulthood. "If I 'm alone and in a compulsively Pure Landish mood, I'll chat to myself in this language (the dialect depends on the persona I'm entering)" (31). Both the Pure Land and Pure Language seem to be refuge spots for Dessaix as a child and as an adult. Just as the Pure Land provides a space for articulating religious, philosophical and political issues, the Pure Language enables Dessaix to confront moral issues, such as the notion of right and wrong. As Dessaix elaborates: “English is filtered through [Pure Language] all the time. I make myself translate almost everything I hear . . . . Obsessively, I force conjunctions to occur between language systems” (31). Conjunctions provide meanings between “words and things, words and words, words and memories” (31). For

instance, when Dessaix ponders over the meaning of words like right and wrong, he realises that they "are just English words with a history. They have been applied to different things at different times in different social contexts" (32). This provides an understanding of "how relative and personal concepts like right and wrong are, how socially determined, and how imprisoning knowing just one language can be" (32).

While this delineation of Pure Land/Language is a child's play and fantasy at one level, it is also the search for the core that is missing. "In some ways all I was trying to do by spending part of my time in a parallel world was to belong somewhere, to give myself a history I had some control over. I'd known ever since I could know anything that I didn't come from where I was …. So on the one hand I seemed to have landed on my feet while on the other, from a very early age, I was confronted with the fact that there are times when people must abandon those they love" (33).

Robert Dessaix's frank account of his marriage and his preference for homosexuality can be viewed as extension of his search for a sexual and moral ideal. In a vivid description, Robert Dessaix conveys the reactions of his mother-in-law and mother, who are conservative in their beliefs – the initial shock followed by a quick acceptance of his sexual preference as something that provides meaning to his life. He describes the long conversation with his mother about Peter Timms and her acceptance is sealed with a kiss to Peter. "To you it may have looked like any other kiss. To me it was momentous" (126). This moment of acceptance by the most important person in his life makes him reflect on his homosexuality.

> From a very early age. . .I was aware of being different. . . .I knew that the cards I'd been dealt (by circumstance, biology, whatever agency) made up an odd hand. You notice at school that you speak differently. . . .You notice in yourself a certain fastidiousness that discomforts people. . ..

> Above all, you notice other boys don't mind tearing their clothes off in the changing-sheds and knocking each other about (but you do) . . . . Above all, you notice other boys like being with other boys. You basically like being with girls. (130)

To a large extent, Robert Dessaix's world (Pure Land, Pure Language, Sex Orientation) is feminine.

This raises a question about the purpose of including a gallery of mothers in a memoir. Robert Dessaix makes a perceptive remark that *A Mother's Disgrace* is "a letter to my mother to tell her things. . .to tell her in all its complexity why my life had assumed the shape it had" (Gina Mercer). At another level, *A Mother's Disgrace* is a "look at his own image" even while pretending to be looking into the mirror of his mother's life. In doing so, he sets the self in action and does not define it as a thing with a fixed identity. "A verb, not a noun."

Such a stance informs the moral positioning of the individual and the people involved in the relationship. "Meaning only occurs in conjunctions, after all–words and things, words and words, words and memories (the Universe and God, for that matter)" (31). The phrase 'right and wrong' is language dependent and each language is fixed in time and space. So, who is Robert Dessaix's ideal listener of this narrative? In an interview with Caroline Baum, Dessaix says for his writing voice, "he imagines he is speaking to an ideal listener, who is always a specific woman – 'a woman who is fond of me but not uncritical.'" The text, which is a quest for one mother, is peopled with several mother figures and addressed to a mother-reader.

Robert Dessaix's extraordinary and deft weaving of the mother figures in the narrative makes *A Mother's Disgrace* intimate and impersonal at the same time. He adopts variations in voice and words thus quilting together Mother Lands, Mother Russia and

Mother in his weave. The result is a "swooping" narrative that approaches this particular life "kaleidoscopically in sharp bursts" (90).

Commenting on the male writers' need "to retrieve, refashion and finally let go of their mothers, in memory and in writing," Wendy Lesser remarks ". . . for some this process itself becomes their primary work as writers" (24). Quite interestingly, *A Mother's Disgrace* is the threshold that enables Robert Dessaix to draw the line between academic and creative writing. He crosses a milestone in his growth from being an adopted child, through academic pursuits, through his stint as an acclaimed broadcaster of "Books and Writing" in Australian Broadcasting Corporation, through his sexual shifts from heterosexual to homosexual and finally his position as a well-established contemporary author. On a final reckoning, writing the memoir defines for Robert Dessaix not only his identity but the process of 'mothering' the self – giving birth and nurturing it. "Who I was – had been, would be – suddenly seemed so fluid, the self so evanescent, protean. A word, a name, and by some magic a precarious self would crystallise briefly in the void and float there, many-faceted and glinting. And then dissolve" (9).

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Lending them Voice: Writing the Community in Robyn Friend's *We Who Are Not Here* and Maitreyi Pushpa's *Fighter Ki Dairy : Democracy Ka Dastavez*

Pankaj K Singh

The burgeoning of life narratives from the margins from the last decades of the twentieth century have started giving voice to the oppressed, the dispossessed and the colonized marginalities of race, class or gender across the world. Autobiographical and biographical narratives (often written by a family member) that have appeared on the literary scene have started articulating their ordeals and their struggle for survival. For example, the Blacks, the Natives or First Nations, the Aborigines, the Dalits , the tribals and others have started candidly expressing their side of the story, recording the history of their people which has been erased or distorted by the mainstream. At times the voices of the marginalized have been recorded and communicated by individuals outside the subjugated or exploited communities.

The present paper focuses on the recording and compilation of several oppressed lives by two mainstream creative writers, Australian novelist and oral historian Robyn Friend from Tasmania and the acclaimed Hindi novelist and short story writer Maitreyi Pushpa. In *We Who Are Not Here* (published by Huon Municipal Council in 1992) Robyn Friend records the life narratives of the Aboriginal people of "the Huon and Channel Today". In *Fighter Ki Diary : Democracy Ka Dastavez,* that is, *The Diary of a Fighter: A Document of Democracy,* Maitreyi Pushpa records the stories of persecution and of courage of the young women who, despite harrowing atrocities or stiff opposition, finally succeeded in joining as police constables in Haryana Police.

While the autobiography or biography of an eminent

individual from the mainstream usually records the rare journey or accomplishments of a *lone* individual, the subject in the life narratives from the margins often represents the larger community. The lived truth of an individual often replicates or mirrors the life experiences of other members of the larger group or community as well. Robyn Friend, a white non-Aboriginal Australian of European descent listened to the experiences of a number of Aboriginals of Huon and Channel area over a span of a few months and then presented their voices in a composite verse narrative, arranging it around some dominant themes. At the end of the narrative she gives the names of 53 'contributors' and 9 others who assisted her in putting this narrative of a community together. Maitreyi Pushpa lists some major sagas of struggle and survival under the individual's name, while several excerpts from some others' lived experiences are also listed, and in-between there are her own observations and interventions entitled 'From my Diary'.

Of Speaking and Not Being Heard

In Tasmania Robyn Friend used to run courses in adult education of all kinds not only in literacy but also in teaching other various kinds of skills like plumbing, electrician's, etc. When she first came to Tasmania in 1978 she was told there were no Aboriginal people there. The government of the day, the books, the display in the museum all said the same. However, she began to suspect an element of myth in this when a group of Aboriginal people contacted her and asked her if she would run "a course in communication skills". "We can't seem to get our message across", said one, "Nobody listens to us"(ix). The Aboriginals were very much there, living and speaking about themselves, but probably due to a huge 'conspiracy' of 'silence' the mainstream refused to 'hear' them.

Robyn Friend now wanted to do a book of oral history recording the stories of these people who have been wiped out of the *official* accounts of history. Being a white non-Aboriginal Australian writer she had doubts about having access to their inner world. However, in 1991 she was contacted by Mike Foley of the Huon Municipal Association asking her if she could do a community project on oral history with the Aboriginal people of Huon and Channel—an area settled by Europeans in the early eighteen hundreds and where Aboriginal women had large families out of alliances with ex-convict men. Over a period of several months she explored the personal and shared journeys of these people and the result was *We Who Are not here* (1992), which Robyn Friend describes as "the voice of a cohesive people and each separate story is a part of the wider story" (xi). She adds, "The stories represent both individual contributions and group conversations" and that "Authentic speech has been used with little editing and nothing added" (xi). Her claim is endorsed by the Aboriginal liaison officers Rodney Dillon, Shirley Evans and Mike Strong in the Preface to the book, "Robyn has skillfully selected appropriate accounts of the lives and experiences of our community, providing at last, a written account of our views of this society in which we live" (vii). Their lives and views finally found written documentation.

While offering the book *We Who Are Not Here* to the readers Robyn Friend asserts in the Introduction:

> … this is not another white-on- black book ….This is a black-on-black book. This is a community speaking of and to itself--and to us. My part in it has been to listen and to put down what I hear. I have been listening to the voices of a people who, because of a conspiracy of silence necessary to maintain a mythology, have not existed for the last eighty years…. This is a community growing up in a hiatus, they were here but they were not here, invisible but seen,

spoken about but often not spoken to – or heard. (x-xi)

A similar conspiracy 'of silence' and 'of not hearing' or could one call it 'conspiracy of momentous deafness' exists in other places too, in countries and communities bent upon throttling the voices of the oppressed. Maitreyi Pushpa records the pain of the recruits under training as women constables in Haryana police—many of them coming from poor or lower middle class families. Story after story reveals how their simple desires for education, for pursuing their talent in sports or looking for a job were detested and suppressed, and what brutalities they had to suffer both inside their own homes and outside.

In June 2008 Maitreyi Pushpa was invited to Haryana Police Academy at Madhuban to speak to young officers recruited in Haryana Police. After her lecture she was requested by the Director of the Academy, Vikas Rai, to speak to women constables undergoing training at the Academy. Maitreyi Pushpa started her talk on a personal note narrating how while going to her school, six kilometers away from her home, by bus she used to be harassed by the driver and the conductor. The bus used to daily pass by the police station on its way but she couldn't think of reporting the matter to the police knowing the atrocities of police on women. As she put it, "*Thana draata tha bus wala tarpata tha,*" that is, 'The police station scared me the bus driver harassed me' (Foreword). She couldn't complain to anyone as she had lost her father and had no brothers. How she wished there were women police constables at that time! Immediately the young police recruits started opening up, narrating the heart-rending stories of their own struggles and survival. Maitreyi Pushpa realized that the lives of these brave hearts need attention and need to be recorded and she spoke to the Director about her desire to interact with these young women over an extended span of time. And then started a process of *listening* and *telling*. From July to end of August every evening she had a session with these women and they

shared their life of untold suffering and of rare courage. In comparison Maitreyi Pushpa's own struggles in life to articulate her voice seemed to her very mild. There was no one so far who wanted to listen to their stories. Nobody paid attention to their simple wishes for getting education or pursuing sports. No one was interested in listening to what they thought of themselves and of their own life. As one of them puts it,

> *Hamara padna-likhna ayaashi ke roop mein dekha jata, aur khelna badtmizi* . (32)
>
> (Our studies were viewed as debauchery and sports as uncivilised conduct.)

When Satvinder Kaur (who was repeatedly beaten in her childhood by her mother for playing with boys, and who was grossly ill-treated at boxing coaching academy), is punished even in the Police Academy for no fault of hers and no one listens to her, she took to writing a diary, to pour her heart out (66-79). Silently, on the pages of a diary *only* she could speak. So did Hina ultimately start unfolding the story of her agony from the day her father died, and how she would be brutally beaten when she contested her family as to how could they think of marrying her at the age of 13, and the story of brutalities of her husband and in-laws, and even her own brothers(41-65). Maitreyi Pushpa brings these recordings from the private space to the public space for everyone to read and hear their stories. Quite appropriately Maitreyi Pushpa calls these collected voices of the wronged girls "The Diary of a Fighter" and gives it a subtitle, "A Document of Democracy".

Both Robyn Friend and Maitreyi Pushpa contest the conspiracy of not listening as they become the *means* to tell in written script the lived experiences of people silenced and erased in their own country by the government and the mainstream steeped in a colonial and racist mindset, and of young women silenced and brutalized by their own families and others rooted in the

patriarchal mindset.

Writing the Self and Interrogating the Other

The Aboriginal people of Huon and Channel, living under the *official* lie that "The last Tasmanian Aborigines died with Truganini—and we are not here,"(81) finally come out with their side of the story, the facts of their lived experience. Voice after voice in *We Who Are Not Here* tells what proud and wonderful people they are, how they respect nature and all human beings, and how they preserved environment for thousands of years. "Respect" defined their attitude to nature and "never upset the bush or nothing" (52), "Just took what they needed and let the bush grow up" (53),

> Experience
> and respect
> Didn't leave bare hills
> and ugly scars. (53)

Another voice adds,

> They never took no more than what they wanted though, did they? (57)

By contrast the white men have damaged and plundered nature in just two hundred years, have "stuffed the bloody lot" (57). As an angry voice says,

> . . . what white side?
> . . . thieves the lot of them . . . (61)

Several voices also list how they had a wonderful culture which was eroded by the whites,

> That television
> Worst thing that was ever invented.
> Killed the stories. (78)

The stories of their people, the stories of their land, their oral history all got lost. Another voice asserts:

> Now

I never listen to the weather forecast on the TV or the radio.
I take no notice of that.
I go by the ants.
Or the birds.
Or a calf in a paddock. (54-55)

A whole way of life, a knowledge system, an oral history, all the stories of these people got lost. These people question the distortion of their history,

They taught us
that Captain Cook found Australia
and we used to say,
'But it was never lost.'
You'd get caned for that—
they'd send you out to clean the lavatories
and empty the rubbish bins for that. (14)

One is reminded of similar punishments meted out to Omprakash Valmiki, the renowned Dalit writer, who recalls in his autobiography *Joothan,* that so deep was the caste bias that when he was in class four, to discourage him from attending the school, the Headmaster debarred him from sitting in the classroom and instead made him sweep the whole school and the playground, day after day (5). He also recalls when he asked his teacher why Hindi poetry only romanticized rural life and did not register the hardships of the rural poor and why the epics did not make any mention of the poverty of the Dalits he was brutally caned in the class by the teacher for "daring to talk back" (23).

Robyn Friend was told by several others also about their sad experiences of the education system. Due to racist discrimination at school, despite being extremely bright and good at studies, they were not allowed to go to matric, and one of them says,

Well . . . I spent most of time out of the room
cleaning the lavatories--didn't I . . . (15)

The pain of humiliation at the school is communicated by another voice as well:

At matric I did Australian History
I was told that the last Tasmanian Aboriginal
died with Truganini.
And I stood up and said, 'I'm Aboriginal.'
And I was laughed at.
The whole class just turned around and laughed at me.
The whole class.
I cried.
In class.
And they laughed at me.
Later
the teacher came and apologized to me.
But only to me.
He never corrected it in the class.
So on the one hand you were lined up at school for being Aboriginal
and on the other you were laughed at for saying that you were. (15)

The lies, the paradoxes of a callous system are candidly questioned by these people and their own side of the story, their pain and degradation are poignantly recorded. They talk of the "bloody side" of Woolnorth, "this wonderful property with tourism and fine wool. . ."

How the people were simply herded off the cliffs—
as if they were less than animals. (9)

They were not allowed dignity even in death. Talking about the last full-blood Aboriginal Truganunna, they report:

She begged and begged to be cremated . . .

but they mummified her
and put her on show
in the museum.
On show.

And anyway . . .
her name wasn't Truganini
it was Truganunna
That's how you pronounced it.
Truganunna.

Bloody whites
They couldn't even call her by her name. (84)

There is anger, bitterness, questioning as the atrocities, the violence perpetrated by the whites is exposed by individual after individual

I mean
you got off the bus
you got into the school ground
and you were isolated right away. (90)

They tried to bear with this isolation calmly but there was no end to such discrimination:

We used to try and turn the other cheek all the time
--you run out of cheeks sometimes. (91)

In these heavy and painful stories, sometimes the questioning of the colonizers takes a lighter tone:

You know . . .
those French fellas
they came over here and wrote a journal about Aboriginals
and said they stunk.
Well, what would stink worse than a Frenchman
coming over here in a boat and he hadn't had a wash for a

year? (13)

The affirmation that gets repeated in the narrative is

I'm just proud about being Aboriginal.
I can't explain it. I'm just proud about it.
It's a warm feeling in the heart—
and I belong. (8)
or
And I've ended up as I am today
Very very proud to be Aboriginal. (11)

The section entitled "Nobody bothered about the Women" records the stories of the abuse of women and their hardships in bringing up children, often alone in utter poverty.

Is it my fault
that my great-great-grandmother's people
the women
were forced, were brutalized, were raped?
By white men ?
Or
with their people dying, all their tribal men dead
they sought to survive, themselves and their children
by settling down …with those white men? (81)

Another narrates how when a black girl worked for a white family either the father or the son would use her and when they had children. "The children were 'father unknown' or whatever" (82). Sometimes these girls were also ostracized by their own families, as in the case of Bella, who gave birth to Gus at the age of fourteen. While the child was brought up by her mother she went to town and worked as a prostitute. And this "really, really beautiful girl" was "smothered between two mattresses" by the whites in the brothel "because she had syphilis" (83).

However, Aboriginal women were "strong women", they did all the work, they struggled to bring up children, as a descendent of

Fanny Cochrane Smith-- the only woman whose story has been documented to some extent--puts it:

> The Aboriginal women were the survivors.
> And I'm one of them.
> Men!
> I've had 'em up to here.
> I don't need a man in my life.
> I don't need them.
> Just muck you around
> try and take over your life.
> Who needs that. (84-85)

The ***survivors*** who narrated their stories to Maitreya Pushpa in the Haryana Police Academy are also strong women who survived the brutalities inflicted on them by their own men--father, brothers, husband--within the family, and by the men outside, and occasionally by women too. A deep-rooted patriarchal mindset sees the daughters as their property, a body without any mind or desire, and constantly attempts to keep the young women within the confines of the prescribed roles.

In *Fighter Ki Diary* story after story unfolds not only harrowing tales of torture, of callous restrictions, of gross discrimination but also of unfailing courage and determination to finally break the meaningless conventions and practices to pursue their independent will, and find economic freedom. Strong interrogative voices emerge contesting the irrationalities and injustices of patriarchal social set-up. For example, when Satvinder is mercilessly beaten by her mother for playing with the boys she wonders if the boys are also beaten back at home for playing with a girl (71). She wonders why there are so many dance schools and beauty parlours in her city but nothing to train the girls for boxing (79). She wonders if there is any place for women or they will be shooed away from or refused entry every where(79). Despite the

support of her family, including her father and brother, the possibilities of a glorious career in boxing get sealed because of the jealousy of the head of the boxing stadium where she was getting coaching as she performed much better than his daughter. Helplessly she had to move to athletics though boxing was a mad passion with her, flowing virtually in each cell of her body.

She is excited when she joins Haryana Police Academy, Madhuban, as a constable but when she is once unjustly punished for no fault of hers, and the instructor does not listen to her valid explanation she decides to write a diary because she realizes that she cannot share her thoughts in the training center, as she may get punished for her thoughts. And she realizes:

> *Yeh baat bas main apni diary se keh sakati hoon. usi ke seene par meri kalam syahi ke aansoo royegi. Maine kahin padha tha—kagaz mein sabse zyada dhairya hota hai. (70)*
>
> (I can only say this to my diary. On its bosom only my pen will weep tears of ink. I had read somewhere-- paper has maximum patience.)

She pours out her agony on the paper and Maitreya Pushpa rightly titles her segment "Fighter Ki Diary". There are others also like Hina who had just consigned to her memory her own harrowing experiences in her in- laws home and her own parental home. It is only before Maitreya Pushpa that she narrates the saga of untold suffering.

Girl after girl says that their pursuit of studies was seen as '*ayaashi*', 'debauchery', and their interest in sports as '*badtamizi'* 'uncivilised conduct' (32). Many face strong resistance from their family against joining police – a profession fit for men. Or some, like Sudesh, face a serious dilemma whether to join the police or not, when she, the mother of two children (one 6 months old) is selected in the police but her husband doesn't get selected.

A boxing champion Neelu tells about her prolonged,

determined struggle to pursue her passion for boxing. When she goes to Hisar for a training camp everyone thinks she has eloped with someone. However, when she wins the national championship and gets an award of thirty-one thousand rupees the family's resistance melts down. But once when a boy in the college taunted her vulgarly about her boxing and held the collar of her shirt she slapped him and there was a proper fight. When she went to the police station to lodge the report she was scared by the behavior of the policemen. They didn't try to find out about the boy. When she gave his address to the police he was brought to the police station. The boy started levelling allegations against her. She was shocked, but was even more shocked by the conduct of the police.

> *Ooper se police wala keh raha tha –'itni awara na ban, tu ladaki hai. in sab se kab tak bachegi? aaj to ladake se maafi mangva denge, par ainda se khud ko control karke rehna. Are, ladke to cherte hi rahte hain. Tu gundagiri karegi?'* (25)
>
> (And the constable was saying – 'Don't be such a loafer, you are a girl. How long will you save yourself from them? Today we'll make this boy apologise to you but in future control yourself. Boys keep harassing girls. Will you act as a hooligan? ')

Shocked she didn't go to the college for two days and the boy started boasting that he has set her right. But then she went back and gave him a thorough beating. She had realized that she has to fight herself to move ahead on her path. And later she even went to Russia to play, and finally found a career in police. Maitreyi Pushpa has even captured the raw idiom that these girls had to deal with.

There are others also like Shabnam who at the age of 23 had realized that 'truth' is not to be spoken, because truth made her a culprit while lies saved her from punishment. Truth is fit for books

not in life. Her long saga of heart-rending suffering (151-187) reveals her persecution in her maternal grandmother's house, when her widowed mother moved in with her three daughters, where she got regular beatings from her mother to convince the uncle that she is keeping her daughter under control. Her paternal uncle tried to molest her at the age of nine, and the maternal uncle wanted to marry her off after class eight at the age of thirteen, while she herself had only one dream-- books and school. A tale of endless suffering at the hands of her family and others who in the name of helping her wanted to exploit her body-- from her teacher to her friend's father, her employer at Goa, and the love and betrayal of her classmate whose brother and cousin brutally rape her (and no one is ever held guilty)--ends with an abortion before she finally gets selected as a police constable.

Equally hair-raising is the story of Hina in the society that treats daughters as a burden and daughters-in-law as slaves. The untimely death of her father, who was keen to give her education, changed the course of her life. Despite her protests her elder brother fixed her marriage after she completed class ten. Made to work like a slave by her mother-in-law and five sisters–in-law, she was often brutally beaten by her husband at their instigation. Yet at night he'll have the fill of his lust, on her battered body. Finally she ran away from there and with the support of her younger brother filed a suit for divorce. Along with the divorce the court granted the eighty thousand rupees paid as Mehar at the wedding, which added to her woes. Now both the brothers started fighting for the money--the elder one claiming he had paid this money at the time of marriage and the younger one claiming he had filed and fought the divorce case. No one had time to think of Hina. Helpless mother, dependent on the brothers, understood her pain but couldn't protest. Unable to bear any more she left the house with ordinary clothes on and just five hundred rupees in her pocket. And then started the long journey of this brave heart towards self-

realization and after four years of hard struggle she got selected as a trainee in the Haryana Police Academy. That is when she met her mother, whom she had been dying to see all these years, who had long time back shattered the myth of 'home' or 'family' belonging to a woman. Hina recalls,

> *Ammi kam se kam jhooth nahin boltin, saaf keh diya—Hina tu yahan ki beti hai, wahan ki bahu ho jyagi. Tera ghar mera ghar—yeh baat bhool ja. jiski marzi tujhe rakhne ki jitney din tak hogi, weh utne hi din tujhe ghar mein tikne dega. yahan reh ya wahan reh.* (46)
>
> (Ammi at least never tells a lie, told me clearly—Hina , you are a daughter here, there you'll be a daughter-in-law. Your home my home—forget it. They will let you stay in the house as long as they wish, whether you are here or there.)

This 232 page narrative is epical in scale in recording the plight, the struggle and the survival of women in the patriarchal set-up of Haryana, which in many ways replicates women's ordeals in patriarchy in general. The raw idiom retained while reporting the young trainees' words captures some of the mental violence women are subjected to day in and day out.

The interventions of the author often bring their predicament into sharp focus. She realizes that her own struggle had been with people outside, and in moments of conflict she could at least console herself that none of them is related to her and also that she is suffering because she has no brothers and her father is no more. But she sadly realizes,

> *Kaisi galatfaihmi thi! ladkion ne bata diya ki pita aur bhai ka sanrakshak ke roop mein kaisa kora chalta hai, dekh lijiye hamara shareer hi nahin aatma tak udher daali.* (37)
>
> (How mistaken I was! These girls had told me that in the name of guarding them how the father and brother lash them. See, not only our body even our soul has been

ripped apart.)

Maitreyi Pushpa could hardly have her food after listening to these harrowing tales and she moans that this so-called new time is worse than her own time (37). She is pained to realize that there is such bombardment of customs and conventions on the dreams, desires and ordinary expectations of these girls that their selves are shredded into pieces, *unke vajood ki dhajjian ur jaien* (35).

Maitreyi Pushpa salutes the courage of these women in facing the degrading and dehumanizing situations, and how they triumphed over them. Some girls were initially reluctant to open up but she assured them that she had come not only to share their pain, but to spread it and to show it to people, so that in their story they see their own face as in a mirror (21). She has recorded the stories of their life to be read by all, so that their 'truth' is 'heard' by all.

Heroic Survival

Both Robyn Friend and Maitreyi Pushpa chronicle the lives and struggles of ordinary people—marginalised and silenced by the mainstream, and their heroic survival despite the formidable odds against them. The Aboriginal people of the Huon and Channel had been written off existence *in their own country* by the *official* history of their government with a colonial mindset. The unjust, unfair laws and practices of the colonizers caused them endless suffering, humiliation and deprivation. One is reminded of the brutally unfair legal practices of the white settlers as recorded by Doris Pilkington in the classic biography of her mother *Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence*.[1] But finally as the victims speak up and articulate the truth of their existence and experience, *their side* of the story or rather history gets chronicled in the written word.

The struggle of the young women recorded by Maitreyi Pushpa was even harder as they were brutalized often within their

own family, by their blood relations or by their husband or in-laws, having a hard patriarchal mindset. While for the Aboriginals the 'other' was identifiable as the enemy, the outsider, the invader, for these women the 'other' was their own, among the closest relations in the family.

While the Aboriginals were oppressed and subjugated by technological superiority, political control and biased law (such as Assimilation Policy or the Aboriginal Protection Acts in different states), these women were oppressed under the weight of culture. In the name of culture, in the name of 'honour', in the name of rightful behavior of daughters and daughters-in-law these women were violently restrained from pursuing their simple dreams of getting education or earning a name in the field of sports for which some of them had a natural talent.

The narratives of the Aboriginals expose the myth-making of the dominant order that they are not there while these young women expose the myth of 'home' being a 'safe' place for a woman and that she needs a man for her protection. Their determination, their rebellion and their courage made them ultimately realize their self.

Significantly, by the interventions of two sensitive, empathetic, concerned, creative writers—with some support from the establishment, from the Huon Municipal Council and from the Director of Haryana Police Academy—these erased and marginalized humans step out of the zone of *silence* into *speaking.* They spoke out, they were heard and then their lives got recorded in *written* word, which is always privileged over oral word, as Robyn Friend says, in the Notes at the end of *We Who Are Not Here,* "It is ironic . . . that what is written, however faulty the source, is hard fact, while what is spoken however consistently and continuously, is relegated to the realm of hearsay" (127). The voices move out of their personal space to the public space as these are written and printed to be read by all. One can understand the

sadness and urgency in another famous Aboriginal autobiography *Mum Shirl,* as Shirley C. Smith states right in the beginning of her own narrative, how important it is to write down individuals' memories to record the forgotten history of her people:

> Writing a book like this brings so many things into my mind, and also a lot of sorrow. . . .
>
> You see, there could have been lots of books written about Aboriginal people, how they survived, and how great they are and were. . . . but it is also sad that so much has passed and remains only as a memory for some of us who are older, and this memory might disappear in a few more generations' time." (6)

The two composite narratives become significant political and humanistic exercises as the truth of these lives has been brought from the world of individual memory to the public space, from the personal and private space of oral memory or a diary to a printed book for circulation for a wider readership. What Robyn Friend says of the Aboriginals of Huon and Channel is equally applicable to these young women of Haryana:

> It is a community emerging out of time, finding its voice after a long silence, a people finding each other, coming together, honouring the past, living very much in the present and intent on the future. And it is just a beginning, just a first flush of voices . . . . (xi)

Voices, no doubt, inspiring for other victims like them and educating for the wider readership, the non-victims, for those on the other side of the fence, thus including them in their own struggle for justice.

NOTES

[1]While giving the historical context of her mother's life story Doris

Pilkington tells how when two Nyungar brothers Bidgup and Meedo were caught "spearing a sheep" for food they were "sentenced under the English law" to "several years imprisonment and were transported to Rottenest Island Penal Colony. . . . Their elderly parents and wives and children wept and wailed, while others watched silently as they were shoved roughly, their legs in irons, into a boat and sailed down the river, out to the open sea. They were never seen again." And she adds," Yet when old man Udja complained to the magistrate that a white man stole his wife, Nella, he was given a bag of flour and told to go home." " That old man expected the same form of justice under the white man's law. He never got it" (14-15).

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Memory as a Site of Pain, Resistance and Reclamation: A Study of Sally Morgan's *My Place* and Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke*

Hem Raj Bansal

> Memory becomes a device to inculcate the urge for resistance in future generations. (Pundit xiv)

Biographical and autobiographical narratives of the Indian Dalit and the Australian Aborigines represent sites of struggle, resistance, hitherto unrecorded pain, survival and gradual empowerment. Emanating from the personal lived experiences, such works reconstruct selfhood by speaking from subjective positions. This rewriting aims to serve the twin objectives of contesting the colonial legacy of racial discrimination and socio-political exclusion in the case of Australian Aborigines and caste-based social ostracization in the case of Indian Dalits. Dalit and Aboriginal autobiographical writings, rooted as they are in lived pain, anguish and its continuing recurring presence, narrate a tale of centuries' old oppression. This paper takes up Sally Morgan's *My Place* (1987) and Baby Kamble's *The Prisons We Broke* (2008) to discuss the points of divergence and convergence. The harrowing and hostile power structures come under the direct scrutiny of these marginalized writers. The European colonization of Australian Aborigines and thousands of years' internal colonization of the Dalits by the upper castes in India, the going back to the past and reclaiming identity, racism and casteism experienced in terms of education by the children of both these races and an interrogation of unequal power relationships and hence protest as a contesting tool in both autobiographies shall be explored. The central argument, therefore, that emerges in this paper, examines these two autobiographies both as questioning the

discriminatory practices and also as tales of survival amidst oppression.

Baby Kamble's *The Prison's We Broke*, originally written in Marathi as *Jina Amucha* and translated into English by Maya Pundit, was published in 2008. Delving into the experiences of her community, this work presents a vivifying account of the Mahar Dalit community in Maharashtra and their ordeals. The writer attacks the inhuman practice of untouchability which was solely accountable for the socio-political, economic and cultural negation of the Dalits in all walks of life. Sally Morgan's *My Place* also remains a seminal autobiographical document in bringing to the fore the traumatized past of her Aboriginal family in particular and the Aboriginal people in general in colonial Australia. Sally Morgan traces the family history of her grandmother, Daisy Corunna and her mother Gladys Milory with a strong urge to not only embrace Aboriginality but also to question the tormented past. Though both are marginalized writers there are differences as well. Though the respective communities of these writers have experienced discrimination, the writers themselves have not faced it so intensely and therefore, they represent it vicariously. Whereas Aboriginal children were separated from their parents under the Aborigines Protection Acts and were colonized by a foreign power, the Indian Dalits became objects of caste-based *varna* system of the Hindu religion. The Australian legal system denied the Aborigines the land ownership rights which they got in Mabo High Court ruling in 1992, no treaties were signed with them nor any compensation was paid; they were not included in census until 1967 which shows that they were not considered citizens in the formation of Australian Federation in 1901. In case of the Indian Dalits, however, there were no such discriminatory laws in practice and it was the social system and the religious sanctions that caused deprivation.

Both autobiographies draw on history and experiences,

thus qualify to be read as historical resources that enable us to come to a greater understanding of what life was like for these wretched people in two different lands. These show repugnance for institutionalized racism/casteism and distaste for the controlling centre. As Jennifer Wallach, an American expert on autobiography, says throwing light on these twin aspects of history and experience, "We must see that history can only be understood subjectively, through the thoughts and experiences of individual historical figures" (447). Similarly, the renowned Dalit writer, Om Prakash Valmiki (1950-2013), states, "Dalit life is excruciatingly painful, charred by experiences. Experiences that did not manage to find room in literary creation. We have grown up in a social order that is extremely cruel and inhuman. And compassionless towards Dalits" (vii). Likewise, Baby Kamble states her intention in writing *The Prisons We Broke,* "I am writing this history for my sons, daughters, daughters-in-law and my grandchildren to show them how the community suffered because of the chains of slavery so that they realize what ordeals of fire the Mahars have passed through" (Pundit xiv).

W. L. Howarth, while writing about autobiography, remarks: "The decision to write one's autobiography is at least a strategic beginning, whether a part of a master plan or born of frustration and personal anxiety" (365). For Baby Kamble also it is a part of her personal and communal anxiety that finds reflection in this autobiography as Maya Pundit states, "Like most Dalit autobiographies, *The Prisons We Broke* (2008) is an expression of protest against the inhuman conditions of existence to which the Hindu caste system has subjected the Dalits for thousands of years" (xi). Baby Kamble avers that her intention in writing this work is, "to demonstrate how Brahmanical domination had turned the Mahars into slaves, forcing them to live in conditions worse than animals" (Pundit xiv).

In 1987, Sally Morgan's *My Place* "was a watershed

publication in being the first Aboriginal authored best-seller" (Toorn 36).When Sally comes up with this idea of writing the history of her family in *My Place*, her grandmother, Daisy Corunna resents it, saying "I am taking my secrets to the grave" (207). However, Gladys, the mother of Sally tries to prevail upon Nan, her mother, to understand the need to rewrite something from the Aboriginal perspective: "Why shouldn't she write a book? There's been nothing written about people like us, all the history is about the white man. There is nothing about the Aboriginal people and what they've been through" (205). We find the same stance reflected in the Dalit literature as well which is the product of such questioning of this system thriving on casteism. Hence, a rewriting of history cannot be disentangled from this urge to represent authentic voice of the marginalized in both Aboriginal and Dalit autobiographies, which has been absent in the mainstream narratives of history.

Baby Kamble asserts her sense of pride in scripting down her heart-rending life narrative in the following observation:

> Today, our young educated people are ashamed of being called a Mahar. But what is there to be ashamed of? We are the great race of the Mahars of Maharashtra. We are its real original inhabitants, the sons of the soil. The name of this land is also derived from our name. I love our caste name, Mahar—it flows in my veins, in my blood, and reminds me of our terrific struggle for truth. (Pundit xiii)

However, in *My Place*, it is not the younger generation that does not want to embrace its identity but the older one as Daisy Corunna and her daughter Gladys Milroy were persistently scared of revealing their past as it would have shattered the chances of their acceptance in the white system, in schools or even in white society and hence their survival. But Sally Morgan in writing this

family history takes great pride in her Aboriginal identity. Even Arthur, the brother of Daisy, wants his sister to divulge her past experiences to her granddaughter Sally by considering it to be a matter of pride: "Why should we be ashamed, we bin [sic] here longer than them" (188). So the questions of the ownership of land and its original inhabitants and the pride in being the Aborigines remain at the root of the autobiography. The sense of wholeness that Sally feels on visiting North (the place where Nan worked as a nursemaid for the Howdens) reveals how therapeutic it was to own her blood relations and articulate their pain: "How deprived we would have been if we had been willing to let things stay as they were. We would have survived, but not as whole people. We would never have known our place" (295). Reflecting Sally's buoyancy of spirit, her venture culminates in not letting the "things stay as they were" but rather in tracing and proudly embracing a missing part of her existence in the form of her relations.

Kamble asserts that while the caste Hindus had forced the Dalits to regard the upper castes as superior, the Dalits had themselves internalized the feelings of inferiority. While questioning the caste Hindus steeped in the system of untouchability and discrimination, she also holds the Dalit women accountable for this degenerate condition. Talking about the Mahar women, Kamble states that they would wake up at three to do household chores. One woman from their respective families would go to the village shop and would politely and humbly request, "*Appasab* [brother], could you please give this despicable Mahar woman some *shikakai* for one paisa and half a shell of dry coconut with black skin?" (14). This shopkeeper, rooted in the vice of social discrimination, would use derogatory terms to warn his children against getting any closer to this low caste woman, "Chabu, hey you, can't you see the dirty Mahar woman standing there? Now don't you touch her. Keep your distance" (14). Arundhati Roy, the noted Indian novelist, political activist and the

recipient of the Man Booker Prize (1998), draws attention to this pollution-purity dichotomy: "The top of the caste pyramid is considered pure and has plenty of entitlements. The bottom is considered polluted and has no entitlements but plenty of duties. The pollution-purity matrix is correlated to an elaborate system of caste-based, ancestral occupation" (Roy 24). The Mahar woman in her turn would plead with the young boy, "Take care little master! Please keep a distance. Don't come too close. You might touch me and get polluted" (14). It signals how these Mahar women had themselves internalized these ignominies and this social code of behavior as their destiny. This shopkeeper would throw the *shikakai* on her *pallav* [part of sari covering torso] from a distance so that he might not get polluted and then would take the money kept on the threshold which, the author notes sarcastically, "did not pollute him" (14). Even after Baba Saheb's conscious-raising, the older people of the community would resent any thought of abstaining from the caste-based identity. Thinking it to be their duty to eat dead animals, they would even deride the reformative attempt of sending their kids to schools: "Why do you want us to put our children in schools? Are they going to become Brahmins? . . . God has drawn a line for us and you want us to cross it? Listen, we are born for this work. Why should we give up our religion, our duty?"(66-67). It again reflects the internalization of these caste-based prejudices by the Dalits themselves.

Similarly, we find the Aborigines in Australia who had internalized inferiority, imposed on them due to their dark skin and poor living conditions. Daisy and her Daughter Gladys in *My Place* have internalized this oppression so much so that they feel scared to reveal their real identities to their kids. Apart from it, on Sally's question to Jill, her young sister, about the Aborigines, she also expresses such negative stereotypical internalization by saying that they are "like animals" (121).

The forbidden geographical space where these people

could not enter shows the subhuman status that has been given to them. The Dalits in India were not allowed to enter the village premises, to take water from a public well or to eat together with the caste Hindus. Kamble narrates the relegation of the Mahars to the margins in vivid and graphic details, taking a dig at the same time on Hindu religion, "Hindu philosophy had discarded us as dirt and thrown us into their garbage pits, on the outskirts of the village. We lived in the filthiest conditions possible. Yet Hindu rites and rituals were dearest to our hearts" (18). This issue of relegation to fringes has also been discussed by Om Prakash Valmiki in *Joothan* that how the people of higher castes would defecate near their houses even in daylight. Viramma Josiane Racine and Jean Luc Racine, the authors of *Viramma, Life of an Untouchable* (1997) also speak about this geographical and social exclusion of the Dalits: "Presumed to be impure by the twice born castes who believe that they pay in their present reincarnations for the bad karma of their previous lives, the Dalits have traditionally been relegated to the extreme margins of society, not only socially but also geographically" (5-6). Similarly for the Aborigines in Australia, the issue of land and their forced confinement to reserves remains strongly contested. Hence, the forced removal of the Natives in Australia and the Dalits in India to the fringes is common and the discrimination faced on this front also remains the same. Barred from mixing with the whites, even with their half-caste kids and forced to live on the fringes, the Aborigines were reduced to a sub-human state.

The next observation about these two texts centers on the right to land and the adverse effect of religion on their lives, that is, of Christianity for the Aborigines and Hindu religion for the Dalits. Kamble claims her right to the land in an emphatic stance: "We have been the most devoted children of Maharashtra, this land of our birth, and it is we who are the true heirs of this great land. You played with our lives and enjoyed yourselves at our

expense" (37). Kamble goes on questioning the Hindu religion:

> We obeyed every diktat of your Hindu religion, we followed all your traditions—why did you single us out for your contempt? . . . We never dared to cross your path. We dedicated ourselves to the service of civilization and culture that was so precious to you, in spite of the fact that it was always unkind and unjust to us . . . . (38)

Deprived from their rightfully due resources and dignity, both writers interrogate the discrimination in their lives as an offshoot of casteism and colonialism. The Aborigines were the original inhabitants of Australia but were forced to become landless which disrupted their life style. Arthur, the brother of Daisy Corunna in *My Place*, while narrating his experiences to Sally, condemns the whites for having used religion perversely. While he acknowledges that God is supreme and that religion should be used to enlighten the mind and uplift the humanity, the whites misused it to disrupt and destroy the Aborigines: "Take the white people in Australia, they brought the religion here with them and the Commandment, Thou Shall Not Steal, and yet they stole this country. They took it from the innocent . . . they twisted the religion" (268).

The concern for nature as reflected in these two works also seems to be common. The narrator in *The Prisons We Broke*, while recalling her childhood games talks about how when their feet would bleed, the soil they applied would cuddle the oozing out blood. She further bears out how nature was bounteous for them and served their needs, "The cactus was a boon to us poor people. It yielded us everything, right from toys to firewood. When we went hungry, they supplied us with food. They gave us our ornaments too like the flowers we wore as nose rings" (43). Similarly, nature also served as a substitute for man-made chemical substances for the Aborigines and often supplied their needs. Arthur, the brother of Daisy, while narrating his story to his niece

Sally, shows the Aborigines' love for nature: "They don't kill unless they hungry, the white man's the one who kills for sport" (267). It does not only reflect their subsistence on nature but also exposes the whites, killing just for fun. Daisy, being the eldest member of the house, imparts her knowledge of natural world by advising young Sally that "eating a tin of beetroot would replace the blood you lost" (81). Apart from it she had such love for nature that wherever she would poke her stick in soil, the birds would fill the yard "with a high trilling sound" (11).

The deprivation that the Dalits and the Aborigines faced in their respective lands also remains common. Describing the condition of Mahar Dalit women, Kamble records how Tulsa and Kasa, two Dalit women in their fifties, would go to Maratha households "where they cleaned the animal pens" (46) and would return home with leftover food which the family members would eat until the next morning. She compares the state of her people with animals. However, she puts the blame on higher castes for reducing them to this state, "But how had we been reduced to this bestial state? Who was responsible? Who else but the people of high castes!" (49). Indignant over her people's deplorable condition, the writer considers bulls luckier than them as while bulls got grass for slogging for their master, the Dalits only got 'leftovers'. The writer further records that while bulls could eat to their fill and live in their master's courtyards, the Dalits' "place was in the garbage pits outside the village where everyone threw away their waste. That was where we lived, in our poor huts, amidst all filth" (49). She maintains that the Dalits "deserve the admiration of the whole world" (49). Similarly, the degradation and the suffering of the Aborigines of Australia comes to the fore and they need to be admired for how they have survived, and it is Sally Morgan who by tracing her family history brings it before the world to let it realize what a terrible place it was to live in.

Dalit Women had to labour endlessly. They would leave the

house in the morning to collect firewood. And when they got back, there would be no food left in house. Without breakfast and now without lunch, they would go to the narrator's *aaji*'s [grandmother's] house who would give them some *bhakri* [bread made from jowar grain] with onions. Their ordeal would not end here, after this they would make small bundles of wood and go to village to sell them. Not allowed to trudge the usual path, they had to leave the main road if they saw any higher caste people coming and had to say, "The humble Mahar women fall at your feet master" (52) and the children including Kamble would follow their mothers. These women had to leave the road and walk in the bushes even for a child of higher caste. Dr. Ambedkar throws more light on this in his *Annihilation of Caste*:

> Under the rule of the Peshwas in the Maratha country, the untouchable was not allowed to use the public streets if a Hindu was coming along, lest he should pollute the Hindu by his shadow. The untouchable was required to have a black thread either on his wrist or around his neck, as a sign or a mark to prevent the Hindus from getting themselves polluted by his touch by mistake. (Anand 214)

And if there were a newly-wed girl and she forgot to wish the master, a hell would break loose then on her. The man in question would come to the village and explode, "Who the hell is that new girl? Doesn't she know that she has to bow down to the master? Shameless bitch! How dare she pass me without showing due respect?" (53). After the departure of the master in fury, the tirade of abuses would be directed against the daughter-in-law. The writer drives home the point that the people of this Mahar caste or the Dalits in general had regarded these upper caste people as their protectors or patrons as the *sasra* [Father-in-law] of this woman says, "The whole village has started spitting on my face. We eat

their food, don't we? Should we pass by them without bowing"? (53).

Kamble maintains that casteism or the practice of utouchability controlled every sphere of the Dalits' lives. There were sanctions imposed on these Mahar women even in terms of dress, what to wear and how to wear. Forced to wear saris in the traditional way, they had to "tuck their pleats in such a way that the borders remained hidden" (54). Only Brahmin women were allowed to show off the borders of their saris and if the Mahar women were found showing their borders behind their pleats, it was considered an offence. With firewood on their head, they would sell it in the Brahmin lane and the old kaki would only offer meager money for them. The novelist records that thereafter they had to check each stick carefully to separate any hair or thread as the kaki would pass instructions while sitting in shade, "If you overlook any of the threads sticking to the wood, there will be a lot of trouble. Our house will get polluted. Then we will have to polish the floor with cow dung and wash all our clothes" (55). It manifests how widespread untouchability was in Maharashtra. The Mahar women would show, as noted earlier, their humbleness and the mark of their inherited and internalized inferiority by talking of these caste Hindu people as gods "Have we gone mad that we will pollute your house? You are god's own people. Don't we know even that? (54) Finally, after everything was done, the old kaki would throw coins on open palms to avoid any contact with these women. Kamble notes that because of this Hindu religion they had to suffer throughout their lives. She is livid that it is on the labour of Mahars that Brahmins are enjoying a life of luxury and effluence: "You drink their life blood and sleep comfortably on the bed of their misery. Doesn't it pollute you then? Just as the farmer pierces his bullock's nose and inserts a string through the nostrils to control it, you have pierced the Mahar nose with the string of ignorance" (56). The denial of knowledge or education to the

Dalits also perpetuated their misery. Similarly, in the Aboriginal writer Jack Davis's play *No Sugar* (1985) there is an incident where Mr. Neal does not want Sister Eileen to impart education to native kids as it would make them rise above their station.

Another important incident that she incorporates in this confessional narrative is about *yeskar* [a bonded labourer responsible for collecting food from the homes of the upper castes], a man whom the Patil [an administrative officer from Maratha caste] could assign any work in lieu of which he was given *bhakris.* He had to collect it from door to door of higher castes "with a stick fitted at one end with a small bell." Kamble narrates this discrimination where even the voice was considered as polluting. But the *yeskar* would take great pride even in it, thinking the stick to be a royal staff and his black dress as that of a barrister. Even in a marriage at the house of high caste people, the *yeskar* had to do all the cleaning work, cutting wood and drying it. After the ritual of smearing of *haldi* [turmeric] on *Akka*'s forehead, she was not allowed to defecate in the open for fear of bad omens or bad spirits. Again the poor *yeskar* had to suffer as "She would defecate in the garbage pit. And it was the Mahar who had to clean the shit" (76). After the feast was over, he had to clean the entire *pandal* and was given only leftover food. The family of the sixteenth share had *yeskar* for six months, while others had to become members for the rest of the time. They had created an illusion among Mahars by equating this *yeskar* stick with a royal staff, making him feel that by the virtue of being a *yesker*, he was the most important person in his community.

Kamble highlights poverty, deprivation and degradation in the Dalit community. She records that the Mahars did not have a duty towards dead animals only but dead people too. Whenever someone died in the upper castes' homes, the Mahar had to go to inform the distant relatives of this sad news. Even facing scorching

heat, heavy rains and trudging barefoot for hours and sometimes for two three days, he would still be afraid of relatives' wrath "for having brought bad news. As if he was responsible for the death!" (79). Apart from it, their poverty would cause them to wait at the other end of the burning *ghat* to take the shroud and the bamboo sticks used for pier, "They could use the bamboo for their house and the sheet would come in handy for stitching clothes. The *yesker*'s family could have clothes made only from such cloth" (79-80). It underscores the extent of poverty that the Mahars had to reel under, that this Mahar family could have only clothes made from shroud. Added to this pathetic poor condition would be the sense of delight of the Mahar women who would clad themselves in this shroud just to feel like the upper caste women. It shows how they aspired to "live like a Brahmin or a high caste Maratha or Patil woman" (80). Similarly, Daisy Corunna in *My Place*, shows how her mother also aspired for better clothes and better life like whites while she served as a servant at the Drake-Brockmans' place, "Ooh, Daisy, if only I could have a dress like that"(407). Deprivation and poverty of the Aborigines force them to work like slaves at the stations owned by the whites. Arthur records this pain in terms of the punishment meted out to the Aborigines on these stations. He recalls how natives were chained around the neck and sometimes "we would hear about white men goin' shooting blackfellas for sport, just like we was some kind of animals" (231). Arthur also records his experience of being separated from his parents and sisters and put on the Swan Native and Half-Caste Mission in Fremantle. He deplores: " Sometimes I wish I'd been born black as the ace of spades, then they'd never have took [sic] me" (231). On the missions, Arthur and other boys had to do menial jobs like cleaning the glasses, lamps, delivering the milk, eggs and collecting mail. He also recalls how a stern man called Bob Coulson once stripped the boys and beat them over the head and the body: "He didn't care where he hit us, he just beat us and beat us till we bled.

There was bits of blood everywhere" (236). Later, while working as a servant at the Mcqueries' he gets no money but only tucker and shelter and even after his work with Davy Jones, he gets no money but only food.

Poverty of the Aborigines, like the Dalits, also comes to the fore during Gladys' narration of her story to Sally, revealing the life of deprivation that she led at the Parkerville Children's Home and later at five years of age when she was taken to George Turner's House. She, along with other girls, had to wake up before dawn and sweep the floors, clean and mop the breakfast table and have a breakfast full of weevils. Since Galdys did not like this breakfast, she did not have enough to eat and her "stomach used to rumble all the time" (312). She also recalls as to how she was not even allowed to "have the comfort of her mother" when she injured her arm. Moreover, since Gladys' mother herself was a servant at the Brokemans', she could have visited Sally only on Sundays when the Brokemans' were off for a visit. It is a moving account of the deprivation in terms of both the lack of material things as well as the emotional vacuum caused due to a state of prolonged separation. Gladys also sensitizes Sally about the poverty of the Aborigines during the Depression. She painfully recalls that these people were very poor and "had nothing . . . My mother always gave them clothes and shoes, whatever she could find. When they left, she'd have tears in her eyes" (328-29).

As far as school or education is concerned, we find that the kids of the Dalits and the Aborigines make it a point to be together or in solidarity when it comes to communal or familial bonding. Sally, while recalling her childhood finds that she used to be a lot with her younger brothers and sisters which would seem strange to the white kids studying in school. However, for Sally it always signified pride, wholeness, "All my classmates had their own beds; some of them even had their own rooms. I considered them disadvantaged. I couldn't explain the happy feeling of warm

security I felt when we all snuggled together . . . We felt our family was the most important thing in the world" (45). On being questioned about her origin by the kids at school, her mother assuages Sally's feeling of curiosity by saying she is an Indian, on hearing which the other kids feel relieved. It is at this juncture that the question of her origins crops up though she remains content with her identity as an Indian for the time being. It is only after Sally finds Nan weeping for the first time in fifteen years and complaining that her grandchildren did not want her as she was 'black' that Sally begins to trace her roots. This realization makes Sally wonder that if Nan was not white then neither was she herself. Even sensing little Jill's despair, Sally realizes how "there was a great deal of social stigma attached to being Aboriginal at our school" (121) and Jill also speaks about the trauma that Aboriginality signifies, "It's a terrible thing to be an Aboriginal. . . You can be an Indian, Dutch, Italian anything, but not Aboriginal" (122). Sally realizes how even in white society of her own times the Aborigines are regarded as "a bad influence" (122) as the Dalits in India are also still considered impure. Similarly, we find in the case of Baby Kamble and her other Mahar friends same bonding when they were put in school after Dr. Ambedkar's inspirational speeches and his work for the upliftment of his own people. These girls would valiantly face the insulting remarks of the Brahmin girls who would consider their presence as 'polluting'. They would even give them a thrashing in school. Focusing on this discrimination in her own school Kamble recalls in an interview: "It was actually a Brahmin school since all the teachers used to be awfully worried about our polluting them and harassed us a lot as if we were their enemies. They treated us like lepers, really. They would not even look at us" (Pundit 140). Both the texts, therefore, reflect the change that came with the younger generation as Kamble and Sally devise ways to counter discrimination in terms of untouchability and racism respectively.

Another point of convergence is that this trauma of suffering and deprivation is cross-generational. While for the Aborigines this trauma is reflected in the taking away of children from their families for the Dalits it was in the way they were subjected to same degrading treatment repeatedly. It is pertinent to note here that the son of a Mahar or Dalit was not expected by the prejudiced society to attend school and become employed but rather was expected to become a worker or a domestic help for the upper castes only. In *My Place*, Daisy is stolen from her mother and so is Gladys, and so is Arthur, just to be trained as useful domestic help or farm labour. For both the communities, therefore, the history of racism/casteism brings relentless misery, and "the suffering cannot be forgotten, not only because it is a feature of everyday life, but because it afflicts an entire community or family for generations" (Nayar 42).

These autobiographies are also biographies in the sense that they represent the concerns of a whole race, and community. Individual testimony thus becomes collective as well. Individual experience transcends the personal boundaries and addresses the concerns of the whole oppressed group or community. As Pramod K. Nayar observes: "Dalit life writing is a personal atrocity memoir that calls attention to oppressive conditions within a community. It folds the atrocity narrative into testimonies and evidentiary statements that are explicitly political" (338). Baby Kamble, in an interview with Maya Pundit, emphasizes the anchor role that community plays, "Well, I wrote about what my community experienced. The suffering of my people became my own suffering. Their experiences became mine so I really find it very difficult to think of myself outside of my community" (Kamble 138). For the Aborigines as well, community plays a supportive and vital role. For Sally Morgan her people and her family remain a source of unending strength. Nan in *My Place* would sometimes exhibit immense interest in blacks while she would watch them on

TV. As she was pretending to be white to escape its effect on her grand children, she would not do it openly. However, this is how Sally records her community concerns: "They were her people, because they shared the common bond of blackness and the oppression that, for so long, that colour had brought" (174). Thomas Sue, an Australian writer, also remarks about Nan, "She begins to take a special interest in television news coverage of blacks and develops a strong sense of the shared historical oppression of black people around the world" (Sue 770). It also shows that though the authors are not so deprived themselves, their communities are and so they become the spokespersons of their communities.

These Dalit writings can also be called "Claim Narratives" (Nayar 241) as they want to assert their selfhood, identity and physical presence by re/claiming the same. The urge to be treated as humans lies underneath these narratives which make them not only simple manifestation of their life but a strong political statement demanding/claiming to be equal. Hence these also connect with the Human Rights movements across the world. In both the Dalit and the Aboriginal autobiographies, it is revealed that it is the body that first becomes the site of destitution, suffering and pain. The material conditions such as hunger, scanty clothes (rags), life in the huts/camps, menial labour intersect with psychological scars imprinted by such living conditions. Secondly, the passing of racial or caste-based slurs conflate these physical living conditions with traumatic mental states. It is this wronged past and its never ending presence which finds legitimate expression in these first person narratives. This poor living condition is also dealt with by Sharan Kumar Limbale, the eminent Marathi writer in his *Outcaste* (2007) when he recalls how upper class students used to give him their leftover which her mother would regard as "nectar".

Pain repeatedly surfaces in the two narratives due to endless

injustice and harsh, inhuman treatment. In *My Place*, the way Daisy is treated by the whites, particularly by Alice whose kids she had nursed throughout speaks volumes about this. Daisy's daughter is not allowed to stay with her as Alice is resentful of keeping a half-caste with her. She had to do the work of a maid servant, often going without food. Daisy reveals: "She (Alice) owed me back wages, got me to work for nothing, then kicked me out. I was just used up. I been workin' for that family all those years, right since I was a little child, and that's how I get treated" (423). Wanting to keep her daughter Gladys with her, Daisy ponders: "I wanted to keep her here with me, she was all I had, but they didn't want her here. Alice said she cost too much to feed, said I was ungrateful. She was wantin' me to give up my own flesh and blood and still be grateful. Are not black people allowed to have feelings?" (424). In the course of the narration of her story to Sally, Gladys also recalls how Judy, June and Dick, the kids of Alice whom Daisy nursed, had begun to behave like their mother [Alice] : "They treated Mum like a servant now, she was not there beloved nanny anymore" (339). Gladys also feels the pain of poverty as compared to Judy, June and Dick that "I was only the maid's daughter" (338). Similarly, we find the same note of deprivation in *The Prisons We Broke* wherein Kamble states as to how even after toiling hard for upper castes, the Mahars were only given 'leftover'. She reinforces: ". . . we always remained so loyal to you. You have always been treacherous to us" (38). This observation springs from a lived pain that always surfaces in this autobiographical narrative. The writer considers her caste and her community as victims of this social hierarchy based on the edifice of casteism. She deplores the fact that the true service of the Dalits to higher castes was never acknowledged or appreciated and hence a note of deep anguish over this ingratitude and callousness runs in these narratives.

In the end it is important to note about the emancipation or liberation of these people from this situation. For Ambedkar it

was Hindu religion which perpetuated or sanctioned this caste-based discrimination and hence its questioning, as Baby Kamble time and again does in this autobiography. Acting precisely according to this conviction, Ambedkar had discarded Hinduism and embraced Buddhism. It is by this ideology of Hinduism that the Dalits were made to accept their lowest social rank and internalize their oppression as their destiny. Hence, the Dalits need to consciously cast off such negative self-images as Baby Kamble exhorts through this narrative and reminds that emancipation is, as Racine also puts it, "an internal process "(9) and it can be brought about by discarding the old internalized notions of inferiority and the cult of Hindu gods and goddesses, because constitutionally at least they have been accepted as equal citizens of the country. For Australian Aborigines, the emancipation is both an external as well as an internal process. While internal process implies casting off the internalized inferiority, the external process has to come through from the mainstream, the Government, as the provisions made in the constitution in 1967, recognising them as equal citizens, the Reconciliation process, the Mabo High Court Ruling in 1992 (which restored their land rights), etc. and most recently the highly symbolic Sorry Speech by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd on 13 February 2008.

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Kick the Tin: Memory, Resistance and Reconciliation

Vinod K. Chopra

Autobiography as an independent literary category and a separate genre has been in large part defined through a denial of its relationship to other forms, historical and literary. Traditionally, it is understood to be situated between literature and history, or perhaps philosophy, and between fiction and non-fiction. This perceived instability and hybridity of the autobiographical form seen as troubling and problematic by earlier critics, has, however, been celebrated as a powerfully transgressive genre in more recent times. Namely, the last decades of twentieth century witnessed the breaking down of traditional generic and disciplinary boundaries, which allowed autobiography to be studied within a much broader framework. Furthermore, the employment of the autobiographical modes of expression by marginalised ethnic minorities, as well as women writers and postcolonial societies has proved that this transgressive, mixed, hybrid genre, although often criticised for being tainted by Eurocentric, masculinist, individualist assumption, is suitable not only for the expression of the individual consciousness of the westerns, but it is also a key element and a crucial site for the exploration of new identities.

Historically silenced, placed in the position of the inferior 'other' and excluded from the public discourse, Aboriginal women of Australia turned to writing autobiographical accounts of their lives as a means of resistance to various oppressive strategies employed by the white dominant society. The first step in this endeavour is to reclaim their past and history. As Ann Brewster explains, by reclaiming and rewriting history, Aboriginal women intend to educate both the non-Aboriginal and the Aboriginal readers. For the non-Aboriginals, the purpose is to reveal the

violence of colonisation which has been denied in official histories; "for Aboriginal people the narration of the past has the additional role of producing a sense of a common past and binding together people who have been dispossessed" (Brewster 53-54).

Kick the Tin by Doris Kartinyeri, an Aboriginal Australian, is the autobiographical narrative taken for analysis in this paper. *Kick the Tin,* widely read and acclaimed by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal readers, has sprung directly from the socio-political reality and deals with the life story of the author that is similar to that of several other Aborigines of the time. It does represent a community of the dispossessed and exploited. *Kick the Tin* is chiefly concerned with the colonial incursion and its aftermath including racism, oppression and cultural imperialism directed against the indigenous population. It is a harrowing account of pain, anguish and abuse of stolen children.

Doris Kartinyeri pours out painful accounts of her tortuous journey from a stolen child to a mentally sick adult. On a larger scale Kartinyeri's autobiography becomes a biography of numberless stolen children who met with the same tragic fate as that of the author herself. The author explains rather intrepidly how she faces life and accepts the challenges with never-to- give-in-stance.

The present paper explores how memory plays a significant role as a vehicle for maintaining and transmitting knowledge. It not only binds the Aboriginals together by establishing their link to the past, but also has the role of educating non-Aboriginal people about those parts of history that have remained invisible. "It is only the Aboriginal memory, which is preserving the unwritten history of colonisation" (Kapoor 177).

The painful memories of the author are the other side of silence that is comparatively more agonising and intolerable as it keeps one reminding of the wrongs perpetrated on her. *Kick the*

Tin as the name suggests is the name of a game in which the players keep hitting the empty tin jar vigorously. The game here symbolises how the author is kicked mercilessly from one place to another, from one grief to the other till her life is shattered completely. She suffers because she, like other children, belongs to the stolen generation. What could be more shattering and agonising for a person than to be snatched away from her family as soon as she is born? She was picked up from the hospital by the State when she was just one month old. She explains her trauma, "The event of my birth started life shattering experiences for me and my family" (Kartinyeri 6). The author was stolen from her family by the so-called Aboriginal Protection Board and handed over to the care of Colebrook Home where she spent fourteen years of torture and suppression with the feeling of utter loneliness, always crying for her lost family, culture and heritage. Even her father was not informed about her whereabouts. It was really a shattering experience for a child as "displacement, whether forced or self-imposed, is in many ways a calamity" (Saha 1).

Kartinyeri was never told that she was removed from her family. She complains with anger, "In all my childhood, I was never taken back to my family" (6). She makes it clear to the readers how in the name of 'protection', religion and education the Aboriginal children were separated from their 'roots', culture and heritage. It was a systematic plan of the white government under the Aboriginal Act, to remove half-breed children (of Aboriginal mother and white father) from their family, to teach them the ways of the whites, so that they can be useful domestic servants and farm labourers. "This act of stealing children from their family was just a way to colonise the mind and belief system of the Aborigines" (Chinnathambi and Latha 368).

The author poignantly remembers the tormenting experiences at the Colebrook Home where she was subjected to physical and mental violence. She was abruptly made to leave

Colebrook and given house-keeping job for a white family where she was a virtual slave at the age of fourteen. She laments. "My duties were to look after four kids, prepare meals and general housekeeping . . . I knew little about cooking . . . . I worked here for cheap labour as a domestic. No money was ever exchanged" (60). The pain of being a member of the stolen generation continues as she was dislodged once again. She remembers the agonising experience.

> Next I was taken blindly without any explanation from the Edwardian family to a house in the hills at Coromandel valley not far from Colebrook. This was a traumatic removal for me once again. I felt isolated. I lived in horrible cold quarters separated from the house about thirty yards. (61)

Her separation from her parents, family, friends, roots and culture was painful and caused inexplicable torture to her whole self. She felt broken and is alienated even from her own people. It was here that she was subjected to ever greater mental and physical abuse. The lay minister of the Church constantly exposed himself to her. At night she could hear him at the bedroom window. She felt for the first time unsafe and insecure. She explains, "I was constantly confronted with him exposing himself and masturbating . . . . I was forced onto his marital bed with his hands mauling me. The torturing continued at my bedroom window telling me how to masturbate. . . . I froze in my bed feeling angry and frightened" (62). She bewails that she was an 'easy prey' for the sexual predators as Colebrook seemed to be a haven for sexual deviants. She laments how it was a terrible place to live for a lot of children (54). Even by a senior female staff member she was forced into some 'ungodly' behaviour,

> In the evenings we had prayer meetings or a film night. You couldn't afford to be sick….I was always enticed to sit next to this so-called religious woman,

> only to be subjected to her personal desires. She reached for my hand to place between her legs to fondle the upper parts. This continued for a long while, whenever we had film evenings. (54)

She also remembers how a man would expose him to her on her way to school that caused insecurity in her. It was not only Doris Kartinyeri but other girls also of the stolen generation who were subjected to similar sexual onslaughts:

> The experience remained a bad secret until late in my adult years. These people were 'Christians' and I was placed in their care and trust by the United Aboriginal Mission. Later, I found out that another Colebrook girl went to that same farm after I'd left. She was abused just as I had been. (63)

Later in life Doris Kartinyeri made contact with some of those girls who were with her in Colebrook home. As they shared their memories, more harrowing details came up which Kartinyeri has included in her autobiography. Kartinyeri's 'sister', in the Colebrook Home, Catherine Appleton recalls being ill-treated over the years in Colebrook. Catherine was repeatedly told that she was not liked. A members of the staff simply said, 'We don't like you.' This had an immense psychological effect on her life in later years. Not only this, even the boys of Colebrook home were not safe. They were subjected to similar humiliation, ill-treatment and physical abuse as Kartinyeri and other girls suffered at the hands of the whites managing the home. Catherine vividly recalls incidents where young children were physically abused by "having their pants pulled down in the open, in the courtyard. Then picked up by their feet with their head dangling down, they were belted across the buttocks" (115). Likewise, one of older sisters, Bessie, too, gives an agonising account of how boys were subjected to sexual abuse. She recalls that "a senior staff member interfered with the boys, frequently sneaking around the boys' dormitory to

sexually abuse them." Even little children were not spared. She remembers how she was woken by the sound of crying. "She remembers jumping from her bed and found it was her baby brother who was lying in his cot, wet and alone, screaming his little heart out. Not long after, baby Ian died" (115-16).

The author expresses her anger at the fact that the majority of Colebrook children were victims of humiliation, shame and guilt. Speaking in the context of stolen generation Kirsty Murray, the Melbourne-based award winning author of fiction for children and young adults, too expresses her concern for the stolen children in an interview,

> ...there is a general lack of respect for children and their culture, and a very imperialistic idea that the state can impose culture. Again a colonial attitude—that you could force a culture on to a population and on children—which would have no respect for history or their genetic heritance. (52)

At a tender age pain was inflicted callously on the children even in the name of religion as they had to practise religion all the time and religious strictness was phenomenal (30). Religion was more important than education. This imposition of religion also had a very damaging effect on young Kartinyeri. The constant "Bible bashing" and "brainwashing", as she tells was rather painful and intolerable for young children. The children were also subjected to humiliating acts like shaving their heads if they had nits. If some children did not have clean ears then in the name of hygiene they were forced to put up with the barbarous treatment sometimes causing permanent deafness. The staff in charge of children was not trained. She questions this ill-treatment strongly, "My God! Who gave them the right to practise this sort of barbaric treatment on innocent children?" (35).

Kartinyeri also fell victim to the white hypocrisy. She was exploited by a white man who had an affair with her. He was not

ready to marry her. He pressurised her to have an abortion. He shouted and raved with anger like a mad man saying, "Get rid of the baby! This will ruin my reputation!" (106). This shows that the whites can use black women but would not like to marry the Aboriginals because they think this will destroy their position in the society. "This shows deeply embedded prejudice in their mind about the inferiority of the Aboriginals" (Verma 116).

Kartinyeri's painful life, full of exploitation, imposed cruelties, and utter loneliness and helplessness as a young girl rendered her mentally sick for which she had to go for prolonged medication. She herself says, "My journey in ambulance to Glenside was a trip I will never forget." And, "My stay at Glenside was torturing and long. I was heavily medicated, being subjected to numerous forms of different medications. I was like a zombie, and my whole body was disjointed . . . . The alienation was awful (82-83). Mental sickness is, no doubt, excruciating and it shakes the whole being. She suffered from "Bi-Polar Affective Disorder or maniac-depression" (83). She had to struggle hard to come to terms with her illness, and as she says, "to go through maniac depression is pure hell" (83). The malaise resulted from mental torture she had undergone as a stolen child. Her whole life becomes a tale of woe and irreparable loss. Hers is a compelling and sometimes witty memoir of a courageous journey, a journey into the soul of an individual struggling to find meaning and substance after the loss of everything the rest of us take for granted. Despite intense suffering and an agonising journey right from her childhood she does not adopt a pessimistic stance. Neither does she nurture any ill-will against anyone. Her dislike for the whites is not irrational as she keeps praising those whites who emerged like angels in her life. She loves the in-charge of Colebrook, Sister Hyde and Ruster for their caring and motherly nature. She had sweet memories of how both the Sisters raised her from a babe in arms till she was seven. She remembers rather blissfully:

> The atmosphere these sisters created is a pleasurable memory. The sisters and the other children were my extended family. There was a great feeling of belonging and being wanted. Being in the presence of these two ladies gave me a sense of security, belonging and love that I was unable to receive from my true family. (17)

Kartinyeri felt shattered when these two angels were made to leave Colebrook for good, probably because they were gentle to these children.

It is after she makes a contact with her sister that she is able to make a connection with her family and with her cultural heritage. She uses several words from her native language in the autobiography to assert and affirm her Aboriginality. She feels restless until she has started giving words to sweet and sour memories. She says:

> It becomes painful as I relive the past, which will always be a part of me, but I try not to let it control me. Life must go on. (91)

She is a brave woman who wants to give expression to her experiences as she says: "I wanted to put pen to paper telling my experiences of being stolen from my family, of hardships, of adolescence and coping without parental guidance and the difficulties of dealing with my illness. I sat in isolation in a large cold room in another institution and I began to scribble the words that made sense to me" (93-94). She prays to God as an old hymn comes to her mind, "Give me oil in my lamp, keep me burning, give me oil in my lamp I pray!" (94) Despite suffering a lot she exhibits courage to live life. Writing her story helps her heal her scars and the catharsis of her pent up agony is achieved.

Resistance

Apart from healing the battered soul, the autobiographical writing of the Aboriginal women of Australia is a means of resistance. A large group of nomadic people commonly referred to as the Aboriginals, lived in different parts of Australia when the colonial settlers arrived. There were conflicts and bloodshed after the arrival of the colonists. But the Australians generally assumed that the Aborigines of Australia had not resisted the coming of the British as they had not prepared themselves for a war and therefore the notion was spread that Australia was settled rather than invaded (Kodhandaraman 58). There is no mention of the resistance by the indigenous people in the history of Australia written by the whites. Neither is there any account how the people who lived there for well over 50,000 years were dispossessed of 'their' land.

Doris Kartinyeri is one such spokesperson among many who resists through memory, the cruel, callous, exploitative and tyrannical attitude of the white government. She makes her memory—the autobiography—an instrument to oppose the suppressive and oppressive attitude of the whites in Australia. *Kick the Tin* is not just a story of one stolen child, of her displacement and dispossession, but a potent tool to resist the lies of those who ruthlessly suppressed the Aboriginals.

It is through such narration of memory that the true history of the Aborigines--their pain, anguish and dispossession--is candidly painted. "History is not what happened but what is told" these words from David Malory (Kapoor 177) make a perfect epigraph for the whole story of the Aboriginal nations. It is the Aboriginal memory, which is preserving the unwritten black history of colonisation. Modern Australia, thus, has a significant Aboriginal heritage, as over one hundred and fifty years of systematic repression of the Aboriginals have found spokespersons that are giving voice to their suppressed history in their autobiographies.

Kartinyeri employs a forceful interrogative tone to mark her opposition to the wrongs done to her and others like her. The strong feeling of resistance right from her childhood is evidence that she has not been a mute spectator to the wrongs committed against the "Stolen generations". The vigorous resistance to the oppressors' attitude is apparent when she interrogates, "How could anyone think that apologies or money could make up for the lost years and the terrible trauma and emotional damage caused to my family?" (12). She is right. Nothing can compensate for her lost childhood that should have been spent in the company of her parents and siblings. Her childhood is marred as she along with other inmates of the Colebrook Home is subjected to religious strictness. The tender minds are forced to practice religion wherever they go. The children find it "embarrassing" and "humiliating". The author mocks this practice of using religion as a tool to oppress innocent children.

> The religious strictness was phenomenal. It was supposed to be for our good. I believe these people thought they were called by the Lord to become missionaries and to care for us, the Aboriginal children. The stolen aboriginal children. (30)

On Sundays, children were not allowed to do anything else but pray as it was Lord's Day. They were punished for stepping out of line. Everything was well planned to "Brain wash" the children. The author interrogates rather angrily, "Is this called religion?" (31). These postcolonial autobiographies of the subjugated candidly highlight the role of Christian missionaries, education and 'welfare' society, residential schools, and colonial genocide in subjugating the Aboriginals. The Australian Aboriginal writer Alfred Taylor's "From God, Devil & Me" also reflects Aboriginal political movements in Australia and contests the mainstream narrative (Taylor 250-63).

Kartinyeri highlights how religion and colonial

educational policies destroyed the roots of the first nations. The autobiography displays political cunning of the colonisers. It clearly underlines how Christian Missionaries have operated mainly as a tool of colonising the mind and belief system of the Aboriginals for material benefits and "It brings out the complex strategies of colonial government and its interconnection with missionaries, educational and cultural policies" (Kodhandaraman and Latha 368).

The author gives vent to her anger at the lies told by the authorities to the local Sunday school visitors who brought children gifts. They were told that the children who lived in Colebrook were orphans. She gets angry at this white lie and questions, "Why couldn't they have told the Sunday School Children the real stories behind these children's faces?" (53). When she remembers the 'ungodly behaviour' of a senior staff member, the sexual exploitation, she questions, "Can you imagine how I felt—being alone, with no one to talk to about these horrific things happening to me?" (54). When she suffered sexual abuse by the lay minister of the Church who tried to maul her and exposed himself, she gets angry and questions his position, "Am I about to be destroyed?... I had lost all my pride, My God! Are these God's people?" (62). The author rather vociferously expresses aversion and opposition to the religious ways that were thrust upon the children. In the name of religion children's life was devastated. She asks, "What has the government got to say and who was responsible? How can it compensate all the Aboriginal children who were taken away and had their life destroyed?" (117).

Obviously, by recounting Kartinyeri's story, the autobiographical narrative does not perform only a literary and aesthetic function but also political, ideological and cultural one. As a site of resistance and protest, it becomes one of the most powerful instruments in asserting control over the representations of the life experiences of Aboriginal people. Besides, the narrative is

turned into a means of recognition not only of its author as an individual and of her identity but also of other people and their political struggles resulting from the colonised histories.

Ultimately, the autobiography is meant to inspire the Aboriginal people to liberate themselves from the prejudiced images and inhibiting notions about their identity that prevail in the dominant society, and reclaim their sacred 'self' and their cultural heritage.

Reconciliation

The white settlers imposed nefarious laws and policies to dispossess the Aboriginals that resulted in mistrust and hostility between them. Dispossession, suppression and exploitation that followed afterwards created a gap between these two races. Attempts have been made at the state and at individual level to bridge this gap. It is perhaps due to these efforts on various levels that Kartinyeri too adopts a pardoning and tolerant stance at the end in her autobiography. Despite the oppression and the attack on her culture and heritage by the whites and despite her own suffering she does not nurture any ill-will or revengeful attitude against anyone, asserting that she does not want to live with the burden of what she has undergone in her life. The author, like other Aboriginal writers, explores the possibilities of reconciliation with the whites. She emphasises the importance of reconciliation between the Aboriginals and the settlers for a happy and prosperous life ahead as she lays emphasis on "One has to learn to forgive" (33). She admits saying:

> I believe that I am only now coming to terms with all that I endured in the past. The healing has just begun. (135)

She attended many reconciliation groups and addressed them rather enthusiastically. She is happy and contented at the end and avers, "The attention I received made me feel special and made me

laugh with my aches and pains (136).

Doris Kartinyeri's autobiography, thus, becomes a site to record torture and protest, and yet at the same time she stresses the need for forgiveness and reconciliation. It is perhaps due to the sincere and honest efforts of hers, along with other authors and other activists like her, that the labour Prime Minister of Australia Kevin Rudd expressed an apology to the Aboriginals for the wrongs of the past by the colonial government. Kevin Rudd's Apology to the Aborigines is an important step to gain their lost faith:

> The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrong of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future. We apologise for the laws and policies of successive parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss to these our fellow Australians. We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country. For the pain, suffering and hurt of these stolen generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry. (Web)

The apology, though expressed eight years after Kartinyeri wrote the autobiography, is thus a validation, an acknowledgement of Kartinyeri's pain, suffering, accusation, anger, questioning, and also of her forgiveness, as *Kick the tin* is a significant document in making a plea for reconciliation.

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Contesting the Colonial Myths: Life Writings of Aboriginal Women

Aditya Dulta

Autobiographies from the mainstream of exceptionally successful persons have been common for long, but of late the stories of "the failures, to whose lot neither fortunes nor stirring adventures fell" (Bennet and Strauss 1) have generated tremendous interest in the academy and general readers. These writings are implicit or explicit political documents and campaigns demanding freedom, justice, equality and land rights.

The Aboriginals in Australia have been telling stories since the genesis of their civilization, which were mainly oral and could be easily destroyed and appropriated by the colonizers. With the introduction of literacy, quite often imposed, biography and autobiography have emerged as one of the predominant genres or forms of Aboriginal literature. Women particularly hold sway here due to their ability to share and release the pent-up emotions like agony and grief, unlike men who annihilate themselves with ego and rage. Through these writings, the Aborigines contest the various myths, stereotypes and lies propagated by the whites about them. These writings also serve as a medium of self-representation and reconstruction by the marginalized and also as a vehicle for narrating their side of the story, the oppression and exploitation they underwent, and the truth about their culture, language and history. The writers connect with their follow tribesmen, sharing the pain and grief, and thus contribute to a feeling of oneness or pan-Aboriginality. In this struggle for justice, they have also included the non-Aboriginals who sympathized and empathized with them. These works stand testimony to the Aboriginal anguish, ordeals and their will to survive and live in spite of the

'breed out the colour' mission unleashed by the whites. Simultaneously, the authors highlight the role and labour of Aboriginal people in the building and development of modern Australia. Aboriginal autobiographies help in creating an alternative space for Aboriginal voices within the dominant culture and they affirm the continuity and persistence of Aboriginal culture. Ruth Sherry is of the opinion that some groups of people like the historically marginalized and exploited Aboriginals are in great need of having their experiences shared with others. Their history, heritage, culture and language have not only been marginalized, unaccepted, but distorted and destroyed. Such groups include the racial, ethnic and religious minorities worldwide. This causes immense psychological stress apart from the physical and emotional trauma the marginalized are subjected to, which leads to insecurity, loneliness, powerlessness and a crisis of identity.

To foreground the views, feelings, lived experiences and dilemma of Australian Aboriginal women, the present paper shall delve into two autobiographies: Shirley Smith's *Mum Shirl* (1981) and Doris Kartinyeri's *Kick the Tin* (2000). *Mum Shirl* is the title of Colin Shirley Perry or Shirley Smith's autobiography who was known among her people as Mum Shirl. This name was given to her by the jail inmates whom she visited regularly though she was not related to them. She became an activist after her brother's incarceration, which led to her frequent visits to the jail. There she saw that the prisoners hardly had any visitors to share their feelings, thoughts and problems with. She worked for the poor, downtrodden and needy, both the blacks and the whites. She often found food, shelter and all sorts of assistance for destitute Aboriginals newly arrived in Sydney and worked tirelessly for the vulnerable, especially children, single mothers and the alcoholics. She generously helped them with her time, energy and money.

Kick the Tin is the autobiography of Doris Kartinyeri, who

was born on 8 September 1945. Her mother died a month later due to medical complications. She was removed from the hospital in Perth when she was just one month old and was placed in Colebrook Home with no information given to the infant's family. Since then, she stayed in the mission school until fourteen years of age. She was kept in the dark about her family, about her Aboriginality and about the fact that she was stolen. Removed in the name of civilizing and educating Aboriginal children, Doris was placed as a servant in white homes where she was sexually exploited besides other physical, mental and emotional trauma she experienced. The title of Kartinyeri's autobiography refers to the game she played with other inmates of the orphanage school where children in a circle had to kick the empty tin, run for cover and return without being caught. She uses it as a metaphor for her own life. The life of children like Kartinyeri was the same as they were kicked around by the whites and could never go back to their homes without being caught.

The healing comes by sharing their own lived experiences and exposing and contesting the myths propagated by the colonizers. One of the first myths they explode is "**The Myth of Peaceful Settlement**" by the settlers. They reveal that though Australia today is known as a 'multi-cultural' nation but till about two hundred and twenty-five years ago, the island continent was home to mainly the Aboriginals, where they lived unperturbed by invaders for about 40,000 years. However, the English colonizers peremptorily believed in their sovereignty over unexplored landmasses they invaded, plundered and colonized, under the guise of settlement. The Australian Aboriginals' land was declared "desert and uninhabited" (Bourke 1) and later termed *terra nullis*, which Bourke and Cox define as occupied by a people without settled laws or customs (59). Simultaneously, the numerous Aboriginal tribes were termed as barbarian and uncivilized. The invading forces believed the indigenous people to be remnants of a

"Stone Age race inevitably doomed to extinction" (Bourke 1). They brazenly exploited the land and labour to advance their selfish empire-building design on the sweat, blood and bones of the natives. As Mum Shirl says,

> When the white people first came to this country . . . they started to kill us. Many were shot, poisoned and hunted down . . . . When there were not many Aboriginal people left, the government set up reserves and missions . . . . The whites put their houses and farms on the land, and Aboriginal people were supposed not to think of that land as theirs anymore . . . . Just not letting us live on it has not stopped our thinking that it is ours. (10)

Another popular myth they contend is "**The Myth of Civilizing**" and "**The Myth of Successful Assimilation**". In the name of civilizing, the colonizers brutalized, enslaved, subjugated and exploited the natives. As already mentioned, Doris Kartinyeri too was a victim of the state approved policy of removing mixed-blood children from their homes and confining them to orphanages. This callous and gruesome task was entitled to a government agency, ironically called the 'Welfare Department' or the 'Aborigines Protection Board'. Carmel Bird exposes the real motive of the Welfare Department behind institutionalizing the native children:

> By seizing children of mixed descent, institutionalizing them, teaching them to despise their Aboriginal inheritance and sending them out to work as station hands or domestic servants, the authorities wanted to sever the cultural connection between the children of mixed descent and their aboriginal families and communities and to prepare them for a place in the lower strata of European society. (144)

Such children were thus deprived of filial love, blood relations, home, language, culture, tradition, heritage, roots and

identity. These children virtually grew up without any roots to gain strength from, without any support to fall back on, without any family member to share their pain with, without any concrete memory of the past to draw solace from, and without any hope or help to make their present and future life any better. There is a deep sense of loss, agony and injustice and even an inability to experience grief normally, as Kartinyeri laments, "I never experienced any emotions involving the loss of my mother" (10). The false claims of the government, of successful assimilation of the minority Aboriginals into the mainstream, and that of being equal citizens, stand exposed as the Aboriginals were subjected to multiple displacements throughout their life. Their opinion or wishes were never valued, they were kicked from place to place according to the interest and convenience of the whites. Kartinyeri reveals that she was initially uprooted from her biological and extended family. Then the frequent change of staff and inmates at the orphanage traumatized her. Further, at the age of fourteen she was discharged from the orphanage, and then she was shuffled between three sets of foster parents. As Burden's words also report about the misery of the Aboriginals,

> . . . while the masters at some stations sat down to dine in virtual baronial splendor, being waited upon by up to as many as six highly trained (Aboriginal) domestics, occasionally decked out in monogrammed aprons and caps, the husbands and children of the maids sat in the dust picking at the offal from their disgusting pottage, and eventually crawling into 'dog kennel like' structures to sleep. (197)

Mum Shirl too says that in the name of education children were placed under the guardianship of unqualified and incompetent teachers. She says out of firsthand experience, that women were the most harassed lot. They were under the constant threat of violence, including rape by the white men as they had no

fear of punishment, as she states, "The main problem with them making those sort of threats to our girls is that they could have, and would have got away with doing it most likely . . . very few Black men get away with rape, but very few White men get arrested for it" (35). With biased administration, police, and even judiciary and press, they languished in jails for many years as they could not afford the services of a lawyer and English law was beyond their grasp.

Mum Shirl says that the Aboriginals have shown tremendous patience and have put up with a lot of horrifying things and the point where they lost their patience was "the straw that broke the camel's back… it is like unlocking a tightly packed box and all the anger, the frustrations of his whole life, that he keeps hidden at the bottom of the box, they rise up and take hold of him" (35). Therefore, they don't need pity, but empathy and help. The myth of successful assimilation constructed by the white government was visibly exposed when on 26 January 1972, Australia Day, the Aboriginals planted a small beach umbrella outside the Parliament House with the caption "Aboriginal Embassy," (77) thus conveying the Aboriginal angst at their utter neglect and how they are treated like foreigners in their own country. It was a desperate attempt to draw the attention of the government towards their plight but what followed was a barbaric crack down of the police on the agitators, "It was most unexpected that the police would begin to belt up the women. They punched them, knocked them to the ground and then jumped on their guts . . . All this was taking place right outside Parliament House . . . " (79).

Further, demolishing the myth of successful assimilation, these Aboriginal women authors say that even in the latter part of the twentieth century, nearly hundred years after Federation, there were hardly any decent opportunities for the Aboriginals and they had to put up with constant racial bias, discrimination and social

inequity, especially in towns and cities. Kartinyeri's relationship with her husband went sour as the couple struggled to make the ends meet. Her second marriage met with the same fate. She raised her three children on her own without any assistance, either from the government or from her estranged husbands. It shows that the Aboriginals were capable of looking after themselves and their children, even in the most adverse and testing circumstances, both in the pre-contact as well as the post-invasion era. Had the government not interfered with them they would have done reasonably well and would have instead taught the whites the true meaning of life besides respect for oneself, for fellow humans and respect for family, kinship, religion, spirituality and nature. For the Aboriginals, nature was 'Mother'--it nurtured them and they loved, respected and worshipped her. But for the whites, nature was a milch cow or the proverbial hen which laid golden eggs and the overzealous, greedy, selfish, opportunist and ambitious colonizers destroyed it for immediate gratification of their nefarious empire-building and wealth- making designs.

Even in later years of her life, Mum Shirl, a prominent and respected political figure, who even campaigned for Prime Minister Whitlam and his Labour Party, had to face discrimination even in getting basic amenities like food and lodging. After a long walk, though a diabetic, she was refused food at a restaurant unless she ate it outside on the pavement as they didn't serve the 'boongs'. Ironically, the same day she had been invited by the Australian government to dine with the Queen of England, who was on a visit to their country. Many years later, her M.B.E medal was taken back by the government which she was awarded for her contribution to the betterment of the life of prisoners, mostly Aboriginals in the jail. Like several other community members, Mum Shirl lived in great penury all her life but that didn't stop her from being the helping hand and a guardian angel to several other suffering Aboriginals.

The Aboriginals believed in sharing whatever little they had whereas some rich white managers of the reserves siphoned off the subsidized coupons of essentials like blankets, salt and sugar, etc., and ironically called it 'black marketing'. Mum Shirl humorously questions as to where were the blacks involved in it? Even the highly educated whites belonging to the noble and scientific disciplines like Medicine meted out animal-like treatment to the Aboriginals and discriminated against them. When Mum Shirl was about to deliver a baby she was not allowed entry into the out- patients' clinic. People like her were expected to wait outside in the verandah, screaming in labour, till the staff were not too busy to attend to them. Not to forget that 'White Australia' policy was invoked since the Federation in 1901 and annulled only in 1972.

The Aboriginals were far more humane and considerate. Mum Shirl's brother, Laurie, though himself incarcerated under pathetic living conditions in the prison besides the police torture he daily endured, asked her sister to visit some traumatized and lonely prisoners and she too readily agreed though she herself was facing turbulent times in her personal life. The 'civilized' whites could not see the misery of black prisoners whereas Mum Shirl was so moved by the plight of the jail inmates that she could never disengage herself from them and continued to visit them even though she herself was struggling to sustain herself.

Another popular myth they contest is "**The Myth of Christianizing**" the natives. Kartinyeri in her autobiography says that the European colonizers themselves made a mockery of their religion. At the orphanages and reserves, religion-bashing and brain-washing were religiously practised. The Commandment in The Bible, 'Though shall not Steal' was in fact inverted by the whites themselves as they stole the land, resources, women and children. They had no regard for basic human values. They forced religion mechanically on little children several times a day

including on rare picnics. The State and the Church never bothered about the credentials of caretakers, managers and doctors sent to the Aboriginal orphanages and reserves. In fact the harsher they were the better they were considered. Severe punishments and penalties were imposed on children for trivial faults. As a result, when Aboriginal children were physically and sexually abused, they could not express what happened to them. Moreover, they had no one to confide in or complain to. In some rare cases, if an Aboriginal child mustered courage enough to reveal the barbarity to the mission-sisters (in some instances they themselves were the perpetrators), they blamed the child instead and segregated and labeled the child as a bad example for others. These people of God conveniently ignored the horrific sexual exploitation of the Aboriginal children at the hands of the whites, including pastors. Exposing the true character of the colonizers, Mum Shirl tells us in her autobiography that the Aboriginals were not allowed entry inside or even at the front doorsteps of the Convent.

Another myth propagated by the European colonizers and demolished by Katinyeri and Mum Shirl is "**The Myth of White Superiority**". The colonizers believed in their own superiority – cultural, racial, linguistic, etc. They divided and segregated the natives on the basis of the degree of the blackness of their skin. In the name of 'welfare' of the Aboriginal children, these children were forcibly removed from their parents who were described as uncultured, uncivilized by the whites. Narrating some heart-rending episodes of the settlers' cruelty Kartinyeri and Mum Shirl reveal how in fact it were the colonizers with their inhuman, exploitative policies and practices who were in need of being civilized and Christianized and they were the real savages, brutes and barbarous heathens. They invaded, plundered, looted and uprooted the Aboriginals and Aboriginality. They enclosed the full-bloods in reserves and stole and removed the mixed-blood

children or 'half-castes', born out of exploitation of black women, to state-run orphanages to assimilate them into the white culture. Here, the children were physically, emotionally, sexually and psychologically brutalized. The motive was to prepare a working class at cheap labour which could be used as domestic helps and factory and farm hands. Because of the policy of assimilation, two or three generations grew up without filial love, support, security and without any sense of identity, dignity, heritage, culture, language, and sense of history. Many of these children, ranging from few months old to teenagers, could never see their families or loved ones again after their removal. The scars lasted for a whole life time. Moreover, they faced existential dilemma or a crisis of identity as they had been brought up in institutions disparaging the Aboriginals and Aboriginality. It is an irony of epic proportions that the native and original inhabitants of Australia were granted citizenship by the settlers 179 years after colonization.

Howard Groome draws our attention to the fact that even after the post-1967 reforms, the Aboriginals still continue to languish on the fringes of mainstream society. Even now, Aboriginal children are victims of institutional racial bias at the hands of both peers and teachers at school. The discrimination they are subjected to stifles the motivation to improve, achieve or even participate because sooner or later they realize that their culture, language, heritage and family values have no place or respect in the dominant order (168-188). In the words of Groome, "They have to learn to handle the shame of being invisible as an individual person and yet highly visible racially" (179). Germaine Greer says, "A man is not completely destroyed when he loses his livelihood, even if he doesn't get compensation, if he still has his health, his education, his family, his social network, his culture, his religion and his self-esteem" (17-18) but the Aboriginal man, particularly of the stolen generation, has been denied all these.

Kartinyeri emphatically counters the whites' description of

the Aboriginals as uncivilized by telling us about her mother, a strong and loving woman, who kept her house spick and span, as her sister Doreen told her when she met her years later. Like her, the Aboriginals were loving and caring people who valued kinship. They were not materialistic and cherished whatever little they had. Colin Tatz contests the European notion of civilization which is usually employed as a touchstone for the rest of humanity, and says,

> Civilization means neither clothes, nor houses, nor industries, nor science, nor culture, nor taste, nor literature, nor art… they stand outside the essential idea of civilization: they belong to it "materially", not "formally" (intrinsically). A primitive people needing no clothes and no houses, eating the things which nature provides for them, without literature or art or industries, would possess a perfect civilization, provided they agreed to live at peace with each other and induce consideration for each other's rights and liberties. (89)

The truth was that it were the colonizers who were uncivilized and barbarians for they uprooted and destroyed families, killed recklessly and had the audacity to justify the acts. On the contrary, the Aboriginals do not even remove animals from their mothers and they reap the gifts of nature in proportion to their needs. The whites, on the other hand, exploited women, men and children, besides plundering, looting and hoarding precious natural wealth. The Aboriginals were more civilized and humane and inferior to none as they lived with extended families unlike the whites who lived in nuclear clusters. While the whites lived in luxury, they left the Aboriginals malnourished, with only rationed bread, flour, sugar and tea, etc. given to them, whereas in their natural habitat they lived a healthy life. The settlers hoisted the ills of the modern western imperialistic civilization on this pristine land too.

It were the Aboriginals who were a truly superior race and civilization as they had deep respect for nature, humanity, women, spirituality, tradition and language. They practised what they preached. Therefore, to call them uncivilized cannot be just naive ignorance but European cultural chauvinism and a deep-rooted conspiracy to destroy and appropriate their land and wealth for expanding their colonial citadel. What they implemented in Australia were the imperialist and capitalist models of exploitation. Mum Shirl herself was a remarkably exceptional woman. Though she belonged to an economically less privileged section of society, and was a patient of epilepsy, yet she was a woman of immense grit, courage, optimism, never-say-die attitude and determination. She is contemplative and with an analytical bent of mind, she recollects and assesses the past and has put things in perspective. She says, unlike the whites, the Aboriginals do not think only about themselves but about humanity at large.

Another prevalent myth circulated by the settlers was "**The Myth of Benign Effect of Colonization**" and it stands exposed as the percentage of Aboriginal population was reduced to just 1.5 to 2 % of the total population of the country. Jenny Burden describes the condition of the indigenous: "The once vibrant hunter-gatherer societies were reduced to little more than collections of sick, impoverished and undernourished mendicants forced to eke out an existence on the fringes of European settlement, cut off from their country, their sacred sites and their religion. The essence of their life had been taken from them" (195). She further enunciates that for good psychological health, one needs "a firm sense of individual identity and group belonging; a sense of security, purpose, personal involvement, satisfaction and achievement; the knowledge and skills to allow an individual to function effectively in society; the freedom to make choices of benefit to self and others, as well as a sense of control over

important aspects of one's life" (189). But sadly, the Aboriginals had lost all of these. Years of silent and helpless suffering at times makes the victim even mentally sick. As Kartinyeri recounts,

> There were times that I thought I would die. I dreaded each day. I had no sense of self-esteem and no incentive or motivation to do any kind of work . . . I woke up in the morning, wandering aimlessly to the kitchen and forced myself to prepare breakfast . . . . It was even a huge effort to bathe myself… My illness constantly fluctuates between extreme highs and extreme lows. To go through maniac-depression is pure hell. Like maggots, this condition was destroying me slowly by eating away at my body, mind and soul. (84)

The rot lay deep in her psyche or subconscious. With the umbilical cord connecting Kartinyeri to her culture and history cut since infancy, she yearned for some sense of security, belonging, and an urge to trace her roots all through her life. This quest is manifested in some occasional bouts of insanity as Kartinyeri says, "The most bizarre episode during my illness was an occasion when I demonstrated in my yard… that I was a full-blood Aboriginal lady walking with my dog, hunting and searching for a lost baby. I was stark naked… communicating with a group of traditional people" (85). Healing came when she started writing and connected to her mother and motherland spiritually, thus underscoring once again that all cultures are equal and special in their own way and none is superior or inferior to the other. These narratives by Kartinyeri and Mum Shirl reveal that though once defeated, dispossessed, enslaved, subjugated, oppressed, raped, exploited and humiliated, the Aboriginals did not part with humanity, kinship, sharing, spirituality, and hence Godliness. These narratives also provide rare glimpses into the rich and wonderful culture of the Aboriginals about which, in the absence of such writing, the world would have known nothing.

Kartinyeri's and Mum Shirl's activism is not just limited to exposing and contesting the myths propagated by the whites, it extends to providing an insider's point of view on Aboriginals and Aboriginality. The two activist authors in their narratives reveal that more than religious, the Aboriginals were spiritual, and their spirituality was natural, spontaneous and genuine; not regimented, institutionalized and thrust upon like Christianity was imposed by the settlers. They have great reverence for the land of their ancestors and they have deep respect for human life, and even animals. Another remarkable feature of the Aboriginal culture is their faith in the institution of family, kinship and sharing in sharp contrast to the individualism and materialism of the rich whites. Their life and lifestyle resembles that of a child: pure, transparent, without affectation, greed and hypocrisy.

In response to the rhetoric of 'reconciliation' of the government with negligible Aboriginal representation, the authors opine that reconciliation cannot be a one-way traffic, it cannot be taken for granted and expected by default. It should not be mere formality or tokenism. Words will have to be matched with concrete actions. The wrongs done in the past should be generously acknowledged, apologized and compensated. The state and civil society should ensure equality, dignity and partnership in opportunities and nation-building. The narratives reveal how for contemporary Australia it is still a long road to becoming a truly democratic and multicultural nation.

Germaine Greer's observation, "Women do grief, men do rage" (26) seems so true as one goes through Aboriginal women's autobiographies which have emerged as a dominant genre in the Aboriginal literature. Both Aboriginal men and women have been subjected to cruel oppression, violence and deprivation of various kinds but their response to their suffering and predicament has been different. While men coped with the agony and impotent anger by turning to alcohol, violence and suicide, women

expressed their agony through personal narratives. In recounting their own lives they are not only able to pour out their suffering but are able to share the truth of their existence with larger communities of readers—both Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. As they unfold events of their life, they not only share the pain and grief with the readers but are also able to take a political position in that they candidly expose the lies and ruthlessness of their colonizers. In a way, they become activists for their communities and themselves.

The analysis of these narratives reveals that their respective authors take up the responsibility of breaking the long silence about Aboriginal suffering and testify to the long- endured trauma, repression, subjugation, exploitation, harassment and humiliation at the hands of invaders and settlers. These life narratives are, in fact, exercises in the assertion of their worth as individuals and as people collectively.

This act of narrating or speaking out as the two autobiographies reveal involves a whole range of emotional experiences such as sharing, acknowledgement, regret, sympathy, empathy, mourning, generosity, compassion, reconciliation, belonging, security, and hence it has a therapeutic effect. By interrogating the dominant Euro-centric discourse, the counter discourse presents a perspective from below, from the margins, besides healing the fractured soul. The authors reach out to their larger community beyond the individual self and even to the non-Aboriginals apprising them of the truth of their colonial experience.

Their writings are political exercises as well, as they contest the mainstream and these are also empowering exercises as they connect the individual authors with the larger community and are finally able to break the silence. In their struggle and mission for justice, the blacks have included those whites too, who sympathized, loved, respected and accepted them as they were.

These writings are an assertion, representation and articulation of the self hitherto marginalized, misrepresented and stereotyped. These narratives make the individuals and the plight of the community visible not only to fellow citizens but to the world at large, and hence these move from the personal and local arena to the national and international, and their struggle and their resistance as articulated in these autobiographies find parallels with other subjugated minorities across the world.

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Contours of Loss in the Testimonios about Disappeared Kashmiri Muslims and the Aboriginal Stolen Generation's Testimonios

Anupama Vohra

Testimonio which literally connotes an act of testifying or bearing witness has become a popular genre in resistance literature. John Beverly, an expert on testimonial literature, in *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth* explains: "By *testimonio* I mean a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts, and whose unit of narration is usually a 'life' or a significant life experience" (31). The physical format of a testimonial text is fluid and includes various shapes: "[t]he form of testimony may vary, adopting narrative discourses such as autobiography, historical novel, interview, photographs, prison memoirs, diary, chronicle, letter, newspaper article, anthropological or social science documentary; it can be fiction or nonfiction" (Craft 22). Testimonio is not concerned with the development of the individual self, but with a 'problematic collective social situation … [t]he situation of the narrator in testimonio is one that must be representative of a social class or group' (Beverly 14). By uncovering a history of oppression, testimonio challenges official history. In testimonio, the narrator intends to communicate his / her own and/ or the group's trauma in the context of oppression and struggle to claim some agency in the act of narrating, and to call on readers to respond actively in judging the crisis: "Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are the prerequisites both for restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims" (Herman 1).

The paper based on critical reading of selected testimonios of aggrieved mothers from Afsana Rashid's *Widows and Half Widows* (2011) and testimonios of Sally Morgan's mother and grandmother of threat of separation/ separation from children in *My Place* (1987) is an attempt to read the contours of loss of young generation--disappeared, stolen--from these two communities to highlight the suffering of the aggrieved families. Both the communities' anguish at the loss has, hitherto, been underrepresented in the mainstream literature.

In the context of Australia: “Colonisation has had many negative consequences. One of the most profound has been the removal of Aboriginal children from their families. Most Aboriginal families have experienced removal of children or displacement of entire families into missions, reserves or other institutions” (Dudgeon 12).The Aboriginal people, the first people of Australia, were deprived of their basic human rights, dispossessed of their native land, and were doomed to live a subhuman life due to the colonial invasion. Stephen Muecke and Adam Shoemaker remark that the history of marginalization of the Aboriginals "was forged as soon as the Europeans arrived with a terra nullius mentality . . . . The Indigenous people were chased off their lands, marginalized, and even poisoned and massacred. At the beginning of the 20th century their numbers were seriously diminished and they became an invisible people" (55). The 'stolen generation' refers to the Indigenous Australian children who were forcibly and often deceptively taken away from their families, between 1900 and the 1970s. It is estimated “one in three and one in ten Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from their families from approximately 1910 until 1970” (AHREC1997). These children were either placed with white families, church missions, or sometimes even in corrective institutions where they received basic education and had to work for long hours,

sometimes in exchange for meals and board only. Life was miserable for these children who were not allowed to establish contact with their biological families. They were not allowed to speak their native language or practice native customs. Besides, many of them even became victims of sexual abuse.

The Kashmiri Muslims due to the ongoing conflict in Kashmir during the last twenty-five years have also suffered immensely. The violence has resulted in the death and disappearance of a large number of Kashmiri Muslim men in all age groups. Such disappearances have been carried out by security forces (police, paramilitary, military), and also at times by militants. Tear-jerking are the narratives of mothers who have lost their young school/college going sons. In their testimonios words spoken work like gestures to show violence:

> Raja, a resident of Hatmullah, Kupwara lost her two sons within a few years. Her elder son Mohammad Akbar Sheikh (17), a tenth class student "went out to play a cricket match along with his two friends, who were later released after some days, but my son was held back . . . . As he went to play cricket match at Neel Khand in Kupwara, he was picked up by security forces. The moment I started tracing him out, I was told that he has been detained at Sopore. Immediately, I went there . . . he had been shifted to some "unknown" place . . . and till this moment nothing is known about Akbar." A couple of years later, her younger son, Firdous Ahmad Sheikh (11), a sixth standard student was killed, while he was returning home after offering morning prayers (fajar namaz). "He was just closing the gate of his house when security force fired upon him without any reason, killing him on the spot." (Rashid 136)

In another incident, thirteen years ago, in Pulwama,

Hafiza's only son Javaid Ahmad Mattoo, a seventh standard student was picked up by Border Security Forces (BSF) with the assurance that he would be released soon. His mother grieves:

> We were having our meals during the day when he was picked up by BSF. They said they would release him after some verification . . . . When I went there to inquire about my son the next day they said give us the gun first, but where from would I get that. Later the issue got delayed. Finally they told me that he ran away. How was it possible? (Rashid 93-94)

The two testimonios of aggrieved mothers cited above provide insights into the horrendous situation that prevailed in the Valley during post-1990s, and the lives of people caught between the security forces and the militants, and thus, the mental makeup and resilience of those who suffered disappearance/ death(s) of the male member(s) of the family. Every other home in Kashmir has a story of suffering, torture, death, rape, disappearance and fake encounter killings.

The old widowed mothers of men and young boys who have disappeared suffer an irreparable loss of losing their children along with other calamities which befall on them: "Life has become a misery for us and we are living from hand to mouth" exclaims Rehti (Rashid 95). Many of the aggrieved mothers have died without knowing the fate of their missing son(s). Mugli's only son Nazir Ahmad Teli, "a government school teacher at Buchwara, as usual left for his school 18 years ago [early 1990s], but never returned home" (Rashid 139). Fate had been cruel to Mugli. Abandoned by her husband, who remarried when Nazir was just one and a half year old, she brought up her son in a single parent family. When he got a job, she felt her days of struggle were over, not knowing that she would lose her only son to "enforced disappearance." Desperately searching for her son, she passed away in October 2009.

The declaration of Kashmir as a "disturbed area" empowers the security forces with extraordinary provisions of the AFSPA with immunity from prosecution in case of any human rights violations during search operations. Under AFSPA armed forces can conduct search, destroy places and shoot to kill at will without warrant. The only requirement is that the officer should be satisfied that all this is essential for the maintenance of public order. Suspicion is recognized by this Act as a legitimate ground for exercising its draconian powers. By ensuring that proceedings cannot be brought against any member of the armed forces without permission by the Centre, the Act virtually denies the right to constitutional remedies under Article 32 of the Indian constitution. As the right to life cannot be suspended even under emergency, enforcing the Act amounts to a *de facto* emergency. The popular notion that Kashmir is infested with militants has given a free reign to the security forces at the cost of human lives. Parveena Ahangar's son Javaid Ahmad Ahangar was picked up in 1990 by National Security Guards (NSG) when he was only sixteen. She narrates: "He had passed matriculation examination and had joined junior college. He had opted for commerce . . . . Javaid stammered slightly . . . . For days together, I used to protest against his arrest. For many nights I slept inside Batmaloo bus yard . . . I was told 'pass' doesn't work, approach the court . . . . After a year, the security forces who had arrested him accepted it saying that they had set him free but don't know what happened thereafter as they were transferred . . ." (Rashid 19-20).

Mutual concern and trust among the victims of human rights' violations and humanitarian needs brought the aggrieved women (mothers, wives, daughters, sisters) together to articulate violence, torture and suffering. The collective voices of these victims despite the burden of victimhood demand the whereabouts of the missing persons, where they are, whether alive or dead: "We [mothers] were going to the police and to the courts

but getting nowhere. We would see each other waiting anxiously and share our individual grief. The idea of coming together emerged by itself. Alone nobody would listen to us but together we would be heard" (Manchanda 76). Parveena Ahangar, a semi-literate woman, has converted her personal loss and sorrow into a public forum for justice: ". . . I realized to use protests, dharnas, hunger strikes and courts as a tool to fight back"(Rashid 21), to seek answer from the government agencies regarding the fate of disappeared persons in order to bring a closure to their sense of loss.

The one pertinent similarity in all these testimonios is what happened to the missing persons' family members. The families of the disappeared persons have no clue about their whereabouts but the hope of their being alive persists. Enforced disappearance is worse than death because in case of death one is convinced that the person is no more but disappearance makes situation grim for the family. They always think that the person is somewhere around. Desperate to know about his missing son, seventy-five years old Gul Wani remarks: "We simply want to know the whereabouts of our missing children" (Rashid 149). For families of the disappeared persons, due to lack of clarity about the victim's fate, the death of their loved one is something almost impossible to admit.

The stories of the separation of Aboriginal children from their families have come out in different narrative forms like films, documentaries Aboriginal autobiographies, life stories, *testimonies*, autobiographical novels, autobiographical songs, internet blogs, etc., which can be read as screams of the sufferers after a long oppressive silence inflicted upon them by a society dominated by racism and patriarchy. *My Place* is a collective narrative of Sally Morgan's autobiography, along with the transcribed oral testimonios of her grand uncle Arthur, her mother Gladys, and her grandmother Daisy. Daisy's testimonio is a journey into the past in

order to rewrite the distorted or silenced events. Sally Morgan's attempt to record her grandmother's narrative is to fill the gap that mainstream Australia created by removing Aborigines and making them invisible in the construction of Australian history and identity:

> this history, produced in the form of literature, serves as what Foucault would call a 'counter memory' of the violence and deculturization to which Aboriginal people have been subjected, but which has been omitted from official white Australian histories (Trees 69).

Gladys Corunna's testimonio reveals the pangs of separation of a half caste girl from her mother: "Why was everything changing? . . . I was worried that I'd get sent out to work as a domestic and never see my mother again. All the Aboriginal girls were sent out as domestics once they reached fourteen" (Morgan 338-39). The governments' drive for removing Aboriginal children from their families was to develop 'European' values in Aboriginal children. During the 1930s and 40s, the main purpose of forcible removal of half-caste Aboriginal children was to take them away from their family and culture and, in the name of 'assimilating' them into the non-Aboriginal population, to teach them the whites' culture so that they could provide cheap labour as useful domestic helps and farm hands. The children of 'mixed race' in particular were believed to be easier to assimilate into white society. However, those who were removed from their families were not 'assimilated' but abused, exploited, harassed and put into institutions that trained them for menial positions.

When Gladys had her own children, her mother Daisy advised her not to disclose to the children their true inheritance: "Mum said she didn't want the children growing up with people looking down on them. I understood what she meant. Aboriginals were treated the lowest of the low" (378). The fear of family separation appears constantly in the lives of the three women.

Gladys admits "Aboriginal women weren't allowed to keep children fathered by a white man" (374). Sally too experiences the trauma of being an Aboriginal woman's child on her first day in school: " '*Mum!*' I screamed as she hobbled off. '*Come back!*' "(17).

Daisy Corunna or Nan, Sally's grandmother suffered the agony of separation from her family, her roots and her culture. Her brother Arthur was sent away when she was a baby. Then she was separated from her mother, sisters and kin when she was made to work in the station house. Later she was permanently separated from them when she was taken to Perth. Later still, her children were taken away from her. Her half-caste status reduced her to a person with no security, no home, and no familial warmth anywhere. She was taken away from the black community because of her white blood. However, her black blood empowered the whites to treat her as they wished. She was made to work as a servant right from her childhood and finally, when she was no longer useful to the family, she was thrown out with no provision for her future. Daisy bitterly observes: "that's the trouble with us blackfellas, we don't know who we belong to, no one'll own up…"(403).

Daisy's testimony echoes with maternal loss, first in relation to her mother:

> My poor mother lost a lot of babies. I had two sisters that lived, Lily and Rosie . . . . Of course, there was Arthur, but they took him away . . . my mother cried and cried when they took Arthur. She kept callin' to him like. Callin' to him to come back . . . . My poor old mother never saw him again. (403)

Later, she refers to the loss of her own first child: "Before I had Gladdie, I was carryin' another child, but I wasn't allowed to keep it. That was the way of it, then . . . . They took our children one way or another. I never told anyone I was carrying Gladdie" (419).

When Gladys was sent to Parkerville, she says, "I cried and cried when Alice took her away . . . . How can a mother lose a child like that? How could she do that to me?"(420). She finds a similarity between her own experience and her mother's "I thought of my poor old mother then, they took her Arthur from her, and then they took me. She was broken-hearted" (420). Loss creates a connection not only between Daisy and her mother but also creates a community bond as a result of suffering among the Aboriginal women. She recalls her cousin Helen who was forced to leave her three children at Moore River Native Settlement when she was forced back to domestic service: "I think all those kids died…. Poor old Bunda. I knew how she felt, it was the same with all of us" (421). The taking away of children for Daisy and other Aboriginal women was like death of children, an irreparable loss, a tragedy for the family: "The urge to generate a new life that is a reflection of one's own life stems from a profound desire to extend one's own existence, to be and to become something more and better than one actually is. When a parent loses a child, this mirror of her own value and power is gone forever"(Kaplan 120).

The context of disappearance of children in the testimonios of aggrieved Kashmiri Muslim mothers and the loss of children of the Aboriginal mothers are different. However, the suffering undergone by the women of the two communities has similarities. Both the aggrieved Kashmiri Muslim mothers and the Aboriginal mothers, in the absence of information about their children, whether dead or alive, remained restless "'locked in a frozen dialogue with her dead loved ones … Not having been put to rest by a process of mourning, her dead ones remain alive, frozen in a state of potential animation' (Rashid 225). Since in both the cases there were no farewells, no burials the hope that the disappeared/snatched away children are alive made death unacceptable to the broken-hearted mothers.

This disrupts the normal grieving process and at time leads to arrested grief or a typical reaction, known as "complicated grief" (Blaauw and Lahteenmaki 767), which can be understood in terms of "ambiguous loss": "Ambiguous loss is the most stressful loss because it defies resolution and creates confused perceptions about who is in or out of a particular family. With a clear-cut loss, there is more clarity – a death certificate, mourning rituals, and the opportunity to honor and dispose remains" (Boss 117). For the families of disappeared persons, "ambiguous loss" is an explicitly relational perspective that characterizes the stress of disappearance as external and ongoing. In case of the stolen generation many are still finding their way home, still searching for the families they lost and putting together the pieces of their lives.

These testimonios of "the ordinary people" and "the oppressed people" are "the voice of the past" rather than simply "the voice of history." These people who have experienced loss and bear witness to it have come to be regarded as the most authentic bearers of truth about the past, and their accounts are a counter record to the one-sided official records to explain the horrendous past in Kashmir and Australia. These testimonios do not allow for the creation of a single, uniform narrative of events. Rather, they offer a multitude of perspectives, some complementary, others contradictory, which, when put together, can provide a more inclusive or multidimensional picture of past reality. These testimonios give us greater understanding of the historical situation and the consequent losses suffered by innocent people than can be derived from the tendentious obfuscation of official accounts: "The social space occupied by scarred populations may enable stories to break through routine cultural codes to express counter discourse that assaults and even perhaps undermines the taken-for-granted meaning of things as they are. Out of such desperate and defeated experiences stories may emerge that call for and at times may bring about change that alters utterly the

commonplace–both at the level of collective experience and at the level of individual subjectivity" (Das 217).

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BOOK REVIEW

Reclaiming Identity

Pankaj K. Singh

A Review of *Am I Black Enough for You*? by Anita Heiss. Sydney: Bentam, 2012, pages 346.

Naming, defining and prescribing have been the strategies often adopted by the colonisers to control, contain and suppress the colonised people and to justify their oppression of the subjugated. The experience of Australian Aboriginals has not been any different, who are debilitated by "government definitions of Aborigines" based on a caste system defined by "blood quantum'' and outside the government by a language used by westerners about 'the other', such as 'abo', 'boong', 'coon' and so on (123). Realising that the "power of language to create identities is extraordinary, and often debilitating", Anita Heiss, the well-known Aboriginal writer and activist, takes upon herself (like several other Aboriginals before her) to define/describe Aboriginal identity in her own voice, in her own words.

The immediate provocation to write this first person narrative came from an offending article "It's so hip to be black" (produced online as "White is the new black") by Andrew Bolt , a columnist of *Herald and Weekly Times*, on 15 April 2009. Making ill-informed comments on Aboriginal identity and including false information about her and her family he went on to say that, daughter of an Austrian father and 'part-Aboriginal' mother Anita Heiss identified herself as an Aboriginal for career gains. She was pained that even the editors had cleared Bolt's article where he stated "how we had 'chosen' our Aboriginal identity for 'political

and career clout' that we were 'white Aborigines' and 'professional Aborigines' who were motivated by political and financial gains" (8). His misguided opinion and incorrect 'facts' were being read nationally and internationally, offending and humiliating everyone named in the article and their families and communities.

Anger, articulation, assertion and action were Anita Heiss's determined responses to this racist misrepresentation. She not only got down to write her memoir on her identity for everyone to read but also filed a law suit against Andrew Bolt under Section 18 C of the Racial Discrimination Act (RDA), and on 28 September 2011 when the judgement came Bolt and the news paper were held guilty of engaging in unlawful racial discrimination.

The autobiography makes a compelling reading as she records the facts of her personal life, the growth of her political consciousness, her role models (both national and international), her concerns as a writer, as a much sought after public speaker at schools, workshops, literary and cultural festivals, and invited by several countries across the world. In the process the narrative provides valuable history of her people as well, particularly of the urban, educated Aboriginals in the twenty-first century.

Right from the first literary publication by Kath Walker in the 1960s, Aboriginal literature has been used for self-representation, for recording truths of history, for reconciliation, for questioning negative stereotypes, and for defending their right to define their own identity. All of Anita Heiss's writing is also concerned with Aboriginal issues. She speaks and writes "to bring about change for those who have been denied a comfortable, wholesome, dignified life" (145). What particularly pains her is that "our long history—tens of thousands of years of existence—didn't count as being part of the Australian identity" (148) and that

> Although the 1967 referendum was about making Aboriginal people count as Australians, I believe we still

generally remain invisible on the Australian identity radar. (148)

Through her novels, children's books and poems she sets out to address the absences in Australian history and national identity. Her historical novel on Stolen Generations *Who Am I? The Diary of Mary Talence Sydney 1937* published in 2001 reveals how destructive government policies led to the "the disconnection of Aboriginal people from their true identities" (193). Issues of identity, including interracial relationships are central to her novels. But she also writes to stress how the Aboriginals are like all other Australians in matters of love, relationships, dreams and aspirations, etc. Her commercial novels particularly build on the similarities and are aimed at bringing more Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal readers closer to understanding the Aboriginal world.

The interrogative stance of the title of the autobiography is maintained throughout as Anita Heiss questions the stereotyping and misrepresentations of the Aboriginals by the mainstream, and raises several questions which have remained unanswered till date: "What forms allow us to represent ourselves and our identities and communities? How can we tell our stories and shared histories? How can we make political statements that will affect social change?" (160).

The facts of her life and of her people are presented in a candid, firm and poised tone but she becomes furious at times at the 'entrenched' ignorance and assumptions in the Australian mindset. She also examines all the stereotypes imposed on black women and rejects all of these in her own case. She minces no words in emphasising that she hates camping, she is out of touch with nature, she is not used to bush and instead prefers the comforts of a hotel room and her privacy, and so on. She equally counters the colonial lies carried even up to the 1990s. The official records in Tasmania made the Aboriginals even more invisible by saying that after the death of Truganini there are no more

Aboriginals on the island, while the distressed parents told Heiss how “their children had to deal with the locals telling them in one breath there were no Blacks in Tasmania, and in the next breath calling them 'lazy black bastards' (180-181). No doubt she rightly claims in one of her poems that “I write because it is the only way I have a voice in your world” (173).

Nevertheless, this highly engaging, comprehensive memoir ends without bitterness on a note of optimism, hope and reconciliation. She feels that Kevin Rudd's historical Apology in 2008 "gave our nation a new sense of identity" and it was “the first symbolic step” to ensure that Aboriginal Australians retained control over their own lives, and representation. Her faith and expectations were further bolstered by the judgement in the Trial in 2011, which gave her the hope of a more responsible media, a more fair society and the end of lack of respect for First Nations people of her country.

ON NEW ZEALAND

Re-inventing the Self: Survival in Sylvie Haisman's *This Barren Rock*

Neelima Kanwar

> A life is as much a work of fiction - of guiding of narrative structures – as novels and poems, and that the task of literary biography is to explore this fiction. (Rose viii)

Biography is one of the oldest forms of life writing, even earlier than autobiography. As a sub- genre of life writing it enjoys the status of being a pioneer mode of combining facts and imagination. Oxford dictionary defines it as "the history of the lives of individual men as a branch of literature." In fact, biography gives information, seeks verisimilitude, and establishes truthfulness. In over past 200 years, writers had biographical interest in royalty, saints and military heroes (especially Westerners) and political leaders, while now keeping pace with contemporary times, the biographers have also developed concern for common people.Like other forms of life writing, biography too serves the purpose of catharsis. While documenting another person's life history, the biographer herself reinvents the being and resolves many emotional, psychological as well as social issues. This writing itself becomes a healing process.

This Barren Rock (2010) by Sylvie Haisman is an account of a shipwreck of the ship named 'Strathmore' and of the few survivors that included her great- great-great grandmother and her son. The present paper aims, firstly, to evaluate why a particular biographer (here Haisman) chooses a particular biographical

subject and secondly, how this narrative exhibits the nuances of biography as a discipline. The paper takes up for discussion different facets of biography as evident in this text.

Sylvie Haisman, the author presents this biography in a first person narrative. Divided into six chapters aptly titled 'Before', 'Voyage' , 'Wreck', 'Exile', 'Rescue' and 'After', the text is a compelling narrative of courage, endurance and determination of the voyagers of the Scottish clipper 'Strathmore' sailing from London to New Zealand in 1875. The shipwreck and survival of this ship between Antarctica and Madagascar is delineated in the text: "Imagine one woman, forty seven men and a three-year-old boy shipwrecked on a tiny sub-Antarctic island. For seven months they eat albatross and burn penguin skins for fuel, before a passing whaler picks them up" (1). This island was called 'Grand Ile'.

The first question that comes to the mind is - What motivates biographical research? How a biographer does imaginatively reconstruct the facts, realities and evidence? Sylvie traces the trauma, joy, tension and uncertainty of all but majorly of great-great-great grandmother Fanny Wordsworth and her son Charlie, Sylvie's grandfather's grandfather. Sylvie recalls the story first being told by her own mother wherein "Almost half the people on board drowned in the shipwreck" (1). This tale was told when Sylvie was only 5/6 years old while driving home to Paekakariki from Hawkes Bay after a visit to the grandparents. The account intrigued her; she wondered how it was to sail in not so modern world- with complicated clothes, without plastic and electricity. Then as a teenager a relative handed over typed transcripts of two letters scribbled by her ancestors on board describing the wreck and the time inmates had on the island. These were meant for family at Scotland who had presumed them to be dead .The writer in Sylvie just marveled at this. These letters just spoke to her as she enjoyed being with her forebears. "They made jokes, talked about their sadness and fear, about their dreams, and the relief and joy of

rescue" (4). But later she just forgot. However, this shipwreck was to be written about, talked about. Certain personal happenings evoked this tale/fact again from dormancy. Sylvie's mother was diagnosed with cancer, her own marriage broke up, a woman who was like a mother to her passed away and she also abandoned the novel on which she had been working for quite some time. The personal pain, agony, anguish all compelled her towards writing –the process which would be instrumental in her own catharsis. She says, "My ancestors' story spoke to me" (4). She became curious about the journey of 'Strathmore'. She became curious about her forbears as well as other shipmates - voices that had been lost. She looked for answers to many a question – how did the ship wreck? Who all survived? Why certain choices were made? Some learning she searched for, wondered what lessons from her real life experiences and from the island experience of shipmates–she could draw? She says, "What could I salvage from the tale of the *Strathmore* survivors to help me find my way in the world?" (5). The need to reinvent herself, to discover her being through their stories made her go into deep research. In her own words, "In researching this book, I relied where I could on first-hand accounts – the testimony of survivors, preserved through diaries, letters, press archives and books - and on other contemporary records"(235). She has given a detailed list of sources consulted at the end of the text. Some examples are : "Dyer, Elizabeth,letter to GCW (HBPF) 16 December, 1880" (235), "Wordsworth, Eleanor Glifford 'Toddy,' 'Memoir'(HBJG), 15 August 1943" (237) Wordsworth, Larry, 'The Wandering Wordsworths, private publication, 2001" (238) ,etc.

The need to belong, to connect made her pen down this journey of ordinary people Wordsworths - ordinary ones whose lives were not so interesting to be preserved. The book is, in fact, a dedication

For my family,
the living and the dead .

The writing of this accident has healed Sylvie, making her undertake a voyage towards her own self and also accomplish her unfinished tasks: "My ancestors' story has yielded a radio feature, a Masters thesis and now a book. Soon I am off to India for a writer's residency in the foothills of the Himalayas, and I recently fell in love. Fanny's and Charlie's courage in the face of shipwreck has helped me be braver, hold less tightly to my plans for the future, open up to the twists and turns of life"(231) .

This Barren Rock is a product of biographical experimentation. It is a narrative which blends the literary nuances with historical evidences. To put in the perspective and ensure authenticity Sylvie has put pictures of her ancestors on different pages(10,23,28,30,38), the Whale's tooth carved by Charlie Wordsworth (2), a page from Fanny's writings (15), painting of *Strathmore* by C.K Mitchell in 1875 (15), a sketch of the wreck by ship's carpenter John Price (92) and other pictures featuring the events. There is comparison as well as amalgamation of the real and the represented. The fact and image are juxtaposed to make a whole. The narrative moves forth in author's voice and the characters'. The author's voice gives the reader a feel of happenings as narrated. It describes and brings alive the characters: "Fanny's spoken voice, of course, was that of a Scotswoman, refined, well –to-do, with family connections in England. Her Edinburgh accent was probably not too far removed from upper middle-class English speech, with the Scots' influence lengthening particular vowels "(18) and when she talks of Wattie the youngest member to land on the island, Wattie can be visualized : "at two and a half, Wattie had been clean and soft-skinned , active and talkative, every month enlarging his vocabulary, his dexterity with small objects,

his capacity to think, to speak clearly, to form sentences, to climb and run and keep his balance. His social, physical and intellectual powers had grown stronger week and week"(187). The events mentioned show Sylvie's literary skills. Her artistic finesse is further elaborated while she relates many an incidence, "some of these meals were getting very small, however, and the survivors were greatly afraid of them shrinking further. Powerless to change their situation, many turned to religion for solace,…"(133) .

There is another voice –that of the characters – presented in italics which give the readers a feel of first hand account narration. The reader is swayed by the expressions. How to keep up cleanliness and hygiene at the island, writes Charlie:

> *the dirt was too fast on us to allow of water alone taking it off, and the weather was bitterly cold that we could only dabble a very little in it… we had a mode of cleaning our faces a little by means of birds skin, rubbing ourselves with the greasey side first, thereby softening the dirt, and afterwards our clothes were black with smoke and very filthy, and we were crawing with vermin, which we could not get rid of.* (142-143)

In the process of writing this actual account as a biographer Sylvie becomes an interpreter of the events of the shipwreck and the biography becomes an object of interpretation. The narration of the shipwreck is her interpretation and in return being commented for the readers is to be an object. Sylvie portrays the landing episode, "Things didn't get any easier when they finally reached the landing place (95)…. It was a bad night for all the survivors, in or out of the flimsy, overcrowded shelter. Hungry, wet, freezing cold and almost impossibly uncomfortable on their hard beds, most of them were probably in shock."(98). These literary expressions reveal Sylvie the writer and recorded chronicles

of events Sylvie the biographer.

A major feature of biography remains facts, facts which provide authenticity, reality, and information. However, these need to be re-arranged or slightly altered to sustain an interpretation. Sylvie does not manipulate or contradict the facts rather arranges them in a dramatic sequence to build a 'creative fact', a term used by Virginia Woolf. For this, Sylvie relies on first hand accounts, testimony of survivors through diaries, letters, press archives, and books. To be truthful she avoided certain uncertainties. She just mentions that shipwrecked on 1 July 1875 morning, exact time could not be found out.

This Barren Rock derives from creative fact, from "appraisal and presentation, rather than the accumulation and accuracy, of facts…" (8). The reader trying to seek the reality of shipwreck is also given a glimpse of turmoil and emotional upheavals of people stranded on the island. The conflict they faced within as well as with others also has been delineated through psychological analysis. It brings out the living of the inmates, their pain, jealousies as well as the survival instinct. The description makes shipwreck come alive, "Over four thousand tons of iron and timber, cargo and passengers smashed into serrated volcanic stone. Rock tore through the iron hull, first on the port side, then the starboard. Water surged into the lower hold, bursting open the tween-decks. Within fifteen minutes, thirty- nine people would drown,"(79). Sylvie shows how "The wreck had changed almost every detail…(103)" of every passenger's life. Fanny writes down how there was physical pain as well. She remembers with gratitude the kindness of many a sailors and also pens down how some had been extremely selfish –probably the worst times brought out the worst in human being.

> *It was so cold I was nearly frozen to death. Some of the sailors, for whose kindness I can never be sufficiently grateful. . .covered me with their coats, but they were*

> *taken from me during the night by some of the passengers and then, Oh the agony I suffered in my limbs!….* (99)

Soon when living space was to be looked for, instead of one, two shanties were built–one for Fanny with Charlie and the other for Black Jack, a sailor leader where almost all the sailors got together. Later Fanny and Charlie even built their own separate one – the Penguin cottage –*"and my mother and I got installed in our new abode. It was high up on the hill at the other side, on one of these stony shelves frequented by the penguins…"*(154), as Charlie puts it.

For survival, all the people had to undergo great struggle. On the day of landing itself hunt for food began. Many could not work or hunt because of infection that developed in their feet. They had to be fed; still there was no intense bonding. Rather there developed rivalry though not too harsh between the inmates of the shanties. The survivors would eat only two meals as it was difficult not only to prepare three meals but also the store of firewood was diminishing. They survived mostly on sea-birds. Charlie reminiscences,

> *the food we lived upon was young and old albatross; the younger ones gave more eating than the old, being large, heavy birds….*
>
> *Another bird that we lived upon… [were] 'stinkpots' a carrion bird….*
>
> *We used to see these stinkpots feeding on floating substance in the water, very likely the bodies of our unfortunate shipmates. But that did not deter us from eating them, even half cooked as they sometimes were. The very thought of that food now almost sickens me.* (117-118)

The moss was the only vegetable eaten.

A biography comes alive with the language which describes

the events and the subjects . It is language only which gives literary fervour to an account and either establishes or demolishes a literary attempt. Sylvie too through the use of diction effectively recreates the 'Strathmore' shipwreck. Through her brevity and technique - portions of the text in first person narrative and words of survivors in italics, Sylvie, organizes the narrative into a story. A lucid uncomplicated structure of sentences gives the text immediacy required of a biographical writing. The language also sensitively puts forth how the inmates survived. In the section 'Rescue' Sylvie cogently describes the anxiety as well as joy and the efforts of the islanders of survival. The first ship which crossed them was *Helen Denny* sailing from London to Napier. The excitement of escape from 'Grande Ile' was probably the highest at this moment, but it did not see them. The second ship *White Eagle,* Fanny felt, deliberately avoided them. Her suspicion was actually true: "We afterwards learnt her name, and heard that some of the passengers had actually seen us and entreated the officers to wait for us but they refused… shame on them forever. . ."(178). By this time even clothes had worn off and penguin skin was being used to make the clothes. In all, four ships had crossed them without taking any notice and when the passengers had lost all hope came *Young Phoenia* "[T] his time, thank God," wrote Harold , "[our signals were] not in vain, for we were seen; and very soon we could see them bearing towards the island….How to show our joy we could not tell. Some turned somersaults, other turned cart wheel on their hands whilst others ran up and down like so many wild beasts"(197). Gradually, all the passengers were boarded on the ship.

Later all the survivors went their individual ways. Alfred Walker, Wattie's father settled in New Zealand. Not much could be found out about the others. But Charlie remained a voyager, sailed to Australia and then to New Zealand. He died saving few lives. Fanny lived eight years after the survival. She stayed in

England for some time, then returned to New Zealand and finally on 29 November 1884 died in Terrace, Wellington.

The text also bursts the myth of a woman being always caring and affectionate. As an evolved person Sylvie is able to see Fanny Wordsworth as an individual with limitations. She is critical of Fanny's attitude towards Wattie, the youngest 2 ½ year old child, to land on the island. Without a mother, already lost in a new place, his presence never stirred her emotions. Sylvie questions "Did it ever occur to her, as she lay listening to Wattie's whimpering for weeks and months on end, that she might take part in the care of the small boy laying just a metre away"? (146) . Though she herself had been ill, incapable of taking practical care of Wattie, yet a hug, a cuddle was also denied to the child. Sylvie however, also tries to answer, "Fanny herself had lost three babies …. Perhaps caring for an ailing infant was simply too painful for her after the deaths of her own children"(147). In fact, there has been no account of any survivors accusing her of not looking after Wattie. Sylvie also feels that collectively probably more could have been done. Her angst and disturbed self writes, "Did any of the survivors feel they could have done more to keep Wattie alive? Given him more affection exercised his limbs or varied his diet of soup with special invalid meals like the fried bird's brains Charlie devised to sustain Fanny?"(189).

This Barren Rock thus, emerges as a biographical account of Fanny Wordsworth great-great grandmother of the author Sylvie Haisman as well as a travelogue of the shipwreck 'Strathmore'. 124 years later in 2008 when Sylvie left Australia and returned to New Zealand to work on this book, it gave her a sense of purpose and of well being. The whole writing process has healed the wounded self and revived the very being of Sylvie. The narration has been about her own survival as well.

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CONTRIBUTORS

Jackie Huggins, a member of the Bidjara and Birri Gubba Juru people, is a well–known Aboriginal activist and historian. Author of the acclaimed biography of her mother, *Auntie Rita* (1994) and of *Sister Girl* (1998), she is active in the areas of reconciliation, social justice, literary and women's issues. In popular demand as a speaker, she offers an Aboriginal view of the history, values and struggles of Indigenous people. She is a member of the National Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, the State Library Board of Queensland and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. She had been Deputy Director , Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit at University of Queensland (1997-2011), and has lectured in South Africa, Finland, Norway, United Kingdom, Germany, Italy and the United States. Editor of *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* and judge for several years of David Unaipon Award and other awards, she has been honoured with Premier's Millenium Award for Excellence (2000) Stanner Award (1997) and shortlisted for Nita Kibble Award for Australian Women Writers (1995). jackiehuggins@gmail.com

Rashida Murphy, poet and short story writer, was born in Jabalpur, and migrated to Australia in mid -1980s. Her aricles, stories and poems have been published in anthologies and journals in Australia, India and U.K. She writes stories about eccentric characters and poems about obscure sorrows. She has won prizes in competitions and been published in *Marginata, Poetry D'Amour, Broadsheet, Westerly, The West Australian* and the *Australian Writers Journal*. In 2001, she published a novella titled, *On Equal Terms.* She is currently finishing a PhD in Creative Writing from Edith Cowan University in Perth, Western Australia.

V. Bharati Harishankar is Professor and Head of the Department of Women Studies, University of Madras. Her research interests include postcolonial studies, specially Australian, Canadian and New Zealand literatures. She has taught courses, guided research and published extensively in this area. She is a recipient of Humanities Research Centre Travel Grant to visit Australian Universities. She was nominated for a term by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Inslanders' Studies (AIATSIS) Canberra.

Pankaj K. Singh is Professor of English, and Programme Coordinator, Centre for Australian and New Zealand Studies (a UGC Area Study Centre) at Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla. Author of *Representing Woman: Tradition, Legend and Panjabi Drama* (IIAS) and editor of *The Politics of Literary Theory and Representation* and co-editor of three books, she has published extensively in leading national and international journals and anthologies, in the areas of Women Studies, Modern Drama, Cultural Studies and Translation. Fromer Dean Faculty of Languages, HPU, and a former Fellow of the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, she has been a Visiting Fellow at several universities in Australia and Canada. A recipient of Australia-India Council Special Award (2008) and of AIC Fellowship in 2003, she is the Founding Editor of *Indian Journal of Australian Studies* being published since 2008.

Hem Raj Bansal is Assistant Professor of English in the Department of English and European Languages at Central University of Himachal Pradesh at Dharamshala. He has presented research papers at several national and international seminars. His areas of interest include Modern Indian/European Drama, Immigrant and Diaspora Writings, Australian Aboriginal

Literature and Indo-Canadian Drama. He is currently pursuing Ph.D. on Aboriginal Australian Drama. rajbansal24mar@gmail.com

Vinod Kumar Chopra is Lecturer in English at GSSS Kangoo (Hamirpur), Himachal Pradesh. He did his Ph.D. from HPU Shimla in 2002 on the Short Stories on Partition and has published a book *Partition Stories: Mapping Community, Communalism and Gender* (2009). He has translated into English a monograph on Inderpal, a freedom fighter from Himachal Pradesh. He has presented papers on literature and education in national and international seminars and has published seven research papers in national and international literary journals. He frequently writes on the issues of gender, social violence, moral values, and environment and regularly contributes to the leading National Newspapers both in Hindi and English. He is currently working on folk narratives of Himachal Pradesh

Aditya Singh Dulta is Assistant Professor of English at Government Post-Graduate College, Rampur Bushahr, in Shimla district of Himachal Pradesh. His M.Phil. dissertation was on "Aboriginal Women's Voices: Repression, Resistance and Testimony in Three Autobiographies." He is currently working on his doctoral thesis. The main areas of his interest are Native Australian and Canadian Literature and Indian Literature in English and Translation.

Anupama Vohra teaches in the University of Jammu. She was a Fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla (2012-2014) where she worked on the oral narratives of Kashmiri Muslim widows and half-widows. She has participated and presented papers in national and international conferences

including First International Conference on "Mapping Emergent Arab and Muslim Literatures in English" organised by Department of Foreign Languages, University of Nizwa, Sultanate of Oman (2009). Her areas of research are Indian Writings in English and Gender Studies. Her papers have been published in edited volumes and journals including Sage publications. vohranu@gmail.com

Neelima Kanwar is Professor of English at the International Centre for Distance Education and Open Learning (ICDEOL), Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla. She is also Deputy Coordinator of Centre for Australian and New Zealand Studies, HPU. Author of *Resistant Voices* (2009) on Native Canadian authors, she has published several papers on postcolonial literature, especially on the 'First Nation' writers of Canada and Aboriginal writers of Australia. She has visited several universities in Australia under Australia- India Council Fellowship (2005)and has also been a recipient of Shastri Indo-Canadian Fellowship in 2007 wherein she visited universities in Toronto. At present she is involved in the study of interface between gender, race, culture and politics of difference in contemporary literature, besides working on Young Adolescent literature.

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