



## Saurashtra University

Re – Accredited Grade 'B' by NAAC  
(CGPA 2.93)

Thakore, Sheetal Y., 2010, *Select Women's Autobiographies: A Study*, thesis PhD, Saurashtra University

<http://etheses.saurashtrauniversity.edu/id/eprint/136>

Copyright and moral rights for this thesis are retained by the author

A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge.

This thesis cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the Author.

The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the Author

When referring to this work, full bibliographic details including the author, title, awarding institution and date of the thesis must be given.

Saurashtra University Theses Service

<http://etheses.saurashtrauniversity.edu>

repository@sauuni.ernet.in

**SELECT WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES:  
A STUDY**

**A  
DISSERTATION  
SUBMITTED TO  
SAURASHTRA UNIVERSITY, RAJKOT  
FOR THE AWARD OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
IN  
ENGLISH**

**SUPERVISED BY:**

**DR. JAYDIPSINH DODIYA  
Associate Professor,  
Smt. S. H. Gardi Institute of English  
& Comparative Literary Studies,  
Saurashtra University,  
RAJKOT(Gujarat)**

**SUBMITTED BY:**

**SHEETAL Y. THAKORE  
Head, Department of English  
M. N. Kampani Arts & A. K.  
Shah Commerce College  
MANGROL(Gujarat)**

**Registration No: 3844**

**2010**

# CERTIFICATE

---

I here by declare that the work embodied in my thesis entitled as “**SELECT WOMEN’S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES: A STUDY**”, prepared for Ph.D. Degree has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University on any previous occasion. And to the best of my knowledge, no work has been reported on the above subject. And the work presented in this thesis is original and whenever references have been made to the work of others, they have been clearly indicated as such and the source of information is included in the bibliography.

SUPERVISED BY:

SUBMITTED BY:

**DR. JAYDIPSINH DODIYA**

Associate Professor,  
Smt. S. H. Gardi Institute of English  
& Comparative Literary Studies,  
Saurashtra University,  
RAJKOT(Gujarat)

**SHEETAL Y.THAKORE**

Head, Department of English  
M. N. Kampani Arts & A. K. Shah  
Commerce College  
MANGROL(Gujarat)

Date:

Place: Rajkot

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Human being has always attempted to understand the meaning of life. Autobiography as a literary genre has always been a passion to me. It exposes life to its full. It cultivates a kind of intimacy with the writer. The four women autobiographers included in this study are a proof of remarkable capacity of Indian women.

I shall always remain indebted to my guide Dr. Jaydipsinh Dodia for his zealous support in the area. He has been a selfless mentor and a beacon guide through out this endeavour. He has always given a patient listening to my queries and helped me at every stage of my research work.

How can I forget to extend my thanks to Dr. Kamal Mehta for recommending various texts on the genre? I am also equally thankful to Dr. Ravesinh Zala and Dr. Sanjay Mukheraji. I am also thankful to Prof. A. K. Singh, Former Vice Chancellor, Dr. Baba Saheb Ambedkar Open University, for his help.

I take an opportunity to express my sense of gratitude to my teacher Dr. Ranjana Harish, who had hosted a two days seminar on ‘Kamala Das: A Tribute’ on January 11, 12 2010 at ‘School of Languages’, Gujarat University. Her special lecture on the genre helped me a lot. I also had a short discourse with her.

I am proud to be a daughter of retired Principal Mr. Yagneshbhai J. Thakore and Principal Mrs. Bhanuben Y. Thakore. I shall remain indebted to them for having instilled in me a remarkable sense of freedom and literary thirst. I shall always remain indebted to my hubby, Yogesh R. Chhantbar for carefully tending the same sense of freedom and fostering my literary pursuits.

I owe much to my elder sister Prof. Shilpa Jani and my brother Dr. Ashish Thakore for respecting and appreciating my literary aptitude right

from my childhood. I also express my sense of gratitude to my elder sister in laws Anitaben and Bhavanaben. I owe much to my two kids Dharitri and Yuvraj.

I also extend my thanks to the president of Shardagram Institute Shree Dipchandbhai Gardi and the Director Dr. J.G.Bhuva and the academic advisor of the institute Dr. Kanubhai Mavani. I am thankful to the Principal, M. N. Kampani Arts & A. K. Shah Commerce College, Dr. Hamirsinh Zankat, Dr Ramesh Mehta, Head Department of Gujarati of our college and all my colleagues who have always boosted the process of my research work.

I am also thankful to the librarian M.N.Kampani arts and A.K.Shah Commerce College, Mangrol.

I am also thankful to Mr. Nilesh Soni, Librarian, Saurashtra University Library for helping me with the relevant material for my Dissertation.

**Sheetal Y. Thakore**

# CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>CHAPTER: I</b>	
AUTOBIOGRAPHY: NATURE, ELEMENTS & HISTORY	1
<b>CHAPTER: II</b>	
INDIAN WOMEN AUTOBIOGRAPHIES: AN OVERVIEW	39
<b>CHAPTER: III</b>	
<b>PART (I)</b>	
NAYANTARA SAHGAL'S 'PRISON & CHOCOLATE CAKE': AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SAGA	75
<b>PART (II)</b>	
NAYANTARA SAHGAL'S 'FROM FEAR SET FREE' 'A TRUE TASTE OF FREEDOM'	106
<b>CHAPTER: IV</b>	
AMRITA PRITAM'S 'THE REVENUE STAMP': A CANDID EVIDENCE OF INDIVIDUALITY	130
<b>CHAPTER: V</b>	
KAMALA DAS'S 'MY STORY': A BOLD ASSERTION OF THE SELF	169
<b>CHAPTER: VI</b>	
SHOBHA DE'S SELECTIVE MEMORY: - 'STORIES FROM MY LIFE': 'INDIAN WOMAN IN NEW AVATAR'	193
<b>CHAPTER: VII</b>	
CONCLUSION	229
SELECT BIBILIOGRAPHY	238



**CHAPTER: I**  
**AUTOBIOGRAPHY:**  
**NATURE, ELEMENTS & HISTORY**



**CHAPTER: I**  
**AUTOBIOGRAPHY:**  
**NATURE, ELEMENTS & HISTORY**

In this rapidly developing world we get a regular access to various media. We get updated and well informed through computers and internet.

Computer has turned the world into a global village. All the technical resources provide us with all the information about the world. This information is incomplete without a human touch. As a matter of fact, we don't get much time to stand and share the problems of others. In this technical era man has turned out to be a machine. In such a scenario literature is the only key to human understanding. Life – writing is the best medium to unlock human heart.

The great critic Thomas De Quincy has distinguished literature in two broad categories

- 1 Literature of knowledge.
- 2 Literature of power.

“All that is literature seeks to communicate power, all that is not literature to communicate knowledge”<sup>1</sup>

Autobiography is a record of a person's life. It informs us about the various incidents of a person's life. However, autobiography is not only 'Literature of knowledge'. It also moves us. It portrays life in a very aesthetic manner. In order to understand the moving as well as informative function of autobiography one has to understand its nature and elements thoroughly.



## 1.1 Definitions:

According to Oxford English Dictionary: An autobiography is

# “An Individual’s account of his own life”<sup>2</sup>

# “It is a biography of yourself”<sup>3</sup>

# “It is biography, life-history, life story, life-an account of the series of events making up a person’s life”<sup>4</sup>

According to Collier’s Encyclopaedia:

“Autobiography, a form of biography in which the subject is also the author; it is generally written in the first person and covers most or an important phase of the author’s life”<sup>5</sup>

In his grand work, ‘English biography’ Mr. W. H. Donne remarks; “Autobiography, which is worth the name, is serious and truthful self study”.<sup>6</sup>

All the above definitions suggest that autobiography is life-history. It is a biography of the individual written by himself. It covers an important phase of a person’s life. It is necessarily truthful and serious attempt of self-study.

While biography is defined as ‘an account of a person’s life’ or as “literature which consists of the histories of individuals”, autobiography is called: “the story of a person”.<sup>7</sup> The coinage of the term ‘autobiography’ is quite modern. Murray’s New English Dictionary notes “...the first recorded use of the term occurred in 1809. Before this date, the autobiographical form passed under various names: life narratives written by the author him self, memoirs, journal, diary, biography by self, history by self etc”.<sup>8</sup>

James Olney breaks the word “autobiography into three different parts: “autos”, the self, the “I” stated or implied, without which the work would become meaningless. The 'bios' or the 'life', which is the entire life of the individual unto the time of writing. Lastly the 'graphe' or the act of

writing. It is through writing the self that the life takes a specific dimension and image.

There are three main types of autobiography

- 1) Informal autobiography
- 2) Formal autobiography
- 3) Specialized forms of autobiography.

Informal autobiography includes extremely intimate writings not necessarily for publication. Letters, diaries and journals for instance reveal the personal life of the author very consciously. Publication of collected letters of some eminent persons such as the volumes of W. S. Louis's correspondence with Horace Walpole, an 18<sup>th</sup> century man of letters (34 Vol, 1937-65) can enlighten the reader about different ways in which a person can reveal himself or herself. Similarly, Mozart and Byron have revealed themselves in an uninhibited fashion in their letters. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the young Jewish girl Anne Frank wrote her diary in such a manner that a script was prepared for a drama and a film. Records of the personal experiences in journals have offered a confidential history of their writers. Leonardo de Vinci's notebooks reveal his teeming and ardent brain. Dorothy Wordsworth's Journals (1867) bear the proof of her sensitive nature. Memoirs and reminiscences emphasize what is remembered rather than who is remembering. In the 15<sup>th</sup> century Philippine De Connynes speaks more of the life of Louis-xi, master of statecraft than himself. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Sir Orbert Sitwell's volumes of recollections are noteworthy.

- Formal autobiography:

“... Offers a special kind of biographical truth: a life, reshaped by recollection, with all of recollections conscious and unconscious omissions and distortions”.<sup>9</sup>

We find the examples of formal autobiography in the literature of the antiquity and the Middle ages also. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B. C. the Chinese classical historian Ssu-Ma gives a brief account of himself in *Shih chi: Historical Records*. Julius Caesar's *Commentaries* speaks little about himself and more about the conquest of *Gaul*. *The confessions* of St. Augustine of the 5<sup>th</sup> century A.D. is a remarkably early instance of this genre.

In Europe autobiography begins with the Renaissance. Margery Kempe, an Italian mystic dictated an account of her life during this period. Enea Silvio Piccolomini, who became Pope Pius-II in 1458, wrote his autobiography *Commentari*. The 17<sup>th</sup> century is rich in autobiography in England. Autobiographies written by Baxter and John Bunyan are the examples of religious life-accounts. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Colley Cibber's *Apology for the life of Colley Cibber, Comedian* attracted the readers. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century three autobiographies were written by the distinguished writers like Benjamin Franklin, Edward Gibbon and Rousseau. Rousseau's 'Confessions; inspired Wordsworth to write the *Prelude*' and Byron to write *Childe Harold*.

- Specialized forms of Autobiography:

They are classified under four heads: thematic, religious, intellectual and fictionalized autobiographies.

- Adolph Hitler's *Mein Kempf* (1924) and Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) can be called thematic autobiographies.
- St. Augustine's *confessions* and Peter Abelard's *Historia Calamitatum* in the middle ages and a few chapters of Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* are instances of religious autobiographies.
- John S. Mill's Autobiography and Edmund Goss's *Father and son* (1907) are intellectual autobiographies.

- Fictionalized autobiographies are thinly disguised as novels. For instance, Samuel Butler's *Way of all flesh* (1903), James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and George Santayana's *Last Puritan* are fictionalized autobiographies.

### 1.3 HISTORY

Formerly, we Indians were quite unaware of the importance of systematic documentation of the events of history unlike the westerners. The forms of biography and autobiography were quite alien to the Indians before the British arrived. However, the forms of informal autobiography or confessions could be discovered in the Vedic literature like *The Gambler's Lament, Rigveda* (10, 34.2), 1500 B.C. or in the Buddhist literature like *Theragatha*, 6<sup>th</sup> Century B.C. to 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.) Or in the later Sanskrit literature like *Bana's life* given in the first few chapters of 'Harshcharitam (7<sup>th</sup> cen A.D.) or in the Mughal literature like *Babarnama, Tuzak -i- Jahangir* etc. Such informal autobiographies appear to have been written either to promote spirituality or to glorify the auto biographer himself. The systematic development of autobiography in various languages including English in India can be traced from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The first piece of autobiographical writing in English was Raja Rammohan Roy's short autobiographical sketch (1833) which is a very realistic presentation. Kashiprasad Ghose's letter published in James Lang's *Hand book of Bengal Missions* (1848) is of greater literary interest. The first extensive autobiography was written by Lutufullah, a tutor in Persian, Arabic and Hindustani to British officers in 1857. Novelist Lal Behari Dey's *Recollections of My school Days*, serialised in the *Bengal Magazine* (1873-76), proclaims the superiority of English education to oriental learning. Nishikanta Chattopadhyaya's

*Reminiscences of German University Life* (1892) and Rakhal Das Halder's *The English Diary of an Indian Student* (1861-2) were the only attempts of autobiographical writing by Indians in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there was the quest for freedom. Those great figures who devoted themselves to the freedom struggle wrote about their own experiences through autobiographies. Surendranath Banerjee's *A Nation Making* (1925) is an apologia for moderate politics. Mahatma Gandhi's *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1927) written in Yeravada jail appeared first in a Gujarati weekly *Navajivan*. In 1940 it was translated into English by Mahatma's secretary, Mahadevbhai Desai. The story is often compared with St. Augustine's *Confessions* with all its pre-occupation with spirituality. Lala Lajpat Rai's *The Story of My Deportation* (1908) and Jawaharlal Nehru's *An Autobiography* (1936) are two important autobiographies. Nehru's autobiography is a marvellous piece of self-analysis. It is a living record of the Indian history written in impressive language.

Barindarakumar Ghose's *The Tale of My Exile* (1928) and B. K. Sinha's *In Andamans: The Indian Bastille* (1939) are notable autobiographies by the revolutionaries.

Dhan Gopal Mukherji's *Caste and Outcaste* (1923), Mulkaraj Anand's *Apology for Heroism* (1946) and K.Subba Rao's *Revived Memories* (1933) are the literary autobiographies of high merit. Mulk Raj Anand's autobiography also provides a valuable insight in understanding fiction.

Other autobiographies of the period include social reformers like D. K. Karve *Looking Back* (1936) or men of spirituality like Swami Ram Das's *In quest of God* (1923), an educationist like G. K. Chatur's *The last enchantment* (1933).

Suniti Devi Maharani of Cooch Bihar was the first Indian woman to write an autobiography. Her book *Autobiography of an Indian Princess* was published in 1921. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit wrote three auto biographical volumes, like, *So I Became Minister* (1936), *Prison Days* (1945) and *The Scope of Happiness* (1979). Krishna Hutheesingh wrote *With No Regrets* (1944) and 'We Nehrus' (1968).

After independence, one can notice a rich harvest of autobiographies. Among the most outstanding of them are Morarji Desai's *The story of My Life* published in three volumes between 1974 and 1979 and M. R. Masani's *Bliss was in that Dawn* (1977).

In 1951, Nirad C. Chaudhari's autobiography entitled *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* set a landmark. It is a book of the highest linguistic and literary excellence. Among other autobiography of the same period are: *Face to Face* (1963) by Ved Mehta, *My God Died Young* (1967) by Sasthi Brata, *My Son's Father* (1968), *Never at Home* by Dom Moraes. *My Days* (1975) by R. K. Narayan.

Other women autobiographers like Nayantara Sahgal's *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (1954) and *From Fear Set Free* (1961), Kamala Das's *My Story* (1976) and Lady Dhanvanthi Rama Rau's *An Inheritance* (1976) are noteworthy. Further more Amrita Pritam's *Revenue Stamp* and *Shadow of Words* (2004) are famous Punjabi autobiographies. Recently Shobha De's *Selective Memories-stories from my life* (1998) and Taslima Nasreen's *My Girlhood Days* are famous women autobiographies.

Pandit Ravi Shankar's *My music, My life* (1968) reveals his career as an artist. Hazari's *An Indian Outcaste* (1951) presents the life-story of the oppressed classes. Our well known Missile man Dr. A.P.J. Kalam has gifted us with *Wings of Fire* (1999).

In twenty first century we find master pieces like *My country my life* (2008) by Mr. L.K.Advani. *Romancing with life* (2007) is an ever written full fledged memoir of Bollywood's ever green star Dev Anand.

#### **1.4 ELEMENTS/FEATURES;**

Autobiographical form reveals four different aspects that vary according to the auto biographer's mode and mood. These aspects can be classified into Subjectivity, self-revelation, introspection and self concealment. The centre of any autobiographical work is the life. James Olney rightly observes:

“The ‘I’ that comes away to it's own being shapes and determines the nature of the autobiography and in so doing half discovers, half creates itself that opened up the subject of autobiography specifically for literary discussions”<sup>10</sup>

It has been rightly said: “God created people because he loved stories”.

Each one of us has at least one book in him. Each individual is a moving story. It is only by writing and expressing himself that the autobiographer exposes the life and creates a place for himself. Thus, autobiography is at once subjective, self-revelatory and introspective.

- **Experience based features:**

Self written life-story: Autobiography, as the very term suggests is a life-story written by the person himself. It includes all the events of a person's life right from his childhood. These events focus on the internal and external life of the person.

The writer himself gives report of his own life. The basic necessity of writing about one's life arises from the sense of individuality. Janet Gunn observes:

“Autobiography is the act of ‘settling down’ or of wedging one’s feet downward. It represents an act both of discovery and creation that involves at the same time, the movement of the self in the world recognizing that “the land makes man” and the movement of the self into the world, recognizing well that “man elects his land”.<sup>11</sup>

The great poet W.B. Yeats says in his autobiography “It is my self that I remake”. Thus, the art of autobiography involves a process of reconstruction of the writer’s life. It is the self-picturing in which the writer is indulged. “Self-portraiture is a synonym of self-knowledge”.<sup>12</sup>

“When a man is attempting to describe another’s character, he may be right or he may be wrong but in one thing he will always succeed, in describing himself”.<sup>13</sup>

- **Self centeredness:**

Autobiography is a never ending dialogue with the self. All the other incidents, persons, nation, era etc. should be narrated with special reference to the author’s self. The self of the author should be at the centre.

Many a times when autobiography is written by a political or social leader, he indulges himself in narrating other persons, individuals and events so much so that his self is completely dissolved. This is not advisable in autobiography. The writer should maintain a balance in giving account of other events and his own self. The self-referentiality of autobiography should be evident in the language, narrative and the structure of the work.

**Realistic touch or Factual Record:**

Creator and his creation are strongly associated with one another. Literature grows out of life but the truth of literature is imaginative. Facts



of life are dissolved in imagination and reshaped by literature. Facts get a distinct shape by getting the touch of an artist.

Autobiography is a record of a person's real life, lived in a particular time and place. George Gusdorf says that this mode of writing "is limited almost entirely to the public sector of existence". That is to say, autobiography not only deals with personal but also with public lives of the people. It deals with the realities of life. It is a search of self through the annals of history, an act which embodies the self where the 'real' or 'actual' self is replaced "by a new self made object, a cultural artefact- the book at hand, the autobiographical text". (Charles J Rzepka, pg-33, Sodhi) As autobiography is a life-history it is surely associated with reality. Fact is the soul of autobiography. It recreates life through the imaginative transformation of facts. However an autobiographer's treatment of fact is quite different from that of a historian. A historian is concerned with the results of the events while an autobiographer is concerned with the events themselves. An autobiographer is honest to his experiences and feelings.

An autobiography is beyond the limits of time-span. A strict order of chronology is not expected from an auto biographer. Many a times an autobiography does not follow the chronology of details. For instance, Amrita Pritam's autobiography 'The Revenue Stamp' starts with chronological details of her childhood but later on she doesn't maintain this chronology. However, readers relish her flash backs and flash-forwards methods of narration. Maurice O' Sullivan's life story 'Twenty years – A Growing' does not record the facts of his life in chronological order. However, it is full of confessional tone, authenticity and honesty. Hence, it is a complete factual record of his life story.

Thus, autobiographer has to perform a twin role of a historian as well as a litterateur.

## **CONVINCING POWER:**

A story depends upon its convincing sincerity whether a story or a life-story. Each story has its well managed harmonized and consistent world. That is to say it has its individual reality. It has its own rules to be followed. Therefore, the imaginative truth of literature appears convincing.

The truth of autobiography is not created or probable truth. It is based on the real-life experiences of the author. We can say that an autobiography is a 'revised and corrected version' of the writer's life. Therefore, an autobiography

“Can not be a pure and simple record of existence, an account book or a log book; on such and such a day at such and such an hour, I went to such and such a place... A record of this kind, no matter how minutely exact would be no more than a caricature of life: in such a case, rigorous precision would add up to the same thing as the subtlest deception”.<sup>14</sup>

For an autobiographer the factual truth is subordinated to the imaginative truth. More than being a mere historical record it is work of art. The literary value of an autobiography is far more important than its historical or objective function. For instance, Amrita Pritam narrates her dream relationships in more realistic way. Her imagery is more powerful than her realistic pictures.

## **NEUTRALITY:**

“An autobiography is by its nature an exercise in egoism but unless the author can reduce his ego to a little ‘i’ the reader will not find him tolerable.”<sup>15</sup>

Autobiography is far more different from other literary genres in its narrative technique. Here the author himself is writing his own story. Hence, the author has to maintain a kind of balance between his own self-praise and narration of other persons, events and places. There is every chance for an autobiographer to sound egoistic. Obviously, all the activities of man are centred around his ‘I’ but an autobiographer has to express himself through little ‘i’. He/She should be very neutral about the positive as well as negative side of his temperament. An autobiographer is a judge who has to give judgement for his own case. He is an actor and the spectator himself. Hence, he has to be very judicial.

While writing an autobiography, the writer has to dissolve his ego in the narration of other individuals and places. The great critic Erick Link later remarks in his autobiography *The man on My Back*, that his aim is “...to reduce my ego to a little ‘i’ with whom I could live and never notice it.”<sup>16</sup>

## **SELF INTROSPECTION:**

*The Taittiriya Upanishad* (600-500 B.C.), the *Manduka Upanishad* (500-400 B.C.) and the *Mahabharata* (1 A.D.) have glorified man and the self. Man has been considered as the highest creature in the chain of living beings on the earth”

“Guhyam brahma taddam vobrivimi na manusat sreshthataram hi kincit”.

That is to say, “I tell you this, the secret of the Brahman: there is nothing higher than man”. The Upanishads persuade man to know his true self, “know thy-self” (Atanabam Vidhi) and the Socratic ideal ‘know thy self’ also becomes the ideal of the Indian philosophy. Most of the religions of the world support the concept that God dwells in man. Hence, the moral duty of a man is to realize his own self. An autobiography is not only a record of several personal events and character-sketches. An autobiographer is bound to reveal his/her spiritual and mental struggles. He has to draw a chart of his journey from a man to spiritual self.

Mahatma Gandhiji’s autobiography candidly analyses Gandhiji as a man, leader and seeker of truth. It is a vital record of his self-search and self knowledge. Here we come across a naïve boy who smokes cigarettes and the same boy gifting us the concepts of self-control and addiction-eradication. Thus, Gandhiji’s autobiography is a nice self – introspective piece.

### **Contemporaneousness:**

The autobiographical form requires dedication to internal as well as external events. Robert F. Sayre supports this view point and remarks:

“Autobiography is an examination of the self as both a sovereign integrity and a member of society. In fact, the self is at all times both these things and autobiography is an endless stream of demonstrations of their inseparability.”<sup>17</sup>

The autobiographical form concerns the self and not the external forces of the world. However the external world is taken into account as the self hood is shaped and moulded by these external forces. Autobiography is also a work of art influenced by the writer’s race, milieu and the moment. While narrating the progress of the self the author also relates his experiences with the progress of his national and

contemporary times. The western style of an individualistic and assertive personality is out of place in Indian context. Community life helps in the establishments of the individual's self identity. Analyzing Gandhi's 'My Experiments with Truth' Naipaul says that, to Indians,

“The outer world matters only in so far as it affects the inner. It is the Indian way of experiencing; what is true of Gandhi's autobiography is true of many other Indian autobiographers, though the self-absorption is more sterile”<sup>18</sup>

Though written ironically, Naipaul's views echo that Indian autobiographies are much more influenced by the contemporary social, religious, political and even economic conditions of a nation. Most of the women autobiographies also depict the contemporary socio-religious or socio-political conditions of the nation. Nayan Tara Sahgal's autobiographies 'From Fear set Free' and *Prison and Chocolate Cake* also focus more on the freedom movements of India and the role of her parents in them.

### **Conflict:**

Conflict is the soul of any literary form and it gets proper expression through autobiography. There is a vast difference between conflict expressed in fictitious literature and the one which is expressed in autobiography. In fictitious prose the person experiencing conflict is placed in the imaginative world of action. In autobiography, the author himself is at the centre of the conflict. All the mental, physical, moral, religious, spiritual and social conflicts of the author get expression in autobiography. Autobiographer himself is the actor as well as the spectator.

As an autobiography is a life-story, author's mental conflict obviously gets expression through it. However, while writing

autobiography also the writer experiences conflict related to expression. The very thought of writing autobiography creates conflict in the author's mind. Autobiography arises out of conflict.

Nehru has written his autobiography in order to pass his tedious leisure in Jail. He has reflected his views on his visit to Russia in the present work. He wanted to think over the future direction for India. Moreover, he was disturbed by the question: "What next?" He had to maintain a balance in that situation. He has depicted his dreams about India through this work. Thus, autobiography also expresses the dreams and desires of its author. More over, Amrita Pritam's autobiography is a candid record of the writer's conflict between social norms and individual thinking. For Amrita Pritam life has two fostering factors: 1) Pen and 2) Love. 'The Quest for love' is her individual necessity. In order to search true love she had to suffer a lot. However, she candidly narrates her conjugal conflict, urge for true love, love failure in Saheer's case and at last self-contentment in Imroz's love. Thus, Pritam's autobiography is in the real sense a revenue stamp on all her relationships and her inner feelings.

### **Memory:**

The autobiographical form concerns the self and not the external forces of the world. However, the outer world is taken into account as the self-hood is shaped by these external forces. The autobiographical process takes place with the help of the autobiographical memory. Recollection of the past is dependent upon a creative memory, "that apes and reshapes the historic past as in the image of the present, making the past as necessary to this present as this present is the inevitable outcome of that past".<sup>19</sup>

An autobiographer enters the cave of past with the search light of memory. In order to write an autobiography the author must have a powerful memory. Through his powerful memory an autobiographer may dive deeper into his farther past and recollect his fragile emotions. Through his memory the autobiographer recollects the memories related to particular time and place and relives the tender moments of the past.

The autobiographer whose memory is very powerful in recollecting childhood moments can portray most of the events of life very remarkably. Tolstoy is one of such writers. He recollects the wooden bath tub and its smell in which he used to bathe as a child. He is able to recollect the nurse, her novel impression. He feels the heat of the bath-water, his play with it and even the tender touch of the tub at his bottom. Thus, memory plays an important role in exposing the moments hidden in our subconscious. Memory often recollects something shocking. Prabhakar Machvey has rightly said:

“Memory is a convenient sieve. It retains only the poignant precious and painful”<sup>20</sup>.

The above sentence is quite a debatable one. Memory can capture ‘poignant’ and ‘painful’ but can it capture ‘precious’? Whether memory can judge, what is precious for the person? “Precious’ can be understood only by reasoning, whereas ‘poignant’ and ‘painful’ can be caught by heart.

Memory cannot be retained in its original form. It is a mingling of many foregone events. Many a times memory comes in much transformed form of a wish or a thought. Therefore, memory depicts not what was but what ought to be. Thus, memory diffuses and dissipates in order to recreate. Memory not only depicts whatever is useful to the autobiographer. Along with time, character, emotions and facts lose their

significance. Along with time several characters and events grow larger than life and others even become smaller than life.

**Truth:**

“Truth is the hero of my tale” the above slogan given by Tolstoy must be the motto of an autobiographer. Autobiography is not a fictitious story. It is a real life-history of a writer. Hence, truth is the spinal chord of the autobiography. Autobiography is an expression of truthful experience.

Truth in itself is knowledge. Truth is God. Gandhiji has confessed in his autobiography that in order to search the truth he would like to abolish his own self. Let truth alone prevail! Absolute truth is beyond time. Often an artist tries to attain the absolute truth through his diction. However, truth expressed by an autobiographer is an ornamented truth. Main objective of the autobiographer is to realize and to recreate the self. Hence, the factual record of time and place seldom expresses the truth of the writer’s self. The depiction of truth is very difficult in autobiography.

The autobiographical process is not the mere depiction of the author’s personality, but rather a recreation of his personality. The autobiographical act is a reconstruction of the writer’s self and is viewed from a distance in life. The re composition of life is termed as ‘a second reading’ by Georges Gusdorf, which he claims to be truer than the first. It is a search of self through his/her history. However the autobiographer emphasizes the past ‘I’ to be different from the present ‘I’. Hence, autobiography, as a literary art ought to present imaginative or created truth rather than the original truth about the author. Here the self is constantly being remade. Cassell’s has rightly observed:

“There is a different sort of truth in autobiography, not primarily historical or even psychological, but existential, the part discovery, part assertion of a spiritual personality of a pattern in a life, of self-fulfilment”.<sup>21</sup>



## **Expression based features:**

### **Candid/confessional tone**

An autobiographer is always assumed to be candid by nature. However, autobiographer may not express cent percent truth by his/her candid nature. For instance Gandhiji's autobiography creates an impression that Gandhiji was an average student as a child. However his documents and progress cards suggest that he was a scholar. Hence, one can't say that Gandhiji has not portrayed his childhood candidly. Here Gandhiji has expressed his impression about his childhood very candidly.

An autobiographer should be confessional and candid but he should be at first modest. Honesty in expression does not imply immodesty. Self-restraint is also necessary while expressing the truth about himself. Gandhiji has also expressed his basic instincts and carnal desires through his autobiography but he has maintained a perfect balance in the narration. His depiction does not cross the limits of decency. On the other hand, Gandhiji has confessed frankly his explorations with the whores and his attempts to steal the golden bangle and smoking the 'beedis'. Thus, he is very truthful and confessional in tone.

On the other hand, Kamala Das has not maintained any standards of decency in expressing her basic instincts. Her so called candidness is not candidness in the real sense of the term. She wants to spell bound the society by depicting sensational stories of her physical instincts. On the other hand, Amrita Pritam expresses her extra marital relations and her quest for true love in a very candid yet decent manner. An autobiographer has to maintain a balance between under writing and over writing.

### **Inconclusiveness:**

The incompleteness of time and order is a peculiar characteristic of an autobiography. It is an elaborate form of essay. Hence it is never

complete. Even after the creation of autobiography the river of life keeps flowing. Life never ends. Autobiography is an account of life, which begins with the beginning of the memory and ends with the creation of autobiography. Hence, we have writers who have written more than one volumes of their autobiographies like Amrita Pritam's *Revenue Stamp & Shadow of Words*. Dom Moraes' *Never at Home* and *My son's father*. Nayan Tara Sahgal's *Prison and Chocolate Cake* and *From Fear set Free*.

An autobiography can never be complete. It can never have a conclusion like other literary genres/ R.K. Narayan asks in his autobiography, *My Days*, "How can any autobiography have a final chapter?" As long as the biological life of the writer continues, the autobiographical process remains incomplete. Thus, autobiography is that literary genre which maintains a sense of curiosity even if it reaches to its conclusion. It has the conclusion which is never concluded. Marlene Fisher remarks:

"Since no autobiography can be finished 'the life or the progress through life that any such text purports to represent can only be one that is in the making and therefore a fragment of a life'".<sup>22</sup>

Thus, autobiography is unfinished and inconclusive literary genre.

### **Style:**

"Style is the Man" (Francis Bacon)

Style is that aspect of writing which gives artistic touch to autobiography. Literature is an art of diction. In this genre of literature the artist expresses him self in the most meaningful terms. Generally, autobiography is considered as a history of life. This history of life is turned into art of life by the impressive style of the author. For instance, Amrita Pritam through her artistic style presents a picture of a blue-eyed

child emerging from a Rose plant. Style is the key of the autobiographer's mind and heart.

Auto biographer's style depends upon his mood and mode of narration. The autobiographer may employ narrative, dramatic, descriptive or story-telling method for the expression of his/her innermost feelings. The more intense the feeling the more impressive the expression. The language of autobiography should be simple, lucid and clear. It must have dignity of utterance. However it should not be too much ornamented. The language should cultivate an intimate rapport with the readers.

### **Reconstruction of Life:**

An autobiography is a recreation of life through recollection. It is a reconstruction of life in its entirety. An autobiographer is in search for himself through the history. The autobiographical process is not the mere depiction of the author's personality, but rather a recreation of his personality.

During the Romantic period, the autobiographical form was transformed from an objective memoir to a personal subjective remembrance, the attempt to connect by retrospective reflection, disparate and discontinuous experiences and states of mind into a self conceived almost solely in terms of a maturing consciousness rather an embodiment”<sup>23</sup>

Thus, the autobiographical act is a re constitution of the writer's self and is viewed from a distance in life. The reinterpretation of life helps the autobiographer to get a clear cut perspective of himself. The re-composition of life is termed as 'a second reading' by Georges Gusdorf. This second reading has been considered by him as truer than the first. It is like having an aerial view of a fortification or a city, revealing the

important lines which the viewer had failed to notice formerly in himself. It gives him a clearer view of himself.

The great critic Paul De Mann often uses the metaphor of ‘murder’ for biography and suicide for autobiography. That is to say, while reading an autobiography we only read ‘a life’. We read a book. However the literary genre, the autobiography does not exhibit “The Death of an Author”, the ‘I’ of the autobiography determines the ‘bios’ or the life. It is however, the third element the ‘graphe’ or the act of writing which is of real importance.

The autobiographical writing helps the autobiographer in establishing his true identity and helps him to present an accurate picture of himself.

### **Factual Selection:**

As the autobiographer has to express meaningful vision, he has to make his record factual. ‘Fact’ is the base of autobiography. The autobiographer has to select facts from the infinite complexities of life. He has to be quick enough to present those facts of life which might have influenced his personality. The autobiographer has to abandon his likings for the presentation of the facts which he adores. The autobiographer has to take the “advantage of art’s shaping powers in the effort to transmute the incoherence of a life into the regularities of a story.”<sup>24</sup>

Thus, autobiographical writing involves the process of selection, rejection, proper distribution of facts, and emphasis on certain aspects of life. Thus, the autobiographer has to depict those facts only which are helpful in the evolution of his self.

**Magnitude:**

Our life is full of innumerable inconsistent events. When the autobiographer reconstructs life, he has to do so in its whole. This whole must have a certain kind of magnitude. When the autobiographer relives his past, the inconsistent, disorderly events are reshaped. His narration depends upon memory, but he has to rebuild his memory in such a way that all the events of his life appear symmetrical and orderly.

The self defines itself from minute to minute amid the confusion of the external reality and as a security against the hurl-burly, which exists in the outside world. A work of art is a representation from the inner realm into its embodiment as an external form. It then achieves consciousness of itself. Autobiography constantly returns to the elusive centre of the self which lies in the unconscious. The self is forever in the process of making itself. It never takes a complete shape but whichever shape it gets must appear logical and unified.

**Interrelation between the past and the present:**

Autobiography is a reconstruction of the past. The autobiographical act is a kind of a link between the present and the past of the writer. Georges Gusdorf thinks that 'integral resurrection of the past' can seem meaningless due to its complete relation to the present. The autobiographer is faced with a complex situation in revisiting his past. Gone is child, the young man and the mature man of yesterday. The man of today knows the end of his story. The writer has to overcome the time gap between the life lived in the past and its depiction in writing. It is imperative for the writer of an autobiography to seek the genesis of the present condition. Autobiography is not merely a recapitulation of the past but also an attempt by the autobiographer to reconstruct himself in connection to the present.

“Confession of the past realizes itself as a work in the present: it effects as true creation of self by the self.”<sup>25</sup>

Memory and the present reality bear a reciprocal relationship: the now, shaping the memory, just as the present moment, the now, is shaped by the memory. While trying to remember the past in the present, the autobiographer imagines himself to be another person and lives in another world of existence.

“It is an interesting fact to note that the auto biographer emphasizes the past ‘I’ to be different from the present ‘I’. The narrator describes not only what happened to him in past but also how he became out of what he was what he presently is. Thus, the autobiographer bridges the gulf between the past and the present of the writer. Roy Pascal has rightly said:

“Autobiography is then interplay, collusion between past and present; its significance is indeed more the revelation of the present situation than the uncovering of the past”.<sup>26</sup>

### **Historical Consistency:**

In Autobiography the past and the present are interrelated. Hence, the autobiography begins in the end and ends in the beginning. Roy Pascal Says:

“If I have so stressed the fact that the beginning is in the end, it is necessary to stress also the corollary that the end is in the beginning”.<sup>27</sup>

Thus, we find a special kind of consistency between the beginning and end of autobiography. This is historical consistency. An autobiographer has to present a consistent graph of his life right from his childhood to the present times.

For an autobiography, historical consistency implies as Georges Gusdorf calls, “a document about a life”. The autobiographer does not try

to repeat the scene but gives it a new perspective. It is an enactment of the drama of the life of a man who tries to reassemble himself at a certain time in history.

### **Self discovery/Quest:**

The ultimate aim of education in man's life is the realization of the true inwardness. The self of man is very important and if individuality is gone the humans will become 'bankrupt'. The true self has been called the 'Brahman', the Atman being the supreme self. Autobiography unravels the dark recesses of our being. It helps us to discover the intuitive non-mediated experience of the self. Prof. M Hiriyanna explains the two terms, 'Brahman' and 'Atman', the first is 'prayer' and the primary cause of the universe. While the 'Atman', he says is 'the inner self' of man". Autobiography helps us to realize this inner self, distinct from the physicality of man. The exceptionality in man was emphasized by Tagore in Sadhana:

"I am absolutely unique, I am I, I am incomparable. The whole weight of the universe cannot crush out this individuality of mine. I maintain it in spite of the tremendous gravitation of all things".<sup>28</sup>

The world never ends, it is always old and always new. And the self has to know that it is born new every moment of its life. One has to always ask, "Who am I ?" Nothing could be closer, more personal than a person's 'I'. The autobiographer has to ponder over this question and establish his identity. He has to answer the question, "How did I become what I am today?" Thus, self is like a lamp when it illuminates and holds the light high, it reveals itself.

Thus, all the above characteristics of the autobiography have been tabulated from the studies of different autobiographies until now. Scholars of autobiographies may include or discard some of them in

future. They are flexible to changes. However they are a valuable aid in understanding the structure, design and pattern of autobiography.

- **Who can write an autobiography:**

Each human being wants to express his/her innermost feelings. Autobiography is the literary genre which provides vent to the innermost feelings. Autobiography expresses very private emotions and passions of a person. The great critic Chopin has rightly said:

“There is no joy in the world like the expression of oneself, of one’s ego, in whatever medium you choose”.<sup>29</sup>

A man never wishes that the fruit of his long-cherished dreams dwindle away all the way. He wishes to become immortal anyhow. Autobiography is the evidence of man’s efforts and deeds in life. Autobiographies of great figures like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Abdul Kalam and many more have been proved as literary assets. Society has learnt an art of living from the lives of such great figures.

The main aim of autobiography is to introduce ourselves to the self of the writer. It does not aim to delight. Hence, one question arises at the outset that “Is an introduction necessary to any layman?” Is each man’s life story liable to expression? Autobiography of Gandhiji or Tolstoy may be of great value to the society but how much helpful can be the life-story of a thief or a rogue? What is the purpose hidden behind the common man’s life?

Dr. Shanti Khanna has presented the solution to this problem in his thesis. He says:

“An autobiographer can be literary, political or religious or any kind of figure but it is essential that he should be well-known and renowned figure of the society”.<sup>30</sup>

Another Gujarati author Kaka Kalelkar’s opinion differs a lot from Dr. Khanna’s views. Kaka Kalelkar opines that, it is not necessary that an



autobiographer must be an elite figure. Any common man can write autobiography. The most important aspect of an autobiography is the individuality of the experience and expression.

A person passes through a variety of enterprises in life. This enterprising life should be life-enhancing and touched with emotions. Many a times a person may search invaluable emotions from the trivialities of life. Mundane realities do have a classic fervour. For instance, Amrita Pritam relishes the taste of life out of smoking the cigarette butt-ends smoked by the lover Saheer.

Thus, the individuality of experience and expression goes for the success of an autobiography. Hence, it has been rightly said:

To have led an interesting life is a definite advantage but to be interested in life is real essential".<sup>31</sup>

The preface of an autobiography focuses on the proposed objectives of the autobiographer. These objectives may differ from person to person.

It happens that an incessantly flowing river of life suddenly changes its course because of a sudden event. Suddenly a thief turns into a saint. Thus, motivated by a sudden change in life a person ought to write an autobiography.

When a person achieves extraordinary success in life, his ambitions are satisfied to a great extent. He would like to share his innermost feelings with the public at this juncture. Hence, he expresses these feelings through autobiography.

All are not fortunate enough to be successful in life. One has to be contented with failures also. However, people like to make others precocious about the future problems. Through his autobiography a person shares his successes and failures with others and helps others in problem solving.

Sometimes a person's life is not justified by his own kinsman and society. In such a case a person may demand justification of his life through his autobiography. Thus, self justification may be considered as one of the objectives behind an autobiography.

Many a times a person is leading his life aimlessly. A sudden sickness or a long illness may lead a person to travel in his/her past. This nostalgic mood may tempt the person to write an autobiography. The person who has passed his dawn and noon of the life and entered into the twilight (middle age) may write an autobiography steeped in the memory of his past.

The same events of the same period may be described by different individuals in a variety of ways. This is because of the special motives of the author. Taking into consideration this special motive, the writer may write his autobiography. A person may have a special vision of looking particular incidents of his life in a special way. We get special delight in reading such special autobiographies having special insight.

Thus, all the above objectives of autobiographies do not imply that only a celebrity can write an autobiography. A novel can be written on a king or a beggar. Similarly an autobiography can be written by a celebrity as well as by a common man. The only condition is that he/she must have a proper command over diction and its expression. Carlyle has rightly said:

“A Well-written life is almost as rare as a well-spent one”.<sup>32</sup>

## **1.6 Other Related Forms:**

### **Biography:**

Biography has been defined by *Oxford English dictionary* as under: “The history of the lives of individual men as a branch of literature”.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, biography is a relatively full account of the facts of a man's life which attempts to set forth his character, temperament and milieu, as well as his experiences and activities. In seventeenth century John Dryden defined biography as "the history of particular men's lives".

English biography proper appeared in the seventeenth century. Isaac Walton's *Lives* (of John Donne, George Herbert, Richard Hooker and others), was written between 1640 and 1678.

In the eighteenth century the theory and practice of biography as a special literary art was greatly advanced. The same century gifted us with Dr. Johnson's monumental *Lives of the English Poets* (1779-81) and James Boswell's *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791).

Today also, biography has become one of the most popular of literary forms.

The only difference between autobiography and biography is that autobiography is the life-story written by the person himself whereas biography is the life-story of a person written by another person. Thus, biography is that form of literature in which a person's life is viewed and judged by another person. In autobiography a person's life is judged and viewed by himself. Thus, autobiographer has to depend upon his memory to depict his experiences of life. The biographer has to collect the material from outside to depict the experiences of another person. The great critic Longfellow has rightly said: "Autobiography is a product of first hand experience, biography of second-hand knowledge"<sup>34</sup>.

Thus, in biography the central character is at the mercy of the biographer. There should be plausibility in the depiction of the biographer. The hierarchy to which Rousseau calls 'chain of feelings' is related to the person himself. It is established by memory only. The biographer surpasses memory and keeps a check on memory and depicts the improved version of memory and events. A biographer may portray a

person as per his affinities and likings. If a biographer has a fidelity to the facts then he may depict truthful account of a person. Otherwise he may depict an altogether different picture of a person. For instance, writers/journalists of 1960's and 1970's have presented us with crunchy life-stories of Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi. If we gather together all these life sketches then we may get quite integrated images of Nehru and Mrs. Gandhi. In autobiography the author has not to depend upon the account of others. He is autonomous enough to portray his/her feelings. The more truthful he is, the more authentic his autobiography is. Thus, we can say that biography and autobiography resemble much with one another. So far as basic characteristics are concerned. However, they differ a lot so far as their intrinsic structures are concerned.

### **Memoirs and Reminiscences:-**

A literary genre which expresses individual experiences based on memory can be called a memoir. Here the author expresses his thoughts related to a particular person or event or a place or of time-span.

Autobiography also expresses a person's memories related to persons, incidents, places or time-span. Hence, autobiography can be called a memoir. Formerly autobiography was considered as a memoir only. In 1809 Sir Robert Southey termed the word 'autobiography' for a memoir. Hence, it is very difficult to draw a boundary line between autobiography and a memoir. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* has remarkably distinguished the two forms as under:

“These (Memoirs) are autobiographies that usually emphasize what is remembered rather than who is remembering; the author instead of recounting his life, deals with those experiences of his life, people and events that he considers most significant”.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, memoirs depend much on recounting those events, places and persons which are important for the person himself. In autobiography the person who remembers is important. In memoirs the process of recollection is important. Autobiographical work ought to be devoid of prejudices and partiality. Memoirs ought not to be so. An autobiographer is expected to be impersonal and objective in self portrayal. Memoirist may sound more personal and subjective.

An autobiography is the story of the self. Memoir is the story of the memory. One celebrates the self, other memory. Autobiography uses memory as a tool to recreate the self. In a memoir memory itself is an end.

Autobiography and memoir both depict external incidents of life. However, memoir is more associated with the objective world. Autobiography is a recreation of the self through the interactions of the self with the external world. Hence, external life serves as a background to the self-depiction in autobiography. Autobiography is introvert and self-introspective. Hence, it depicts a new 'self' through the search of the 'self'. Memoir is also related to the life-story of the self. However, discovery of a new 'self' is not expected in it. It aims at the depiction of persons, incidents, time and circumstances. Political memoirs become more interesting because of its deep connection with the contemporary times.

A person who is an onlooker of life and has absorbed life in all its colours may promote a greater interest to his memoirs. The great critic J. T. Shipley has rightly distinguished memoir from autobiography in the following manner:

“Autobiography and memoirs though the terms are often used as if inter changeable are properly distinguished by the relative emphasis placed on character and on external events. Memoirs customarily give

some prominence to personalities and actions other than the writer's own; some are hardly more than accounts of historical occurrences ...".<sup>36</sup>

In English literature there are two classes of memoir:

1. Memoir
2. Reminiscence.

Roy Pascal has distinguished these two forms as under:

"One could distinguish memoir from reminiscence by saying that memoir concerns itself with public events, reminiscence with private relationships. The difference is primarily one of the content and does not affect the manner of composition or writing".<sup>37</sup>

The great poet Laureate Ravindranath Tagore gifted us with his 'Reminiscences' of life. It is a marvellous record of his literary muse and aspirations.

### **Diary:**

In its preliminary stages diary was considered a literary genre created not for publication. Diary implies a day-to-day record of a person's mundane realities.

Diary provides raw material for autobiography. Encyclopaedia has defined diary as under:

"The book in which are preserved the daily memorandums regarding events and actions which come under the writer's personal observation or are related to him by others".<sup>38</sup>

Further more 'Modern reference Encyclopaedia defines diary as:

"A day by day chronicle of events usually of a personal and intimate nature kept by an individual".<sup>39</sup>

All these definitions imply that a diarist keeps a record of his day to day experiences of life. He also records whichever information he gets

from others. Whether important or trivial, these incidents definitely exhibit the intensity of their effectiveness upon the writer.

It is not necessary that a diarist records his feelings regularly. He may put down his account on page after a day or two. Sometimes he may consume the time-span of a week or two. Thus, a diary may be written with irregular regularity. Nevertheless whatever he writes exhibits the impact of various incidents of life on his mind.

Sometimes a diary may be written in the form of quotations. Sometimes it is written with a precision of report. Occasionally it is written so elaborately as if the writer wants to present the history of each breath of his life. Diary acts as a search light for the person. It is not only a record of person's past and present but also a map for his/her future plans. Gandhiji considered diary as an instrument of self purification.

Diary serves a proper purpose of catharsis and acts as a true friend of a person. One can pour down one's innermost feelings in one's diary. Diaries portray the reality of the authors. 'Diary of a young girl' is an example of a diary in which an adolescent girl Anne feels lonely and friendless. She considers diary-writing as an act of friendly communion. This diary is a live record of a girl entering adolescence with all her physical and mental changes. How a girl is transformed from a small blossom to a fully grown flower – has been marvellously depicted.

Autobiography is written by an onlooker of life, therefore, it depicts some special moments of life. Diary is a hierarchy of moments. Both the literary forms resemble as both depict the history of self.

Autobiography is written at a neutral stage whereas diary is a form written along with time. Diary is a spontaneous picture of the person's response to an instant of time. Autobiography loses this spontaneity as it is written at a particular stage of time.

A diary may be proved an invaluable aid in its discourse with the self. It is a complementary and obligatory form to autobiography. Having achieved the result, autobiography depicts the procedure. While depicting the procedure diary reaches to the result. Autobiography is a retrospective report whereas a diarist often misses the chance of introspection.

## **Journal**

Journal resembles much with diary. Journal lacks the emotional touch and insight of the diary. Diary appears more intimate and private. In diary the writer maintains a discourse with the self. Journal appears precise and objective. ‘Modern reference Encyclopaedia’ considers journal as another form of diary and defines it as under:

“A journal is a form of diary but tends to be more detached, more detailed and more reflective”.<sup>40</sup>

It is very difficult to distinguish a Journal from diary. Journal expresses various incidents of life but a journal writer also judges those incidents in the light of other experiences. Journal reflects the thoughts of the writer but does not reflect the realistic background of those thoughts. Hence we do not get the idea about the reality of the writer. Diary exhibits the reality of the writer. The diary written by the great poet Rabindranth Tagore in which he has depicted his China-Japan tour is written more in the form of a ‘journal’ rather than diary. It does not narrate his day to day life. It reflects more the thought process of the writer during that journey. Journal is more neutral and objective in its depiction.

J. T. Shipley has remarkably distinguished the ‘journal’ from ‘diary’ in following words:



“The two terms identical in derivation and in primary meaning have acquired a slight differentiation, ‘journal’ being used for a more detached or reflective record than diary”.<sup>41</sup>

Autobiography portrays the mental state of the writer along with his materialistic life. Hence, autobiography is also related with a journal. As an autobiography is different from diary so it is different from journal. Autobiography depicts chronological record of the writer’s mental state, whereas journal does not give a chronological record. It has spontaneity of record.

Journal depicts regular development of the thought process of the writer. In autobiography incidents are important. In journal thoughts are important. Journal is more related to the mental thought process of the writer. Autobiography is more concerned with external realities as well as mental states of the writer.

### **Current Trends in autobiographical writings:-**

It has been rightly said: “Necessity is the mother of invention”. Due to vast exposure to computers and availability of internet, people started periodic web logging from which gradually the word ‘blog’ has been derived. The term ‘**blog**’ was coined in the late 1990s from the word web logging. People kept blogs long before the term was coined, but the trend gained popularity with the introduction of automated publishing services. ‘Blog’ helps us to reach the globe. It provides us with a wide range of information in a very compact form. It keeps us updated.

A blog is type of website maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, description of events or other such material as graphic or video. There are various types of blogs like personalblog, artlog, photoblog, sketchblog, vlog, mp3blog, podcast, etc.

Personal blogs can be rightly called the innovative step in the area of life narratives. It is an ongoing diary or commentary by an individual. The form of a blog is dependent on the individual who keeps it. They depict what is happening in a person's life and what they feel about the world around. Thus, blogs are a kind of hybrid diary and guide.

Blogs often become more than a way to just communicate. They also have a sentimental quality. Personal blog is also referred to as 'microblogging' which is extremely detailed blogging as it seeks to capture a moment in time. Sites such as Twitter, helps bloggers to share thoughts and feelings instantaneously with family and friends. This form of social media is a click away for the tech savvy new generation to maintain a human touch and step beyond their humdrum lives.

Apart from the above literary forms notebook, letter, travelogues, personal essays and even autobiographical novels resemble much with autobiography. However an autobiography as a literary form occupies a distinct place in the realm of literature. It is a kind of linking chain between literature of knowledge and literature of power. It is not only a historical record of a person's life but an artistic incarnation of life story.

## References:

1. James Scott, *Making of Literature*. P. 6
2. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol – I.
3. Ibid, Vol – I, P. 573.
4. Ibid, Vol – I, P. 573.
5. *Collier's Encyclopedia*, Vol – 3, P. 319 (1962).
6. Dunn W.H., *English Biography*, P. 252.
7. Martin Gray, *A Dictionary of Literary terms*, (1984: rpt. Beirut: Longman York press, 1980), P. 33.
8. Waldo H. Dunn, *English Biography* (New York: Dutton & Co. 1916), P. 130-131.
9. Roy Dilip Kumar, *A Lover of Light among Luminaries*, Ch-9: The Form & History, P. 211.
10. James Olney, *Ed. Autobiography: Essays theoretical & Critical*, (Princeton: Princeton university press, 1980), P. 34.
11. Jannet V. Gunn, *Autobiography: Towards a poetics of Experience* (Philadelphia: university of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), P. 59.
12. Ed. By 'James Olney, 'On Writing Autobiography': studies in Autobiography, O.U.P., New York, 1988, P. 166.
13. Ed. By Kathleen Coburn I, *The notebooks of S.T. Coleridge* (London: Rout ledge & Kegan Paul), 1957, P. 74.
14. Ed. by. James Olney ' Conditions & Limits of autobiography: Essays theoretical and critical (Princeton university Press), 1980, P. 43.
15. Betterton Kathleen 'Writing', P. 135.
16. Ibid, P. 135.
17. Sayre Robert F, 'The Examined self', university of Wisconsin press, 1988, P. 6.
18. Naipaul V.S, *India: A Wounded civilization*, Penguin, 1979, P. 101.

19. As quoted in Sodhi Meena, *Indian English Writing – The Autobiographical Mode* creative books, New Delhi, 1999, P. 20.
20. As quoted in Dr. Kadia Rasila, *Atmakatha: Swaroop Ane Vikas* Sadbhav Prakashan, Amdavad, 1985, P. 117.
21. *Cassell's Encyclopaedia of English literature*, Vol-I, P. 74.
22. Marlene Fisher, *Mulkraj Anand as Autobiographer*, in *New Perspectives in Indian Literature & English*, P. 127.
23. As quoted in Sodhi Meena, *Indian English Writing – The Autobiographical Mode*, creative books, New Delhi, P. 17.
24. *Ibid*, P. 22.
25. *Ibid*, P. 37.
26. Roy Pascal *Design & Truth in Autobiography*, P. 183.
27. *Ibid*, P. 11.
28. *The Problem of Self*, Sadhana, Macmillan, 1988, P. 57.
29. As quoted in Dr. Kadia Rasila, *Atmakatha: Swaroop ane Vikas*, Sadhbhav Prakashan, Amdavad, 1985.
30. Khanna Shanti, *Aadhunik Hindi ka Jivaniparak Sahitya'*, P. 18.
31. Betterton Kathleen, 'Writing', P. 131.
32. B. Prasad , *A Background to the study of English literature*, P. 191.
33. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol-I, P. 870.
34. B.Prasad, *A Background to the study of English literature*, P. 194.
35. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol – II, P. 1009, (Edition-15).
36. Shipley J. T., *Dictionary of world literature*, P. 23.
37. Pascal Roy, *Design & Truth' in Autobiography* , P. 6.
38. *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol – 7, P. 365, (1964) .
39. *Modern Reference Encyclopedia*, Vol-6, P. 189.
40. *Modern Reference Encyclopedia*, Vol-XI, P. 77.
41. As quoted in Dr. Kadia Rasila, *Atmakatha: Swaroop ane Vikas* Sadbhav Prakashan, Amdavad, 1985, P. 55.



**CHAPTER: II**  
**INDIAN WOMEN**  
**AUTOBIOGRAPHIES: AN**  
**OVERVIEW**



## **CHAPTER: II**

### **INDIAN WOMEN AUTOBIOGRAPHIES: AN OVERVIEW**

Woman is the largess on the earth. She is a creator and mentor of the whole universe. One can't expect human existence without woman. Our Vedas and Upanishads have rightly termed woman as 'Nari tu Narayani' and she has been hailed as 'Yatra Naryastu Pujiyate Tatra Ramati Devata',<sup>1</sup> That is to say Gods are pleased, where females are worshipped. Thus, woman has been always placed amongst the divine. However, in reality her picture is altogether different. Woman has never demanded any exclusive place in the hierarchy. She has just expected the society to treat her in a human way. She has just demanded 'a room of her own'.

In writing a woman's life Carolyn G. Heilburn says that a woman's life can be described in four ways:

"... the woman herself may tell it, in what she chooses to call an autobiography; she may tell it in what she chooses to call fiction; a biographer, woman or man, may write a biography, or the woman may write her own life in advance of living it, unconsciously and without realising or naming the process".<sup>2</sup>

Domma Stanton in her article entitled "Autogynography: Is the subject Different?" considers women's autobiography as 'autogynography'. Critics like Germaine Bree or Shirley Neumann or Carolyn G. Heilburn have debated over the formation of women's autobiographies and checked the intensity of gender discrimination in it. There are several issues which have troubled the critics for a long time. Carolyn G. Heilburn has put forth several issues while discussing the essentials of a woman's autobiography:

“Where should it begin? With her birth and the disappointment or reason for no disappointment that she was not a boy? Do we then slide her into the Freudian family romance, the oedipal configuration; if not, how should we view her childhood? What in short, is the subject’s relation-inevitably complex with her mother? The relation with the father will be less, complex, clearer in its emotions and desires, partaking less of either terrible pity or binding love. How does she cope with the fact that value is determined by how attractive men find her? If she marries, why does the marriage fail, or succeed? <sup>3</sup>

Though Carolyn G. Heilburn’s questions have been raised with reference to western woman, they can be applied in the Indian context also. The basic difference between western women and the eastern counterpart is that of diversity in their socio-economic and cultural background. Generally, autobiography is a literary genre which unravels the inner most feelings of a writer. It provides self-exploration. But, can a woman, who is taught to be submissive and docile, achieve such a goal. Susan Stanford Friedman has very remarkably put forth this problem of gender-discrimination even in creative writing:

“A... man has the luxury of forgetting his.....sex. He can think of himself as an ‘individual’. Women.... Reminded at every turn in the great cultural hall of mirrors of their sex... have no such lluxury.<sup>4</sup>

Prof. Meena Sodhi appreciates natural creative genius of a woman auto biographer and opines that she can defend her self hood and narrate the story of her life very boldly. There is nothing unnatural in her creativity, which can not be a rival to her biological creativity. She advocates the ideas of radical feminists who consider woman’s literary creativity as a superior endowment:

“... the literary professions were first to be opened to women, the status of the women writer has long served as an index of a society’s

views on female abilities and rights. Although writing has never been regarded as an unfeminine accomplishment, women writers have always encountered more critical resistance than men”.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, Prof. Meena Sodhi has advocated women’s capacity of critical resistance in her critical work “Indian writing in English-The autobiographical mode’. However, we find a whole lot of women autobiographers who consider women’s culture, as a ‘sub-culture’: men’s culture being the main culture, with the women confirming mainly to it. A woman is taught to be selfless, submissive and is only a daughter, a wife or a mother. On the other hand, following Milton’s view:

“He for God only, She for Goding him”, man is always made a God by a mother, a wife and a daughter. Man is a man only because he is pampered and wooed by a woman.

Sometimes, all the three – a wife, a mother and a daughter are rolled into one, as in the character of ‘Candida’. She confesses remarkably her role in her household and focuses on the real character of her husband James Morell when she says; “Ask me what it costs to be James’s mother and three sisters and wife and mother to his children all in one... I build a castle of comfort and indulgence and love for him and stand sentinel always to keep little vulgar cares out. I make him master here, though he does not know it and could not tell you a moment ago how it came to be so.”<sup>6</sup>

According to Andre Maurois, “Autobiography is a prolonged speech for the defence” and is of two types: one is where the writing is “as interesting as novels and as true as the finest ‘life’. It has truth of tone and a “fidelity and impartiality in portraiture of a very high quality indeed”. The best autobiographies are those which expose the inner journey of the self and depict the inner struggles of the person. It establishes a coherent and individual identity of the person.



Indian women writers have established a permanent place in the arena of literature, because they have written with a woman's point of view. They have not initiated male manner of writing. Majority of Indian women autobiographies belong to the first category of autobiography described by Andre Maurois. They have expressed a genuine female experience.

All the autobiographies from Sunity Devee's *The autobiography of an Indian Princess* (1921) to Mrinal Pandey's *Daughter's Daughter* (1993) and Taslima Nasreen's *My Girlhood Days* express the inner search of women with women's point of view. Until the end of nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, women autobiographies lack an authoritative voice to speak. They could speak only of family or religion.

“Although each author has significant, sometimes dazzling accomplishments to her credit, the theme of accomplishment rarely dominates the narrative.... Indeed to a striking degree they fail directly to emphasize their own importance, though writing in a genre which implies self-assertion and self-display.”<sup>7</sup>

In the later part of twentieth century, we find autobiographers like Amrita Pritam, Kamla Das, Shobha De, Dilip Tiwana, Sharanjeet Shan, Mrinal Pande and Bangladeshi writer Tasleema Nasreen who are very blunt in the expression of their innermost feelings. They have boldly expressed the social inhibitions and cultural taboos laid down by the society. Their autobiographies have tone of truth and fidelity.

Women writers like Vijayalaxmi Pandit, Krishna Hutheesing and Nayantara Sahgal have written their autobiographies basically about the Indian struggle for freedom. Hence, their autobiographies have political leanings too. We have to judge whether these writers have consciously or unconsciously secured their 'sense of self'. The autobiography depicts the

‘hidden form of inwardness’ and the writer has to establish the portrait of the self in the public eye. One has to consider whether a woman reveals her unique self and indulges in self-exploration.

There have been many women in India who have felt the urge to express their inner selves to the reading public. These women have been lawyers, political activists, women from royal families and so on. There is a remarkable distinction between the writings of a woman and a man. This is evident not only in India but round the world.

A woman’s autobiography generally deals with the various relationships like those with her parents, siblings and also with her spouse, children and other women of her family set up. Her identity is established only on the basis of these relationships in her life. A man’s autobiography is mainly concerned with his success story, achievements and the world of work. He rarely focuses on his familial relationships. George Henry Lewes says that a woman’s literature ‘promises a woman’s view of life, woman’s experience: in other words a new element’. But he further adds,

“Masculine mind is characterized by the predominance of intellect and the feminine by the predominance of emotions... Woman, by her greater affectionateness, her greater range and depth of emotional experience, is well fitted to give expression to the emotional facts of life...”<sup>8</sup>

Thus, women’s autobiographies deal mainly with the emotional turbulence of women and their relationships in the social set up. Nevertheless twentieth century came up with a set of women writers exposing extraordinarily intellectual and dashing women writers like Amrita Pritam, Kamala Das, Shobha De, Mrinal Pande and Dilip Tiwana. They are no longer passive, submissive ‘Sita’ or ‘Savitri’ but dashing, bold and innovative in their techniques of writing also.

India achieved freedom in 1947. Hence forth 'began a new era of challenges and changes in Indian life'. The new social scenario inspired creativity of the Indian writers in English as well as in other regional languages. Once the country became free and the society gained stability, people became candid and self-assertive. The social upheaval got expression not only in poetry and fiction but also in the autobiographies. The autobiographical genre got a new meaning and opened up new vistas of knowledge for all.

*The Autobiography of an Indian Princess* (1921) is one of the earliest writings by an Indian woman. Sunetee Devi, a daughter of Brahma follower Keshav Chandra Sen, who became the Maharani of Cooch Behar, lost her husband early in life. The book is a stepping stone in the realm of Indian women autobiographies as it depicts the inner feelings of most of the Indian women of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Sunity Devee's parents demanded that their daughter should be married as per the Brahma rites and rituals. At first her in-laws protested but the prince showered his choice on Sunity Devee only. Sunity Devee was well-educated yet felt proud in following her hubby's commands. She never wore pearl ornaments, as her husband did not like them. Furthermore, Maharaj did not permit her to mix up with other people, partying, dancing or horse-riding. She readily accepted restrictions of Maharaja and followed his footsteps like a true 'Pativrata'.

Two memorable moments of her life were the birth of his first son 'Raje' and her voyage to England with Maharaja. She felt that people of Cooch Bihar might have never given her so much recognition if she did not bear a male child as her first born.

After the death of Maharaja in 1911, Sunity Devee passed a 'sati' life and never complained anybody or crossed the limits of her honour. Then after she was guided and protected by her son, who married the

princess of Vadodara, Indira Gaekwad, without informing any one in the family. Sunity never uttered harsh words to anyone and accepted the modern life-style of her daughter in law.

It is obvious that the woman who always led traditional submissive life disliked the stylish life-style of her daughter in law. She tries not to mention much about her daughter in law in her autobiography, except that she was clever and beautiful'. Her autobiography concludes with the remark that, India shall be proud of her daughters.

One has to give a second thought. Did Sunity Devee achieve her identity in her society? One is not assured if her life turned out to be a role-model for other women of India? Looking to her emotional and intelligence quotient, we feel that the life which she might have led rarely contented her. Her discontented inner wishes might have led her to write autobiography wherein she has portrayed herself as an ideal Indian woman.

Another remarkable woman autobiography is *India Calling* (1934) by Cornelia Sorabji. It is the autobiography of India's first woman lawyer, who waged a struggle against the suppression of women. Sorabji belonged to Parsi-Christian family. She was inspired to choose her job by observing the plight of women who visited her mother. Her book depicts the gender discrimination encountered by her not only in India but also in England where she went to study on a government of India scholarship. She emerged victorious from her ordeals and succeeded in becoming a lawyer. Her autobiography deals mainly with her concern for improving the sad condition of the women in the Indian society.

*With No Regrets: an Autobiography* (1943) says the writer Krishna Hutheesing, is 'a book of memories and reminiscences'. Amiya Chakraborty has appreciated the treatment of the subject matter depicted by Krishna Hutheesing in her autobiography. Her autobiography has been

termed as a simple picture incarnated in a simple frame. Sarojini Naidu also considers this autobiography as a simple and intimate depiction of the events.

Krishna Hutheesing born in 1907 was the youngest child of the father Motilal Nehru and mother Sarup Rani. Her childhood passed in a very happy, healthy and gay manner, full of materialistic facilities.

In her childhood Krishna condemned those who got honour and love of all other family members. She notes two remarkable incidents related to this kind of nature. Firstly, she accepts that when her elder brother 'bhai' as she terms Jawarharlal, was about to return from England, she disliked the way in which all other family members were preparing to welcome him. She sometimes wondered why her mother took so much trouble just to please one son. She was not at all pleased to receive Jawahar. Nevertheless, in a very short span, Jawahar won his sister's heart. Secondly, she confesses that she condemned the father of our Nation- Gandhiji on her first meeting as he was honoured by all other people around her.

Just like Nayan Tara Sahgal, Krishna Hutheesing glorified the idea of being imprisoned for national cause and she was much pleased when in 1932 she was imprisoned for a whole year for the freedom-struggle of India. Moreover, she takes pride in being the family member of that historical family from which most of the people were imprisoned for the freedom movement of India.

She has remarkably noted that though she belonged to an advanced educated family of India, her parents never wished that she should join a paid job. They preferred some dignified job. She is proud that because of her worthy brother Jawaharlal only she joined a job as a teacher and later on joined politics.

Her autobiography is a record of the great Nehru family and the historical incidents of the country. However, it fails to bring out the individuality of the writer, who is more concerned with her father – Motilal Nehru. Nevertheless, the book does reflect her loneliness during the freedom struggle.

After independence, more and more Indian women were feeling confident in expressing themselves through life narratives. A Khoja girl, Ishwani Pseud, wrote an autobiography entitled *Girl in Bombay* (1947). The book reveals the writer's determination to pursue her own religion that is Shiya Khoja creed rather than pursuing the religion of her husband that is Agakhani Khoja. She becomes so much determined that she divorces her husband Rashid. After the death of his mother, Ishwani's father remarried. The step-mother laid down strict inhibitions on Ishwani and her sister. Marrying an educated Agakhani Khoja youth meant freedom for Ishwani. However, after the marriage, she encountered the same conservative environment at her in laws. She disliked the hypocritical manner in which all the other daughter in-laws pretended at the dining table and tried to satisfy their appetite by hiding the food in their handkerchiefs and eating it later in their bedrooms. At last Ishwani abandoned her thralldom.

*The City of Two Gateways: The autobiography of An Indian Girl* (1950) is a noteworthy autobiography written by Savitri Devi Nanda.

She was born at her maternal home and for first three years she did not meet her father. When at the age of three her father came to take little Savitri and her mother with him, she was overwhelmed with joy. She considered her father as the most handsome man on the earth. Her father always encouraged her to be a tomboy and wanted to give her good education. On the other hand, her mother did not appreciate her boyish behaviour and sent her back to her grandparents' house for a disciplined

upbringing. Her life story reveals the training she received in domestic chores. By her maternal grandmother, she was not allowed to enjoy a carefree childhood, but was taught to be a docile, cute girl like all her cousins. Her father understood her truly and couldn't see the child being crushed under the social taboos. Hence, one night he took her away from the grandparents' home and got her admitted in a convent school. Later, she pursued medical profession and wrote her life-story on the banks of Thames.

The subtitle of her autobiography needs consideration. It does remind us of what Germaine Bree argued in her chapter entitled 'Autobiography' that, why should there be a separate section for 'women's' autobiography?

"I was somewhat puzzled by the implications of the title. We were not in any other section, invited to discuss men's' autobiography".<sup>9</sup>

Thus, autobiographical writing both by men and women is determined by the socio-historical background of the era.

*Maharani, the Story of an Indian Princess* (1953) is story of a woman 'trying to defy convention'. In the royal family of the early twentieth century, male supremacy was predominant which is evident in this work. Here the father in law of Brinda abused and insulted her for not bearing a son. The autobiography is a tragic story of a helpless girl in a male dominated society.

Engaged at the tender age of ten, Brinda was taken under the guardianship of her future father-in-law. She was sent to Paris to learn the western ways of life and etiquette along with a French governess appointed by her father-in-law. There she fell in love with a French man whom she called gay. The author Dr. Ranjana Harish ironically remarks that Brinda possessed royal elegance, woman like beauty and extreme individuality of disposition. Her autobiography is a story of a conflict

between the opposite poles of two-value systems: the East and the West. Her autobiography is a story of dilemma in the mind of western-educated Indian lady. She never wanted to return to the Indian way of life and adapt herself to the old customs and traditions once again.

It was a paradox that the father-in-law, who had sent her Paris to become sophisticated modern woman, expected her to follow the ideal of a docile, timid, obedient wife. She started defying her in-laws and husband. The drift between them widened when she gave birth to three daughters subsequently. She established a girls' school in her area to empower girls of the area and decided to do some social work. Her father in law disgusted her social work. He insisted that she undergo a painful surgery for producing a son. The operation failed and her husband was forced to marry a second wife. In order to get the Queenly-Crown, Brinda had to continue her conflict-habituated life in the same home with her three daughters Indira, Urmila and Sushila.

The concluding chapter of the autobiography depicts Brinda's relationship with her three daughters among whom Indira, the eldest one was very independent like her. The other two were docile and modest and passed happy marriage life. Brinda also passed her remaining life among friends and relatives in foreign land. The last chapter concludes with Brinda's discussion with her daughter Indira. Brinda concludes the life story by expressing that each one has to build up his/her destiny. In order to break the age old conventions one has to rebel.

After Krishna Hutheesing, Nayan Tara Sahgal is another woman from the Nehru family who used the autobiographical form of writing. She is a novelist and columnist of great repute. She has written two autobiographies 1) *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (1954), 2) *From Fear set Free* (1962). Sahgal considers writing as an invaluable aid which has



great therapeutic value. Considering cathartic function of literature, she remarks:

“Wring of any sort helps to put your own world in order, all the shapeless, bewildering fragments of it. It helps you to figure out what is happening in and around you.....These are things that will never be understood until they are written, and sometimes not even then. But writing helps the process”.<sup>10</sup>

Prison and Chocolate Cake is full of reminiscences from the family record, with emphasis on the political life of the family at Anand Bhawan in Allahabad. William Walsh thinks that it is a significant trend started by a woman that of bringing politics in her works. Nayantara Sahgal’s writings have qualities of ‘dashing journalistic prose’, which exhibits her interest in the minute details of the political life.

Sahgal’s another autobiography *From Fear Set Free* is a sequel to the first one. It unravels Gandhian influence on the writer. Here, Sahgal’s personal experience is emphasized more than the political activities. The core of both the books is personal experience through which the writer reaches for the liberation of her spirit. The first autobiography was not written with a view to publish and the writer had not maintained records. Hence the chronological order has not been maintained.

Just like Sunity Deves, Shoilbala Das was another girl who loved to dress up like a boy. Nevertheless her life story *A look before and after* (1956) does not express any feeling of inferiority for being born a girl. She is a ‘born fighter’ and ‘a blunt woman’. She is bold and assertive. She received high education, often in boy’s college. She transformed a boys’ college of Cuttack in a co-education college. She never liked to mix up with docile and modest girls. Her friend circle consisted mainly of boys.

She was an adopted child of Madhusudan Das, who was an important political leader of Orissa. He sent her to Cambridge to take teachers' training course. On her return, she helped her father in the affairs of the Orissa state. Because of her bold attitude, she got an honorary post of Magistrate in Orissa. She later became a member of the state's Public Service Commission and held many public posts later in life.

Another significant autobiography of the period is *On the wings of fire* by Kamala Dongerkery, written in 1968. The book deals with some prevalent customs and traditions in the country. Kamala Dongerkery received good education but was married at the age of eleven. She had been trained to respect patriarchy and to believe that the male-child was the primary supporter of the family. She had a remarkable capability of adjusting herself in a large family, which helped her a lot in her in-laws' home. Kamala Dongerkery discusses the dictatorial behaviour of her mother in law, on whom she depended financially also, as her husband handed over all his salary to his mother. The mother in law tortured Kamala, as she was childless. Even in unfavourable circumstances Kamala established her individual identity by becoming a social worker in Maharashtra. She also achieved success as a handicraft critic and published many books on Indian Handicraft.

Another heart wrenching but unique autobiography is *Beyond the Jungle* (1968) written by a tribal girl Sita Rathnamala. She lived in the jungles of the Nilgiri Hills. She had a happy and protected childhood with a caring father. Her autobiography depicts her childhood escapades into the jungle with her friends. As a child, she always wished to go beyond the jungle and explore the new world unknown to her. Later on she received a scholarship by the Department of Education, Government of

India to study in the Dodo Boarding school. Here, she acquired sophistication of the civilized society.

In her childhood when she was injured and taken to the hospital, she was nurtured by Dr Krishna Ranjan. Later on she joined nursing and went for training in Dr. Krishna Ranjan's hospital. Her adoration for Dr. Ranjan turned into love and Dr. Ranjan also confessed his inner feelings for her. However, being a son of an orthodox Brahmin parents, Dr. Krishna Ranjan was unable to accept a non-Brahmin girl's hand in marriage. Disillusioned Sita returned to her small town in the lap of nature. She always strived to go beyond the jungle, but the reality which she found there was not digestible for her. Beyond the jungle, she found the world of Pomp, Snobbery and class consciousness. There, she found another heartless jungle of cement-concrete, full of wild animals- human beings.

A woman is expected to be modest, shy, demure, passive, soft-spoken and attractive. She is not encouraged to be active, assertive, competitive and unattractive." Most women writers do not write about the condition of being born homely". Catherine Drinker Bowen remarks: "Every girl who lacks beauty knows instinctively that she belongs to an unprivileged group and that to climb up and out she will have to be cleverer and stronger and more ruthless perhaps than she would choose to be".<sup>11</sup>

The above statement is most suitable to Urmila Haksar. In her life-story *The Future That Was* (1972). Urmila Haksar recounts that her grandmother never forgave her for being born a girl and that too not very beautiful. This made her rebel against the established norms of gender prejudice. Urmila was not only conscious of her unattractive looks but also of the winsome looks of her sister. Hence, she concentrated more on her studies and being intelligent, excelled in her student life.

She never accepted the conservative, suffocating world of female sex and always developed friendship with male cousins of her family. Her father always appreciated and fostered her carefree, outward personality. While her elder sister learned fragile homely chores from the other female members of her family, she passed her time in discussing sports, politics and other current problems with boys. She candidly confesses her anxiety related to her menstrual cycle. Her mother imposed so many restrictions on her during periods, without giving any solution to her inner most worries. She disgusted her menstrual cycles and never followed the rules imposed by her family. Her mother never discussed anything about the adolescence with her. During her periods Haksar cried and cried for a long time without getting any response from the elderly people. Due to her physical changes she started condemning her sex more intensely.

Nancy Friday has depicted a marvellous Jewish tradition and importance of mother-daughter relationship during menstrual period. In Jewish culture, when a girl has her menstrual period for the first time, she is slapped by her mother. Thus, the girl feels a self-pity, anguish and negative feelings for the society throughout the life.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless Urmila turned out to be a rebel against society.

She taught political science in Kamala Raja Girls College Gwalior after achieving high qualifications in her subject. In 1952, she married the popular History scholar Shri N. Haksar. Leading a happy married life for 38 years, she died on 29<sup>th</sup> of November 1989. She left behind a husband and two daughters, Nandita and Anamika. In his letter to Dr. Ranjana Harish, Shri N. Haksar has mentioned that Urmila condemned her premarital life so much that she never liked to mention her parental surname 'Sapru' along with her name. She has always written under the name 'Urmila Haksar'.

Thus, Urmila Haksar's life-story is a role model for all those girls whose personalities are crushed by their rigid, conservative parents and the hypocritical social norms.

George Gusdorf opines that each person thinks himself to be a special being, "worthy of special interest"<sup>13</sup> this makes him write about himself and his life in an autobiography. Each individual considers himself to be a 'unique self', with a special identity. Hence, the process of writing becomes a "quest for identity". We can say, "The autobiographical work develops as the author develops".<sup>14</sup> Related to this process of development is a question which a true auto biographer, according to A.O.J. Cockshut has to answer, "How did I become what I am?"<sup>15</sup> It is this process of conversion which was first seen in Augustine's 'confessions'.

Prof. Meena Sodhi, inquiring the structure of Women's autobiographies asks: "How many of these women autobiographers have been able to establish their identity through their writings? How any of these women autobiographers can answer the crucial question put forth by Cockshut?"<sup>16</sup> There are not many, but undoubtedly some women autobiographers have revealed their true self successfully through their life-stories.

Kamala Das is one of the most distinctive female writers of her time. Her autobiography *My Story* (1976) is one of the bold, uninhibited self-revelations seen in recent times. *My Story* is an attempt at redefining male-female relationship. It is a challenging account of the writer's mental as well as physical urges. Through her life-story Das has redefined her personality. It is an account of a woman who tries to live traditionally but is forced to break the social rules in order to satisfy her instincts.

Das's childhood was spent like a common Indian girl. Her mother was from the royal Nalapat family. Her father was a peasant Nair, who

later became a Managing Director with a British concern. In the very beginning of her life narrative Kamla Das confesses that there was no bridge of communication between the parents and the kids. Kamala and her brother were always treated indifferently. She remarks:

“They took us for granted and considered us mere puppets moving our limbs according to the tugs they gave us. They did not stop for a moment to think that we had personalities that were developing independently, like sturdy shoots of the banyan growing out of crevices, in the walls of ancient fortresses”.<sup>17</sup>

“Every dark cloud has a silver lining”. Though Kamala was not closer to her parents, she had a loving and indulgent grand mother. She has given detailed accounts of the customs and traditions in the Nair family; the performances of Ottanthullal dancers, the theatre group which she and her friends established.

Das’s romantic ideas of life shattered soon as she was betrothed to a man double her age. He only wanted to maul her body. After marriage his behaviour became insensitive and the tender Kamala had to encounter a kind of rape regularly. However, she enjoys her role as a mother and looked after her son very indulgently. Her husband disliked the baby around the house. Because of his callous behaviour Kamala Das decided to be ‘unfaithful to him, at least physically’.

After the birth of her third son, Kamala turned out to be religious and went to live in Malabar house along with her sons. Her relatives were not happy to see her without her husband and thought her twenty four years old marriage was on rocks. But she paid heed to none. She lived there happily fully stuffed with gold jewellery and cultivated her lands like a true peasant.

India, in early nineteenth and twentieth century was a country of kings and queens. We find many autobiographies written by princesses

and Maharanis, which at the time of publication provided the much needed revelation of the royal women. Most of them had lived behind the 'Purdah'. However, most of them were well-educated. Some of them had got their education in European countries too. Writing in English did not create a problem for them. They were quite familiar with the western way of life. Hence writing an autobiography - a document of self-recapitulation and revelation came naturally to them. Most of these autobiographies focus on the lives of these queens in the kingly shadow of their husbands. They participated actively in social and political activities of their times but they never appeared ambitious enough to hold independent positions. Right from their childhood, they were trained to be submissive and to perform their duty.

Gayatri Devi's autobiography 'The Princess Remembers' (1975) is a landmark in the autobiographical writings by Indian 'Maharanis'. It is the story of queen of Jaipur who gave up 'Purdah' to join politics and won every election. she played a vital role in the welfare of her state of Jaipur. However her life-story concentrates more on the personal events of her life than on politics.

Another important life-story of the time is 'An Inheritance' (1977) by Dhanwantri Rama Rau. Her autobiography exposes the making of a woman. Right from their childhood, Indian women are given the inheritance of their culture to imbibe the womanly virtues of 'Savitri' and 'Sita'. They were supposed to conform to the conservative male-dominated rules.

Dhanwanti's mother was much concerned about the education and well-being of her daughters. Despite the familial opposition, Dhanwanti was admitted to the presidency college of Madras in 1909. It was a 'brave decision' in those days. Her mother gave her an approval to take up a teaching job for economic independence. Dhanwantri Rama Rau was

married to an I.C.S. officer in a registered marriage. She was given the new name of 'Sita' after marriage. However, her Cambridge educated husband did not call his wife by any name and showed no intimacy towards her in public. He did not like her interaction with people. Nevertheless Dhanwanti developed into an individual in her own right.

Another woman of substance is Shudha Mazumdar. Her autobiography 'A Pattern of Life' (1977), describes how the women of the house lived in the inner rooms of the house while the father occupied the outer rooms. He followed a western style of life and gave Shudha a good education in a Christian school. Shudha's autobiography expresses her awareness of being a female as she narrates that as a child she was taught that the female was inferior to the male. However her father considered her birth to be an important moment in 1899. Her childhood was spent in observing 'Vratas' to get a good husband and little Shudha was taught that it was "a sin to displease one's father". The same applied to the husband. Shudha naturally considered women as a second sex and followed the path led by all common women of her times. Her mother did not allow her to eat meat even though her brothers ate it. Her father always supported Shudha in all the matters. Shudha's mother never objected her husband; but advised him to make Shudha an heiress of a little part of his estate; for her safe future. When Shudha's father did not follow her mother's advice, she was withdrawn from the Christian school by her mother.

Shudha was married at the age of thirteen to a man who was in Bengal civil service. He persuaded Shudha to give up 'Purdah' and learn to read and write to become a perfect wife. She also became a social worker, adapted new ways of life, but never abandoned her traditional values learnt at her parents' home. After husband's death, she defied the social norms and wore coloured saris and attended meetings abroad.



Indira Gandhi seems to be the only woman from the Nehru family, apart from her mother, who did not want to write her life-story. Her aunt Vijayalakshmi Pandit's 'The scope of happiness' (1979) is an important work revealing the affluent life style of the Nehrus and their contribution in the freedom struggle. Here is the powerful woman who fought for the inheritance rights of the women of India. She served as India's ambassador in many countries.

Vijayalaxmi Pandit had an arranged marriage at the age of twenty and she willingly changed her maiden name 'Sarup Kumari', which she had never liked, to 'Vijayalaxmi' the conquering goddess laxmi'. Later both the husband and the wife became actively involved in the freedom struggle. She felt guilty for neglecting her domestic duties, but she did not sacrifice her career. She had a successful political career. She was elected the president of the eighth session of the General Assembly of the United Nations. Later she was made the Governor of Maharashtra. Her political achievements did not hinder her womanly qualities.

Another outstanding woman auto biographer is Durgabai Deshmukh. There is a marvellous presentation of her childhood days in her autobiography Chintaman and I (1980). Her father taught her to be selfless and have a humanitarian approach towards life. She was quite unaware about her womanliness. Her autobiography also depicts her deeds in public life. She joined the work of social service at the tender age of twelve. Her parents always encouraged her for her outspoken behaviour. With the help of women's organizations Durgabai protested 'Purdah' system and Devdasi culture. She also fought for women's rights.

She belonged to a traditional Hindu family and was married to the son of a 'Zamindar' at the age of eight. Later, she divorced him so that he could marry again. At the age of 12, she organized a meeting for the women of her town to be addressed by Gandhiji, so that they could

abandon 'Purdah'. Her autobiography reveals her keenness for the women to be educated.

In 1940 she established the 'Andhra Mahila Sabha'. She did her matriculation from the Banaras Hindu University and her B.A. from Andhra University in 1939. She also studied law and became a criminal lawyer.

Despite all her education, Durgabai considered herself 'almost a rustic' and was hesitant to accept the marriage proposal of C. D. Deshmukh, the then finance Minister in the Nehru Ministry. However, the marriage proved to be happy and successful as the two individuals adored and respected each other. Durgabai states in her autobiography "When I look back over the twenty six years of our married life, I cannot find even a single instance where we differed significantly. Thus, there was no question of adjustment because adjustment and compromise arise only when one differs basically from the other on a significant matter. We are assimilated in one another and were integrated as a soul like Parvati and Parameshwar".<sup>17</sup>

Another significant life story is 'My Reminiscences' (1982) by Renuka Ray. We can discuss it as a related form to life-narrative. Here is a woman born to the most advanced family of Bengal. In the conservative Indian society, where generally a male child is welcomed with pomp and ceremony, Renuka's birth was a rare one indeed to be celebrated with a great pomp. She was lucky to be born in highly educated Brahmo family of I.C.S. officer Satishchandra Mukherjee and Charulata Mukherjee. Her mother was one of the pioneers of feminism. Her Maternal grandfather Dr. P. K. Ray was the first principal of the Presidency College and fortunate to be a teacher of great figures like Dr. Radhakrishnan and Dr. Rajendraprasad. Her home in Calcutta was a meeting place for great

figures like Gandhiji, Dadasaheb Naoroji, Gopalkrishna Gokhale and other freedom fighters.

Renuka went for further studies to U.K. where she met a youth named Satyajeet Ray. He had completed his studies in natural sciences and achieved the degree of I.C.S. The acquaintance turned into friendship and love, which resulted in marriage. After her engagement Renuka and her fiancé returned to India in 1925. Gandhiji invited both of them for a meeting. Gandhiji warned Renuka's fiancé that Renuka's first objective in life would be to serve her Nation. He advised Mr. Satyajeet to give a second thought as he was a servant of the British and Renuka was devoted to the freedom struggle. Satyajeet promised 'Bapu' not to hinder Renuka's mission in present as well as in future. Thus, with proper understanding and decided mission Renuka and Satyajeet got married and passed a successful life together.

Renuka fought for women's rights and laws related to divorce. She enjoyed various dignified posts in the then government in 1952-57; she served as a minister for relief and rehabilitation. From 1957-67 she remained an elected member of parliament. From 1958 to 60 she remained an active member and Head in the Planning Commission of social welfare and Welfare of Backward Class. In 1967, she did not get the ticket in congress and it was the end of her political career.

The last chapter of her autobiography *In Retrospect* summarizes her political career. She has mentioned her private life in few paragraphs only. She has briefly discussed her family, kids, kinsman and the agony related to her husband's death. It is notable that she has referred to her two bright kids – Ranjana and Rati in her life story once or twice only. Her autobiography does not conclude with the memories of self content. It is more a piece of social-documentation. She gives more importance to

creativity as its own end rather than materialistic facilities, she opines that chivalry and sacrifice has its own charm.

Another significant contribution in women's autobiographies is *Princess: The Autobiography of the Dowager Maharani of Gwalior* (1985). Vijaya Raje Scindia, who was 'Lekha' prior to her marriage, but agreed to the change of her name. She says that her husband was her God. In order to please him she became a non-vegetarian. After her husband's death she had been torn to pieces. Due to differences in political ideology, she had to suffer alienation from her only son. Her autobiography is an account of the plight of a woman, her pain, her sorrows and her sacrifice. She also served as a chancellor in Sagar University.

Another significant autobiography published in 1991 is Sharanjeet Shan's *In My Own Name*, which we shall, discuss later on.

Another significant autobiography of the period is Kamaladevi Chattopadhyaya's *Inner Recesses outer spaces* (1986). It is distinct in the sense that it unravels the story of a woman's heart, who is a bit reserved and shy. She is the woman who is greatly influenced by her maternal grandmother and mother under the influence of her mother she had imbibed the feministic ideas of Pandit Ramabai Saraswati and Annie Beasant. Her marriage to her friend Sarojini Naidu's brother was a failure. In the concluding chapter of her life-story, she accepts that she did not like to exhibit her innermost feelings publicly. Moreover, she did not tolerate those who exposed themselves publicly. Life had been very hard for her and she did not achieve anything easily in life. She was a devoted freedom fighter and enjoyed the position of a chairman of 'Indian Handicraft Cell', vice chairman of Sangeet-Natak Academy and general Secretary of 'All India Women's Council'. The concluding chapters of her autobiography reveal that she passed her last few years of life in the fear of death and uncertainty of life.

*Portraits of an Era* (1988) is another significant life-story by Tara Ali Baig. As the title suggests this autobiography is a beautiful portrayal of great figures of twentieth century. Here Tara has portrayed her personal and intimate experiences with great figures like Gandhiji, Nehru, Rajendraprasad, Jinnah and his Parsi wife Petit, Homi Bhabha, Somerset Maugham, Sarojini Naidu, Actress Devika Rani, Anna Pavlov, Udayshankar, Dalai Lama and Mr. and Mrs. Deshmukh. She has associated her individual experiences with all these great figures in such a manner that they appear live on the page. Tara Ali Baig was a well known writer of Multi Media and also the president of 'Indian Council of Child-welfare'.

Another remarkable life-story of the period is 'In Love with Life' by Dr. Prema Naidu. She was a practising doctor and professor of medical science in Osmania Medical College, Hyderabad. Prema Naidu passed a very hectic busy life as a doctor. Both, the husband and the wife worked in different hospitals in different cities and met only on weekends. During internship they chose the same sessions and Doctor Naidu proposed Prema through a hastily written chit. Prema loved to play a role of a typical house-wife for her husband during week-ends. Week-ends remained the most exciting moments for the couple. In the concluding chapters of her life-story, she requests the great God to announce her summons and to conclude her hectic, long and exhaustive life so that she can sleep peacefully forever. Nevertheless she is fully contented with life and has no regrets. The autobiography has been written in a very realistic manner. Her life-story is a marvellous evidence of how an autobiography can be a piece of consolation and self content. Her autobiography echoes the thought process of John Peeling's 'Autobiography, as a crisis'.<sup>19</sup>

In many of these women autobiographies we find that a sense of failure continues despite having achieved success in their life. They felt discrimination in their childhood, Carolyn Heilburn opines; “Nostalgia, particularly for childhood, is likely to be a mask for unrecognized anger”.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, all these women have attempted to glorify their childhood memories. In the later part of their life they were acknowledged with the fact that their births were not very happy events for their families. Until then, they enjoyed the best part of their lives, their childhood: “For women, adulthood-marriage or spinsterhood implied relative loss of self unlike men, therefore, they looked back fondly to the relative freedom and power of childhood and youth”.<sup>21</sup> The depiction of childhood has been a favourite theme for the autobiographers. As a matter of fact, the childhood memories are often second-hand. Generally, parents and grandparents narrate incidents from early life. Thus depiction of childhood is an indirect experience. What is offered as recollections of childhood is generally no more than what the writers have heard about themselves from others.

The birth of a female child is still not a very joyous event in many of Indian families, where the girl child is announced as “It has arrived”. Many of the women autobiographers have not elaborated it but some have discussed the attitude of the other family members at the time of their birth. It is interesting to note that Vijaylaxmi Pandit’s *The Scope of Happiness* (1979) gives a detailed account of the birth of a girl in the Nehru family. Kamla Nehru was expecting a child and all the family members waited anxiously outside the room. After some time Swarup Rani announced “Hua...”, at which Motilal Nehru laughingly asked “Bachcha Hua?” When his wife did not reply, he understood that a girl child had been born and announced it to the whole family:

“Mother had not said a son is born but ‘it’ has been born. In the traditional way she could not bring herself to announce the birth of a daughter!”<sup>22</sup>

The same girl child who was not welcomed by her family members at the time of her birth, became India’s first woman Prime Minister! If the elite class of India possessed such a state of mind, then what would one expect from the lay man?

Dr. Shubha Tiwari has illustrated the childhood of various women autobiographers in her book *Children and Literature*. She remarks that childhood is usually associated with happy memories. However, autobiographies of Kamala Das, Sharanjeet Shan, Dilip Tiwana and even Shobha De reveal the social stigmas attached with the birth of a girl child.

Dr. Shubha Tiwari remarks that as a child Kamala was very ordinary in her looks. At the tender age of nine she was made conscious of her dark complexion. Her grandmother rubbed raw turmeric all over her body before the oil bath. Her father found her to be too rustic for his likings. So Kamala was admitted to a boarding school run by the German Catholic nuns. Kamala was given proper education but her father was quite orthodox. At the age of fifteen, Kamala was forced to marry a person quite double her age. She comments: “I was a burden and a responsibility neither my parents nor my grandmother could put up with for long. Therefore with the blessing of all, our marriage was fixed”.<sup>22</sup>

Dr. Shubha Tiwari points out that the girl’s childhood was scaled with an unhappy marriage. There was no one to share her misery and pain. In such circumstances she took to writing. Soon her poems were accepted by the journal P.E.N.

*Selective Memory* (1998) is an engaging candid memoir of Shobha De. Here she writes poignantly of her earlier years and of her relationship with her parents and siblings. She writes, “Unfortunately for my mother I

was not a second son she prayed for. My birth could not possibly have been a day of celebration for the family especially since my maternal grandmother was around to remind everybody that third daughter had arrived as an additional liability....”<sup>23</sup>

It was only Rao Saheb, Shobha’s father who rejoiced on seeing the perfectly formed infant. He consoled his wife by telling her that God had been kind to them by giving such a healthy and good looking daughter. Fortunately for the family many changes for the good happened after the birth of Shobha. She was considered lucky for the family. Thus, the initial feeling of being let down by the daughter’s birth was transformed to warmth and love soon after. Shobha De shares memories related to her first pregnancy. She confesses that during her first pregnancy women told that if a woman glows and looks pretty then it predicts the birth of a girl child. On hearing this, Shobha stopped blooming. Unconsciously the pressure of producing a son took hold of her. She was worried that if her first born would be a girl, then it would disappoint the eager family.

The social conditioning is so deeply rooted in our psyche that even modern women like Shobha De succumb to social pressures of having a baby boy as their first born.

Another significant portrayal of gender-discrimination has been found in Dilip Tiwana’s *A Journey on Bare Feet*, (1990). Tiwana was born into a traditional family of rich and prosperous Zamindars. She remembers her mother as a neglected woman in the family because she had not given birth to any son. Tiwana’s grandmother never spoke gently to her daughter in law. She rebuked her daughter in law in the worst manner:

“What good are you if you can not give us a son.” (Tiwana:17)  
“Oh! God it’s our bed luck that you have fallen to our lot. That bride of the Peepal tree house took no time in giving birth to two sons in quick



succession. A lucky family indeed! And you?”<sup>24</sup> After many years of prayers a son was born in the family. Tiwana at last had a brother. Grandmother lavishly distributed wheat among the poor and many other gifts were also offered. Tiwana could perceive the difference in the treatment given to the son and the three elder daughters. Tiwana records another problem which is usually faced by girls in our society. She recalls the time when her marriage was settled. When only few months were left for the wedding, parents of the boy broke off the engagement. The social stigma that a daughter in the family had been rejected was uppermost in the minds of all at home. The rejection of a daughter for marriage would also affect the prospects to Tiwana’s two younger sisters as well. Years later Tiwana’s aunt brought another proposal. This time she said sarcastically:

“What belongs to the garbage dump must ultimately find a place there. Girls can’t live in their parents’ homes all their lives. They must go where they belong. Here’s a good opportunity coming your way. Of course, you can try in other place. Nobody can stop you from doing that. But they would all insinuate that she is a once-rejected girl, you may find yourself at a dead end.”<sup>25</sup>

Thus, Tiwana's autobiography unravels typically Indian social scenario and the social issues. Her account is essentially personal, yet her struggle is the struggle of every woman. She has focused on several concerns of women such as dowry, women’s education, the general preference for sons and the status of woman. Her autobiography, *A Journey on Bare Feet* received the Gurumukh Singh Musafir Award in 1982.

Another significant autobiography concerned with the struggle of woman right from her childhood is *In My own Name* (1991) by Sharanjeet Shan. Shan’s life story expresses extraordinary courage, faith

and determination. She had a very independent mind and extraordinary individuality. She defied all the restrictions imposed on her right from her childhood. In the preface to her life story, she writes “My book is merely a narration of the tragic events of a bright young girl’s life; a life that was transformed, indeed cut short because of the orthodox marriage system.... It is a statement of agony on behalf of the many hundreds of girls who go through the same trauma even today.”<sup>26</sup>

Recounting the time of her birth, she remarks; that was my beginning to Sardar Ajeet Singh and Bibi Pritam Kaur, a daughter, born to be ‘Parai’ (some one else’s property.) Shan’s brother was born one and a half year later. Sharanjeet was told to be a good sister and share everything with her brother Paramjeet. She was taught all the household chores right from her childhood. Her brother was encouraged to play and participate in all extra-curricular activities. Sharanjeet was confined to the four walls of her home. Her interest in current fashions was severely criticized by her father. Her brother was always nurtured with vital delicacies like apples, milk and ovaltine. He was not allowed to share all these delicacies with his sister as she was ‘a parai’ and so she must learn to suppress such temptations.

Shan took special pleasure while listening to her mother singing: “My son will grow up to be a king one day”. She thought that if all the sons in India would take up the throne one day, there was bound to be a glorious mess. According to her father, it was bad deeds of past lives, which caused one to be born woman or to a schedule caste. She is often confused about her role as a daughter. She ‘tongue in cheek’ remarks that, on the one hand a daughter is referred to as Devi (Goddess), while on the other hand she is always looked upon as a burden, a temporary guest, a duty to be discharged. She feels that the reference to ‘Devi’ has been

made in order to cover up a kind of guilt the parent might feel for having given birth to daughters.

Another such life-story narrating a conflict habituated childhood is *Daughter's Daughter* (1993) by Mrinal Pande. It is a book about growing up as a girl. Gender discrimination was felt by Mrinal Pande in the early years of her life. In the preface to the book Pande writes, "I know, even as I write this, girls are being destroyed in wombs by new techniques, being tortured and burnt for dowry... No, survival is not easier for our young girls today than it was for us"<sup>27</sup>

Most of the events are narrated in the background of her grandmother's home, where her being the daughter's daughter was always a disadvantage. All the attention was paid to her cousin, Anu, the grandson of the family. Their grand father would often treat Anu to a slice of mango but the daughter's daughters, i.e. Dinu and Tinu were deprived of such favours.

Mrinal Pande has expressed the sorrow of her mother, Shivani, who had three daughters and pined for a male child. When her mother was expecting the fourth child, the relatives called Prakash, a cousin to predict the sex of the unborn child. He made a sign of a money box with his hands which clearly meant a boy. Girls were bad cheques, they were like auctioneer decrees. Boys brought in money, land, gold everything. Girls just took away things."<sup>28</sup> Mrinal Pande recollects the day when her brother was born. Her mother looked so relieved and relaxed. Her grandmother hugged the youngest grand daughter who had brought a brother on her back. All the relatives remarked that now the brother will protect the sisters and carry on the family's name.

Thus, the childhood experiences of notable women writers expose the deep rooted disbeliefs of our society. The gender discrimination is very evident and obvious. The preference for a male child, the pity for a

mother of daughters, the different set of morals for boys and girls has always existed in Indian social structure. Biographies of some eminent women are also marked by such events. Kiran Bedi suggests some strong convictions which can change the future of young girls in the new millennium. Bedi firmly believes that as long as women continue to be in a position of receiving rather than giving, they shall continue to bear injustice.

The next point of discussion, so far as women are concerned is that of marriage. It is the most persistent of myths which imprisons a woman. It focuses on her relationship with the husband, mother in law and women and other family members. Today a woman may decline marriage or opt for dual career marriages. They may even choose to live in relationship. But the times in which most of these women auto biographers lived, marriage was both mandatory and conventional. Most of these women hoped for a perfect marriage. Meena Sodhi opines: “The media encouraged it (marriage) by showing a happy ending in the movies, with the marriage of a hero and a heroine, flashing the sign, and they lived happily ever after”, little realizing that the trouble would start only after marriage.”<sup>29</sup>. Women willingly accept to be called Mrs. so and so, unaware of the servitude represented in that nomenclature:

“Women have long been nameless. They have not been persons. Handed by a father to another man, the husband, they have been objects of circulation, exchanging one name for another”<sup>30</sup>

Prof. Meena Sodhi opines that a common and absurd practice, which is highlighted in some of these autobiographies, is the change of the first name after the marriage. Women willingly accepted new culture, new environment and completely new name after their marriage. Along with her name a woman’s original identity is shattered after her marriage.

One more notable point about women's autobiography is the age at which these autobiographies are written. Virginia Woolf had recorded in her diary that she was forty years old when she found that she could talk freely about herself and her life. It is remarkable that women generally like to indulge in the act of self creation when they reach their middle ages. To confront the society, one needs either the energetic youthful attitude or the shrewd, calm and calculating mind of the middle age. Erik Eriksson has observed that autobiographies "are written at certain late stages of life for the purpose of recreating oneself in the image of one's own method and they are written to make that image convincing."<sup>31</sup>

In her early life woman is involved in her responsibilities, duties and preoccupation. Hence, she forgets her 'self'. 'She forgets her individual existence and becomes one with the surroundings. But once, when she is comfortable with her circumstances,' she may well for the first time be woman herself'.<sup>32</sup> Women are well beyond youth when they begin often unconsciously to create another story".<sup>33</sup>

If we take a look at some of the women autobiographies, we find that most of them were written during their middle ages. For instance, Sunity Devee wrote 'The Autobiography of an Indian Princess' at the age of fifty. Dhanwanti Rama Rau wrote her life story *An Inheritance* when she was eighty. Shoilbala Das wrote *A look Before and After* at the age of 82. *The Scope of Happiness* was written by Vijayalxmi Pandit when she was seventy five years old.

A deeper study of the women's autobiographies unravels the hidden recesses of feminine psyche and the sick psyche of Indian society. What so ever the position of woman may be, behind every social stigma, there is a woman- either in the role of mother in law, sister in law or wife. Most of the autobiographies reveal that fathers always encouraged the bold and broader outlook of their daughters. Especially in the case of

Sunity Devee and Shobha De, fathers rejoiced the births of their daughters. Most of the time father in laws turn out be father figures for daughter in laws. Woman herself has to come out from the age old customs and disbeliefs and treat the newly entered woman in the home as her own sister.

When a sister or a mother in law becomes too much possessive about the son or the brother then only the problem arises. Furthermore, woman herself should be rejoiced at the birth of a girl child. Women have to develop the determination to review their situation constantly. Only then the men will share resources with them. With more women coming in the situation will change. In order to give a happy child hood and blissful life to woman, an unbiased social perspective and a change in social attitude is required.

## References:

1. *Manusmriti*, canto 7.
2. *Writing a woman's Life*, The women's Press, London, 1988, P. 11.
3. *Ibid*, P. 27.
4. As quoted in *Autobiography and questions of Gender*, Ed. by Shirley Newman, Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. 1991, P. 2.
5. Elaine Showalter, ed. *Women's Liberation & Literature*, Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich Inc. New York, U.S.A. 1971, P. 3.
6. Shaw Bernard, *Candida*, orient Longmans, 1957, P. 79.
7. *Selves in Hiding'*, *women's Autobiography*, ed. Estelle (Jelenik Indiana, U.P.), 1980, PP, 113-114-131.
8. George Henry Lewes, *The Lady Novelist"* in *women's Liberation & Literature*, ed. by Elaine showalter, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc. New York, U.S.A. 1971, P. 174.
9. Germaine Bree *Autogynography*, studies in Autobiography, P. 171.
10. Sahgal Nayantara, 'Point of view', a personal response to life, literature and politics, prestige books, New Delhi, 1997, P.17.
11. Catherine Drinker Bowen, Family Portrait, as quoted in *Modern selves*, ed. P. 18-19.
12. Nancy Friday, *My mother my self*, (Glasgow: Fontana, Collins, 1990).
13. *Conditions and Limits of Autobiography*, *Autobiography: Essays theoretical and critical* Ed. James Olney, Princeton university press, 1980.
14. Peter Abbs *Autobiography : Quest for Identity*, the Present, Vol-8, The New pelican guide to English literature, ed. by Boris Ford, 1983.

15. *The Art of Autobiography in 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup> century England*, Yale University Press, 1984, P. 16.
16. Sodhi Meena, *Indian English Writing, The Autobiographical mode*, creative books, New Delhi – 1999, P87.
17. Das Kamala, *My Story*, New Delhi, Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1976, Reprint 1991.
18. *Chintaman & I*, P. 76.
19. John Peeling, *Autobiography and Imagination* (London: Routledge & Caign Paul, 1981).
20. *Writing a woman's life*, P. 15.
21. Patricia Spacks *Stage of self: Notes on Autobiography & the life-cycle*, in 'the American Autobiography', ed. Albert E. Stone, P. 48.
22. *The Scope of Happiness*, Vikas Publishing house Pvt. Ltd. P. 57.
23. Das Kamala, 1976, *My Story*, New Delhi: Sterling Publishers.
24. De Shobha, *Selective Memory*, New Delhi: orient Longman, 1998.
25. Tiwari Shubha, *Children & Literature*, Atlantic Publishers, New Delhi, 2006, Ch-6.
26. Ibid, Ch-6.
27. Ibid, Ch-6.
28. Ibid, Ch-6.
29. Sodhi Meena, *Indian English writing The autobiographical mode*, creative books, new Delhi, 1991, P81.
30. AS quoted in – Ibid, P81.
31. Ibid, Ch-86.
32. Ibid, Ch-86.
33. Ibid, Ch-86.





**CHAPTER: III**

**PART: I**

**NAYANTARA SAHAGAL'S  
PRISON AND CHOCOLATE CAKE:  
AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SAGA**



**CHAPTER: III**  
**PART: I**  
**Nayantara Sahagal's**  
**PRISON AND CHOCOLATE CAKE:**  
**An Autobiographical Saga**

“Mamu has already gone. Papu is going in a day or two, and my turn will come next week. You and Lekha and Tara will remain out, but you will be Satyagrahis just the same as we and you will do your bit by keeping the flag flying over Anand Bhawan. This is a big job and you will be helping in the good fight just as much as we are.... We want smiles and grit to win through in this fight which will mean freedom for us all, and for this great big, beautiful India of ours think of it, darling, you and I and Papu and mamu are helping to make her free. Isn't it something to be proud of and very happy about?”<sup>1</sup> Above quoted lines of Nayan Tara Sahgal's life-story is a keynote to her whole life. These lines imply Nayan Tara Sahgal as a first group of kids who witnessed Gandhian movements for freedom. The very little of the first part of her life-story- Prison and Chocolate Cake is very apt and suggestive.

Recollecting her childhood she related that in her tender mind some how the imprisonment was something creditable. To work for the freedom of India was the call of the Age. As a daughter of one of the most elite families having political influences she too was coloured by the spirit of freedom offering a key-note to the title she remarks.:

“Our earliest association with politics was far from – unpleasant. One day, when I was about three years old, we had chocolate cake for tea. It was a treat because ordinarily we had bread and butter. It was a rich, dark cake, chocolate through and through with chocolate swirls on top. while we were at tea, a group of policemen arrived at the house when

Lekha asked why they had come, Mummy explained that they had come to take Papu to Prison, but that it was nothing to worry about....”<sup>2</sup>

Sahgal relates that listening to their mother’s response they joyfully fared well to their father. From that very day prison had been associated mysteriously with the Chocolate Cake in their mind.

*Prison and Chocolate Cake* is thus, the first part of the life-story of an elite class woman of 20<sup>th</sup> century India. The cover jacket of the book is a proof of her grand political lineage. It is inscribed on the jacket: ‘Mrs. Pandit’s daughter, Nehru’s Niece’.<sup>3</sup> Thus it is clear that the writer belongs to one of the most aristocratic families of India.

Nayantara Sahgal or Tara (Taru) as she has been referred to was born on May 10, 1927 in Allahabad, though she was born in Swaraj Bhawan. The New Anand Bhawan became her home in 1935. One of the most energetic living legends of the freedom struggle, Nan Sahgal started her career as a journalist. She has delivered many important lectures: Annie Beasant Memorial lecture at Banaras and Arthur Davencroft lecture at Leeds to name a few. She enjoyed various literary positions:

- Advisor of Eng. Language board and
- Sahitya Akademi member.
- Chairperson of Eurasia region in the jury of commonwealth writer’s prize
- She had been a fellow, Radcliff institute (Harvard) and a foreign honorary member of the American Akademi, arts & Science.

She had been a member of the National Executive, Peoples union for Civil liberties; she was also a member, Indian delegation to the U.N. General Assembly in 1978.

As a writer Nan sahgal has been more famous for her novels of political consciousness. In 1969 she started her political writing and wrote a column in a New Delhi fortnightly. She is also a freelance writer.

Today, in the literary world she is more famous as a novelist. Apart from political dimensions her novels deal with many other aspects of Indian life.

Her novels not only focus on the era which has gone behind but also on the new tensions and conflicts faced by a young nation, its men and women.

Critical responses to her works suggest that she highly admired British writers like Virginia Woolf. During her visit to America she came into close contact with pearls S. Buck (Mrs. Walsh) she was also influenced by Indo-Anglian writings like Chaman Lal's *Azadi*.

Apart from her two autobiography and a collection of her lectures entitled *A Point of View*.

She has written some remarkable novels like:

*"A Time to be Happy(1958), This Time of Morning ( 1965), Storm in Chandigarh (1969), The Day in Shadow, A Situation in New Delhi (1977), Rich Like Us (1985 ), Plans for Departure (1985 ), Mistaken Identity (1988 ).*

- Indira Gandhi's 'Road to Power' and Relationship: Extracts from correspondence are also very famous prose-collections.
- Her novel 'Rich Like Us' won the Sinclair prize for fiction in 1985 and the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1987.

Plans for Departure won the commonwealth Writers' Prize in 1987.

Nayan Tara Sahgal has attempted to pour down her life story in two different parts namely, 'Prison & Chocolate Cake' and 'From Fear set Free'. Prison and Chocolate Cake published in 1954 was written during the autumn and winter of 1952-53 by Sahgal in a bedroom of her maternal home, adjoining a small garden in New Delhi. She literally gives the address of her home in the introduction to the book and remarks

that the book was written in “The house at 30, Aurangzeb Road” allotted to her mother, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, when she took her place as a member of India’s first elected parliament. *Prison and Chocolate Cake* is a critically acclaimed life- story of Nayan Tara Sahgal.

Great literary figure Mrs. Roosevelt found *Prison and Chocolate Cake* “a delightful<sup>4</sup> life-story. Elizabeth Bowen called it. “A rare account of a childhood which is not charming.”<sup>5</sup>

Times Literary supplement commented: “An unforgettable picture of the hopes, the unfaltering determination, the spiritual Convictions, which carried the independence movement to its triumphant conclusion... It is given to few mortals to lead all their life in the public eye, to become objects of something like adoration to millions of their countrymen and yet to remain simple, natural and above all lovable. But the Nehrus have succeeded in doing it and this delightful book, so warmly human, shows how greatly it was done”.<sup>6</sup>

An autobiographical writing is always a therapeutical process. Autobiographical writing helps the writer to relive his/her past and to search the real self”. Meena Sodhi opines: “Sahgal’s fictional writings venture to break free of her “Self” through a search for others” characters; in a few of them she tries to see some experiences of her life through her fictional creations and tries to understand herself. On the other hand her autobiographies reveal her efforts in attempting to confront her earlier “Selves” which she had been perhaps trying to conceal”.<sup>7</sup>

Thus literature is a key to unlock her heart for Sahgal. She has a great faith in art. Being a novelist she approves of the therapeutic value of art and opines:

“Writing of any sort helps to put your own world in order, all the shapeless, bewildering fragments of it. It helps you to figure out what is happening in and around you.... There are things that will never be

understood until they are written and sometimes not even then. But writing helps the process.”<sup>8</sup>

Thus, writing gives a kind of ‘inward freedom’ to the writer. Writing releases our emotions and the more effective is this emotional release; when it is a life writing Nostalgia for the past is one of the constant features of life writings.

Recollecting her past, Sahgal refers to her gay and happy childhood. As one of the nieces of Nehru Nayantara Sahgal was “born with a silver spoon.” She was the youngest daughter of the first woman M.P. of India – Mrs. Vijayalaskhmi Pandit and the great Mr. Ranjit Sitaram Pandit. In those early days of freedom struggle, how her ‘Nanuji’ as she called him, Mr. Motilal Nehru left his practices of law for the freedom struggle has been marvellously depicted by Sahgal. The Nehru family was the hub of Indian politics and India’s struggle for freedom. Being a part of such a family Sahgal and her two sisters were quite at home with the spark of freedom struggle. Gandhian ideology ignited their minds right from the childhood. Sahgal observes:

“We were born and grew up at a time when India had come under the leadership of Gandhi and was maturing to nationhood under his guidance. My sisters and I were among the youngest of India’s children to be touched by the spark with which Gandhi illumined our country. It touched our lives in innumerable small ways and penetrated our consciousness gradually, so that as we grew it became a living part of us.”<sup>9</sup>

Thus, all the three daughters of Nehru family breathed the spirit of freedom from their early childhood. In the introduction to her life story Sahgal has declared her intention behind writing her life story:

“Prison and Chocolate Cake was intended for myself and my family, and for the circle of friends who had been part and parcel of the

atmosphere it described.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, Sahgal’s life-story is a recapitulation of the past dealing not only with the history of her ‘self’ but with that of the whole nation. *Prison and Chocolate Cake* depicts the writer as a product of her time. It is a mirror in which the freedom struggle of India is at the centre and the writer’s self is in the margin. Nevertheless it is a marvellous self-analysis of a woman who had experienced the development of freedom struggle brick by brick.

In the depiction of her life Sahgal has not maintained a chronological order. She advocates that, we don’t maintain records just for the sake of maintaining it. Moreover, a literary artist is not bound by the limitations of time. She also confesses that while writing the life account, she did not consider about publishing it. Hence, her life-story does not begin with the depiction of her childhood.

The opening of her life-story depicts Sahgal’s visit to America along with her sister. Even when she wrote her life story, Sahgal was quite bewildered at the prospect of her parents’ decision to allow such small girls to send to America in 1943. It was the tough time of the second world-war and demanded a brave heart to send two little kids to a completely unknown country. Sahgal notes that even after becoming a mother herself, she couldn’t get the answer to her parents’ determination. Nevertheless she remarks that perhaps the American sojourn was essential for ‘training in courage and discipline’. Time and again in the auto biography she refers that she did not have the training in courage and discipline which her parents had.

Further, Sahgal notes that her ‘Masi’, Krishna Hutheesing helped her two nieces in the last-minute shopping and bade them farewell with flower garlands and red ‘Tika’ on their foreheads. From the very first page of the book we come across so many Indian terms and customs. Her ‘Masi’ offered them a coconut and a little wooden box filled with Indian

Earth. She advised them to bow down to the Indian soil if they become home sick. This little gesture suggests the pious devotion for motherland not only of Krishna Hutheesing but of all the Indian citizens. Further, the mother-figure ‘Masi’ advised them how to live in a foreign land. As a precautionary measure, she said:

“The thing to remember is to look helpless, but be efficient that way everybody gives you a helping hand and if everybody doesn’t, you can take care of yourself anyway.”<sup>10</sup>

This sentence shows Masi’s concern for the two little nieces. Whenever there is crisis a person has to exhibit a matter of fact stand. Hence, a matter-of-fact aunt taught her innocent nieces lessons of practicality. Born and brought up in a family where Sahgal learnt not only the lessons of practicality but also those of emotional matters helped her in the development of an all-round personality.

To Sahgal, a visit to America turned out to be a study in freedom. It moulded her tender teenage in an altogether different mould. En route to America, Sahgal met a variety of people: Military personnel, nuns, missionaries and many more. She discussed Gandhian thought and ideology with them. Her sister Lekha pleaded for the concept of ‘Ahimsa’ in the presence of few soldiers. It is very interesting to note that Sahgal and her two sisters were so intensely influenced by Gandhian thought that they defended the concept of ‘Ahimsa’ at the time of second world war. One of the soldiers discussed with Tara his inner joy of returning home after a whole year of pacific war. The conversation between that soldier and Lekha is quite noteworthy. Nayantara Sahgal notes that their talk of non-violence only made them laugh:

“This guy Gandhi must be crazy. Suppose a man came along and killed his sister; would he sit still and not do anything about it?”<sup>11</sup>

At this juncture Lekha replied:



“Well, even if you believe in fighting, you don’t fight for nothing. You fight for a reason or an ideal. Yet that very ideal is forgotten in all the bloodshed.”<sup>12</sup>

Thus, the concepts of Ahimsa and ‘Satyagraha’ were parts and parcels of Sahgal and her sisters’ lives. Thus, Lekha and Tara sailed to America with their minds filled up with the home ideologies. In those conservative times their parents sent them to America to learn the lessons in discipline and freedom. When a tender mother, Vijayalaxmi Pandit shuddered at the idea of sending their little babies to America, Tara’s father remarked: “Would you rather they stayed in India and became more and more embittered day by day by what is going on around them? That would be a complete negation of all that we have stood for and tried to teach them.” At last Mrs. Pandit agreed: “No, I should not like them to grow up bitter human beings, nursing grudges and hatreds.”<sup>13</sup>

Having begun the life-story with the depiction of her visit to America, Sahgal narrates her ‘Indian Childhood’ in the third chapter of her book. Recollecting her childhood days, Sahgal appears quite nostalgic about the city of Allahabad, her home town. Very remarkably Sahgal begins the third chapter and observes:

“Americans often asked how we lived in India and we tried to give them a glimpse of our childhood..... To do so we had to take them in imagination to the city of Allahabad, known of old as Prayag.....”<sup>14</sup>

Recollecting her home town Allahabad of the 1940’s – 50’s Sahgal notes that it consisted of 2, 60,000 inhabitants. Its culture was a blend of the ancient civilization of the Ramayana and the much later influence of the moguls. Why Allahabad was termed as ‘Prayag’ has been marvellously narrated by Sahgal.

Connecting the story of Rama-Bharat reunion and the confluence of two rivers Ganga-Yamuna with the name of Allahabad Sahgal relishes

her childhood memories. Further she has depicted the history of Allahabad right from the time of King Akbar. It was King Akbar who considered Allahabad as the ‘Abode of Allah (God)’. Further Sahgal remarks that in those days there were two railway stations in Allahabad.

In such an abode of Allah, Sahgal passed her early childhood. As Sahgal belonged to the elite class of India, we find references to the gala parties thrown by her parents to their officials and elite citizens. Hers was a time when politics was in the air and her parents were active politicians. That was the era when intellectuals entered the clean politics guided by Gandhi.

Being born to the elite parents, Sahgal enjoyed a very happy childhood where she found nothing to vex her. There were roses – roses all the way. Recollecting the happy-go-lucky, colourful childhood, Sahgal refers to the parties in which she relished ‘Kebabs’ prepared of finely ground meat blended with crushed ginger, cardamom, cloves and red chillies, flaky golden samosas, fragrant, steaming saffron – coloured long rice, flecked with peeled white almonds; meat cooked in rich gravy dripping with spices; a tray full of small, round, earthenware bowls of kheer covered with a gossamer – fine layer of varakh full of pistachio nuts, so on and so forth. Sahgal’s gourmet was thus full of fine delicacies. All such mouth – licking Kashmiri delicacies were laid out on the kitchen table in the shining silver thalis and katoris. After dinner, pan full of areca nuts and cardamom would be served. Thus, Sahgal was not only ‘born with silver spoons’ but also with silver ‘thalis’ and ‘katoris’.

Sahgal had never come across any set-back or a feeling of being neglected in her childhood or even later. Her family background always remained a back-bone to her progress.

An autobiography always possesses a charm of character-sketch. There are several persons in each individual’s lives who play a pivotal

role in his/her character formation. As a family member of the Nehrus the most remarkable impact on Sahgal's character seems to be that of Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi. In her life-story we find full length life sketches of Mahatma Gandhi Jawaharlal Nehru, her mother Vijaylakshmi Pandit and her father Pandit Ranjit Sitaram.

Relating her childhood memories to her mother Sahgal discloses the truth about a career woman who is also a mother she observes:

“A career, especially a political one, is proverbially said to rob a woman of much of her femininity. It has never had this effect on my mother.”<sup>15</sup>

Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit had been a genius at whipping up miraculous meals out of nothing, at arranging flowers, at interior decoration, and all the things that make a house a home. Sahgal is quite overwhelmed by the dexterity of a mother who was the first woman M.P. of India she notes that they had always associated her mother with the ordered beauty of home. They were habituated to see her early in the morning in the veranda arranging the roses in the vase with great precision. She entertained the guests in the parties thrown at Anand Bhawan with her ‘Silvery’ laugh. Though brought up in the care of an English governess and educated at home by private tutors in Allahabad, Sahgal's mother whole-heartedly cooperated the boycott of foreign goods. She accepted wearing coarse white Khadi Saris along with many other women all over the country. With a great zeal Sahgal's mother stored away her expensive beautiful saris and jewellery and accepted everything ‘Swadeshi’. With a great pride, Sahgal observes:

“But never did clothes and jewellery have less to do with enhancing a woman's appearance. Austerely dressed and without any of the ornaments that tradition demands that a Hindu wife wear, she (Mrs. Pandit) emerged far more striking than before”.<sup>16</sup>

Thus, Mrs. Pandit always maintained a 'halo' of her personality. Depicting the towering figure of her mother Sahgal recollects the pre-independence elections of 1936. She comments that during those elections her father's constituency was Jumna- par region near Allahabad and her mother stood from the Kanpur constituency. The then constitution of India imposed that the viceroy was to continue to hold the actual reins of authority and the central government was to function as before, with vital control over several portfolios.

Overwhelmingly Sahgal comments that when the results of those elections were declared, she and her sisters were enjoying the vacation at Woodstock. It was the year of 1936 and Sahgal and Lekha received the telegram of their mother's victory in the elections. She narrates that her mother had been allotted a portfolio of health. Very enthusiastically Sahgal observes:

“All over India newspapers and magazines, flashed Mummies' picture, beautiful and black-haired, the first Indian woman to become a cabinet minister and one of the first women in the world to hold such a position. We were the proud recipients of congratulations from our friends.”<sup>17</sup>

Sahgal relishes the fact that the name of Vijayalakshmi Pandit became a legend in the villages of U.P. and many babies were named after her mother, she enjoyed taking her mother's lunch in the picnic basket to the secretariat and people referring to her as “Honourable Minister”.

When Sahgal found out the lack of waste-paper baskets in the secretariat corridors to stuff up the Chocolate wrappings her mother considered the whole matter seriously and advised Sahgal to write a note to Pandit Govind Vallabh Pant (Pantji). Soon, young Tara's proposal had been granted.

Very interestingly her mother furnished her office, with brightened bowls of roses freshly cut from the secretariat garden. Her mother's secretary felt that such signs of feminine frivolity would surely distract from serious work. He was surprised by the sudden changes made in the interior decoration and remarked:

“But, Madame, it has never been done before”

“Well, it will be done now”. Replied Vijayalakshmi Pandit.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, Pandits reacted to their subordinates in a very ‘Cool’ manner. One more instance of the managerial skills of Mrs. Pandit is sufficient to prove the fact; why Nehrus ruled India for three generations.

Once, Mrs. Vijayalakshmi Pandit reached her home late night from a party and tiptoed into the bedroom where Rita and young Tara slept. She halted in the doorway and stifled a scream. To her surprise she found Mademoiselle – Kids’ governess seating on the edge of Rita’s bed, muttering some enchantments and covering Rita’s face with her shadowy hands. Having seen the governess polluting her kids’ lives Mrs. Pandit was annoyed and sacked her off the next day. Without telling a word to the subordinate Mrs. Pandit got rid of the governess. Such, was the discretion of Pandits. Though Mrs. Pandit worked outside home, she was quite aware about what was going on, in & around her home. Sahgal relates that having been elected as a health minister of U.P. Vijayalakshmi Pandit became enormously popular, especially among women. She was a shining example of all that a woman was capable of achieving. The young women imitated her and the older ones sorrowed for her as she had no sons but blessed her. Many urchins didn’t accept the fact that a woman can held a position of health minister. With a tinge of intellectual humour Sahgal has portrayed a picture of surprised urchin:

“..... So new was the concept of a woman minister, a woman touring cholera-ridden districts and famine areas and doing work that no

woman had ever done before, that some were still unconvinced that it was true. During one of her speeches, a grizzled old kisan (peasant) wagged his head in wonder and remarked to his neighbour: “It is true she really is a woman.”<sup>19</sup>

Thus, Mrs. Pandit established a trail of women empowerment in India.

Though Mrs. Pandit worked round the clock she allotted sufficient time to kids & home. She encouraged them to become efficient Indian citizens. Sahgal always associates her mother with tenderly care & devotion of a true home maker. She observes. “Mummy was a person of beauty, warmth and understanding. Her presence was like sunlight and we blossomed in it. When she walked into a room, it became home. When she put her hand to the most ordinary meal, it became a banquet. When we were guided by her, the most unpleasant ordeal became a challenge. We were her ardent admirers.”<sup>20</sup>

Thus Sahgal’s life was governed by a towering mother figure. Nevertheless, her father’s impact upon her character can’t be ignored.

She admits that her parents were the centre of their lives. So, the most striking fact about Sahgal’s father is that in that orthodox era when a girl – child was not welcomed zealously; he had a rare attitude. He firmly believed that girls should have essentially the same type of upbringing as boys. Sahgal & her sister had the least idea of having been born as a weaker sex. However, she notes that, ‘if he (Mr.Ranjit Sitaram) had ever wanted a son, we never knew it’<sup>21</sup>

Sahgal considers her father as an indulgent and proud father. He disliked the “purdah mentality”. He belonged to the western part of India where women have always enjoyed more freedom than in other parts of the country. ‘Papu’ as sahgal terms him, always rebelled against the orthodox traditions of U.P. He considered narrow minded traditions as

“modest shelter” meant “for the decrepit, the disabled and the feeble-minded, not for healthy, alert, normal young people”<sup>22</sup>

Considering Sahgal’s art of pen-portrayal, her father seems to be a rare combination of whatever is good in both the eastern & the western Culture. He seems to be a modernity incarnated. He was a Sanskrit scholar who had mastery over translations from Sanskrit to English. He had translated many Sanskrit classics into English with care and precision. Though born in the earlier part of 20<sup>th</sup> century he can be considered a role model for today’s multi-lingual age. He was a gifted linguist who had many Indian as well as European languages at his command. He loved to swim, ride, shoot. He was genuinely interested in sports. He enjoyed every outdoor – activity. Gardening was a passion to him. He was an ardent lover of nature and had a ‘green thumb’ because of which all things flourished under his care. Often while serving prison sentences he planted flowers in the jail courtyard. Thus, he added colour to the rough dry prison life. He also wrote letters to his daughters illustrating stories and sent lively pencil & ink sketches.

Sahgal further remarks that with his keenly poetic nature, he had chosen the names of his three daughters: Lekha’s name was ‘Chandralekha’ meaning the crescent moon. It was taken from the ‘Rajtarangini’ – a Sanskrit history of Kashmir which Ranjit Sitaram had translated into English. Nayantara means star of the Eyes. She was named after Ranjitji’s first client whose case he had argued and won, Rita’s name (pronounced ‘Rita’) means ‘Truth’ in Sanskrit.

Sahgal has given a brief outline to her father’s origin. Relating it, she notes that her father’s home was in Rajkot, Kathiawar, “The colourful far western land of Indian chivalry.” His family originally belonged to the village of Bambuli on the Ratnagiri coast in Maharashtra. Sahgal notes that just like Kathiawar & Maharashtra, her father’s character too was

moulded into complexities & contrasts of these two Indian regions. That is to say, the Marathas are a tenacious, hardy, virile people having disciplined austerity. Kathiawar is the home of bright folk-lore, lilting melodies and graceful dances of much that is joyful, artistic and carefree in Indian life. In the princely state of Rajkot Sitaram's son Ranjit grew up imbibed with best of the qualities of both the cultures.

Further, Sahgal notes that her grandfather had made Rajkot their home because there was a greater scope for the practice of law there. Ranjit Sitaram was given the finest education in western Indian colleges. He distinguished himself both in his academic career and in sports. He shone out when he went abroad in Christ church college at oxford and later in the middle temple in London, taking degrees at the Sorbonne and Heidelberg during his vacations. German music and German language were some of the finest memories of his student days.

Though born & brought up in matrilineal culture, Tara was always inclined towards her father's background. As a child of such a family she inherited, a mixed variety of Kashmiri, Kathiawari, Maharashtrian and even western culture. With a great pride for her father's background, she observes:

“After Papu married Mummy he chose to settle in the U.P. the heart of the national movement. So we were brought up in our mother's home, in the Kashmiri tradition, observing Kashmiri customs and speaking Hindi and Urdu instead of Marathi. But our father's background was not lost to us, for he had brought to the mannered refinement of the U.P. the irresistible combination of an adventurous Maratha spirit and the brimming gaiety of Kathiawar.”<sup>23</sup>

With deep intimacy Sahgal remarks that Mr. Ranjit Sitaram always yearned for his boyhood home and his family. He had voluntarily chosen



to join congress and he never regretted about it but little Tara could recognize her father's nostalgic aura.

Further Sahgal has narrated how she and her family enjoyed their summer vacations at the 'Khali' estate in the Kumaon hills.

Further more, Sahgal has depicted full-length portraits of her Nanaji, Mr. Motilal Nehru, Nanima Smt. Swaruprani Nehru, the great aunt Bibima and many more. Much of her behavioural patterns & mannerisms are the fruits of interaction with such people. She seems to have imbibed Indianness & India culture, customs & traditions from great women like Swaruprani Nehru & Bibima. Recollecting Bibima's death, Sahgal remarks:

“When Bibima died, just twenty-four hours after my grandmother's death, I suffered my first irreparable loss. Day after day, I sat in the deserted little Puja-ghar, convinced that if I waited long enough she would return, for she had always come to me when I had needed her..... To this day, her memory revives the charmed hours of childhood and the belief that goodness prevails and that the world goes on because of it.”<sup>24</sup>

Thus, Bibima who was the sister of Sahgal's grandmother and her grandmother taught Sahgal lessons of trust and faith in goodness. Goodness is the ultimate and all-powerful phenomena on the earth.

Depicting the character of Motilal Nehru Sahgal depicts that he had also left his practice of law for the sake of freedom struggle.

Another significant character – sketch penned down by Sahgal is of her 'Mamu' – Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. In the earlier part of her life – story Sahgal has depicted the two great figures in her life: Mummy and Papu. It is in the twelfth chapter of her life-story entitled 'Nehru's nieces' that we come across Pandit Nehru as a 'Mamu' of young Taru. Here's an author who is a pampered niece of the first prime-minister of India.

Theirs is a very rare kind of Kinship. Nehru shared the literary sensibilities of the author. Tara always discussed a variety of books with her 'mamu' as she called him. In the twelfth chapter of the book Sahgal notes that when she was only ten years old and listened to her Mamu's speech; she briskly scribbled it in her notebook. She had never forgotten that speech throughout the life. Later on when she reached New-York, she again recollected that speech: The speech was:

“Wherever in this wide world there goes an Indian, there goes a piece of India with him and he may not forget this fact or ignore it. It lies within his power to some extent, to bring credit or discredit to his country, honour or dishonour.....<sup>25</sup>

Thus, her mamu's words were not only inscribed in Sahgal's notebook but also in her heart.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru never turned out to be only a prime minister of India for his nieces. He always remained their 'boisterous playmate' when they were young. He was much adored hero and his nieces never tolerated the slightest criticism of him. Little Tara always defended her Mamu against her Papu's teasing remarks.

Sahgal relates that after her mamu organized some new game or activity for his nieces. They would march as if in a procession, all around the house, waving congress flag and singing national songs in refrain. They even forgot their lunch, naps and homework in the hurly-burly. They remained unperturbed by their mother's call for the mundane works. Often the nieces along with their mamu upset the decorum of the drawing room even in the presence of the guests. Nehru taught them to become upside-down on their heads and many other exercises. If Sahgal's mother tried to negate her kids; she was also punished to perform 'Shirshasan'.

Sahgal notes with a great pride that in the presence of her mamu grown-up authority and discipline faded away and they created noisy, world of riot. Nehru and his nieces always shared an exuberant world of their own. Often Tara along with her sisters went to Nehru's personal library and read enormous, dusty books of his Harrow school songs. Nehru recited songs in the company of his nieces.

Being an onlooker and a near & dear one of Nehru family Tara closely observed his daily routines. She often joined him in his yogic exercises. In a very philosophic vein she remarks that standing on his head was a regular favourite with her mamu not only because it was a healthy practice but also because it was a good way of viewing the world bright & early in the day. Nehru preferred Eggs, toast and coffee for his breakfast unlike the family habit of taking tea & fruits in the morning. He emphasized the importance of 'brunch' in the morning. It boosts the energy of body & mind. In that case he deferred a lot from Tara's mother. Further, Sahgal notes down that, Nehru was Lord Byron's classmate. They studied at the same school of Harrow and Trinity College, Cambridge. Once when Tara longed to read Andre Maurois's 'Byron' Nehru prescribed her to read 'Ariel' by Andre Maurois, when she admired Byron, Nehru commented:

"I find it difficult to like him. He was so amazingly selfish & self – centered. If you like Maurois, you ought to read his 'Ariel'..... Shelley is, I think a far more lovable and admirable character than Byron".<sup>26</sup>

Thus, one can perceive the literary pursuits of the whole Nehru family in such discussions and digressions. Nehru allotted sufficient time for reading, writing & even imbibing literature of his time. Sahgal also endorses the fact and notes that they were a family of voracious readers and much of their reading was done in Nehru's Library. In the concluding

sections of *Prison and Chocolate Cake* Sahgal observes that, Jawaharlal Nehru was above all a good human being. It is through his eyes that Sahgal viewed India. Freedom of India meant a lot to him & Sahgal's ideal India was bound up with her uncle's ideal of it. Nehru's worth cannot be measured by any label. How intimately Sahgal knew her uncle is very well expressed when she writes:

“There is a confining sound about the label of prime minister, as there is, for that matter, about any label. It suggests specific duties. In Mamu the human being seemed always ascendant to the label. He was a sensitive person passionately devoted to certain humane ideals before he was anything else. To me he resembled a knight in quest of the Grail or an artist dedicated to the completion of his task, much more than he did a prime minister.”<sup>27</sup>

Thus, Sahgal was much influenced by her mamu in all her endeavours.

Another significant impact on Sahgal's character is of Mahatma Gandhi. The world in which Sahgal was born & grew up was dominated by Gandhian ideology. In twentieth century Gandhism not only united the country but became a living part of any Indian who came into contact with it. Gandhi and his ideals spread like a Gospel and enchanted the people of India. Many well to do people like Motilal Nehru abandoned luxurious ways of life for the sake of country's freedom. In the beginning part of her life-story Sahgal refers to the fact that young Gandhi also visited her grandfather's home in Rajkot where Mr. Sitaram had migrated to pursue his career as a lawyer. Thus, not only Sahgal but also her forefathers were much at home with Gandhiji & Gandhian ideology. Nevertheless, Sahgal's first and foremost encounter with Gandhiji is quite noteworthy. That is to say, the whole event focuses Sahgal's truthful, frank and honest nature. Sahgal frankly confesses that as a tender child

she did not like Gandhiji when she had met him for the first time. There was a special prayer arranged to welcome Gandhiji at Anand Bhawan. Her mother advised her to offer a bouquet of red roses to Bapu and she objected:

“But he’s ugly.....

I don’t want to give them to him”.<sup>28</sup>

Having objected thus, Sahgal scowled at him, nevertheless, Bapu gave her a gleeful laugh and blessed her to remain as honest forever as she appeared at that juncture. Further Sahgal refers that she had also told her father not to attend such prayer meetings in future. However, in her later years she became one of the regular visitors of Bapu’s prayers at Birla house and she also sang prayers for him.

Furthermore in chapter 13 of the book entitled ‘About People’ we come across a full-length account of Gandhiji's character. Sahgal relates that, Gandhiji was the most honoured of guest at Anand Bhawan. Each of his visits to Anand Bhawan was a novel and incredible experience. Though she saw him in presentia she always felt that a phenomenon named ‘Gandhi’ was a character of legend. She narrates an aura of Gandhi in the most remarkable terms:

“However often one saw him or watched the crowds react to him, one could not believe that such a phenomenon was possible. It is one thing to recall just one such event in memory and quite another to see it re-enacted over and over again before one’s eyes in all its unbelievable magnetism”.<sup>29</sup>

Recollecting Gandhian aura with all its bloom, Sahgal relates that thousands of people always stopped the train in which Gandhiji travelled before it reached the station platform. Curious observers in the crowd always stared at him with unblinking eyes. As an intimate onlooker of Gandhiji Sahgal notes that his diet was very simple and garlic was an

essential part of it. Personally, Sahgal averted garlic & its smell. Once, she took a saucer full of garlic at keeping it at her arm's length so that she couldn't smell it, but Mrs. Naidu (Nightingale of India) caught her and told:

“Don't be so snooty, young lady. You should eat some of that yourself, if you want to have a gorgeous complexion like the old man's when you're his age”.<sup>30</sup>

Mrs. Naidu told young Sahgal that Gandhiji may have been a saint and a Mahatma for his countless admirers but he always maintained a childlike naiveté amongst his friends. For Mrs. Naidu he was always ‘The old man’ and ‘the Chocolate coloured Mickey Mouse’.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, “Simple living and high thinking” is the mahatma Mantra.

Sahgal has further depicted Gandhiji's love for prayer – meetings. She notes that whether Gandhiji was at his own Ashram at Wardha or in any other part of India he followed a regular pattern of prayer meetings which consisted of readings from the Bhagvad – Gita and singing of Hindu bhajans, reading excerpts from the Koran, the Santsahitya – a Sikh holy book and Bible and hymns of the various faiths. Gandhiji's favourite Christian hymn was ‘Lead kindly light’ which he had translated into Gujarati for his prayers.

Thus, Gandhiji's prayer meetings were quite secular in its form, objectives and mission:

When Gandhiji went to Allahabad in 1941, his prayer meetings were regularly arranged at Anand Bhavan. Young Sahgal waited for her turn to sing, sitting cross – legged on the carpet holding a tanpura against her.

Gradually, Sahgal was coloured by Gandhian impact and the ideals of simple living and high thinking.

In the last two chapters of the first part of her life – story sahgal has presented pictorial narration of Gandhiji's death. It was the year 1947 and sahgal had returned from New York having completed her graduation. Young sahgal was not quite assured about her future. Her mamu took her to Birla House, where Gandhiji was staying. Bapu greeted her with his child-like chuckle and with a twinkle in his eyes asked:

“So! You have come home! What are you going to do now? Not too grown up to talk to me about it, I hope”.<sup>32</sup>

Gandhiji was much disturbed by the horror and bloodshed in which our countrymen had been engaged. They had forgotten the lessons of non-violence and the brethren were turned into enemies. The partition had brought much tragedy and bloodshed.

Such a perplexed man was quite receptive and sensible to the new thoughts of a young girl. He gave a very patient listening to young Taru. When she inquired whether he was busy; he replied:

“Busy? I am never too busy. Let me know when you are coming”.<sup>33</sup>

Thus, Gandhiji was always ready to help the next person he found around him. With a great determination, he arranged his prayer-meetings even during the times of riots.

Sahgal notes that a number of foreign visitors used to attend Gandhiji's prayer meeting and they might be wondering why thousands of Indians were spell bound by- “the unimpressive looking, sparsely clad little man...”<sup>34</sup>

Giving contemporaneous account Sahgal relates that during 19'47 – '48, Delhi was people in agony after a cruel Partition. The world was curious about this India of Gandhi, curious about the manner in which she had achieved her freedom. Tourists from abroad flocked to the city of Delhi and diplomatic corps expanded rapidly. During the month of

January in 1948, Indi, Ranjit and Taru along with Padmasi- Mrs. Naidu's daughter, visited Gandhiji in Birla house and with his sixth sense premonition Gandhiji had remarked:

“It is good you came to see me today, because the next time you see me will be in a crowd.”(p.p.228)

Above words, spontaneously spoken by Bapu turned out to be true. The next time Sahgal found him in his funeral procession amongst thousands of people. Recollecting the passing away of the great soul Sahgal remarks that on January 30, 1948 while she and Indi were having their evening tea a phone call summoned them to ‘Birla House’. They were informed that,

“Gandhiji had been shot on his way to a prayer-meeting”.<sup>35</sup>

That very prayer meeting which was a mark of peace for the whole world was polluted by a mean Indian.

With a precision of a skilled sculptor Sahgal has presented a pen-portrait of Gandhiji's funeral session, immersion of his ashes in the Ganges at Allahabad and the sense of emptiness India felt. Sahgal has attempted to conclude her autobiography with the depiction of Bapu's demise and with a sense of self-realization through Gandhian impact. She notes:

“It was true that I had not worked with Gandhiji, gone to prison at his call or made any sacrifice for my country's sake. That had been the work of a different generation. My sisters and I and other young people like me, had been merely onlookers. But still I felt at sea and I think the reason was that my feeling of loss went deeper than consciousness”.<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, Sahgal hasn't lost hope for India. Having received the inspiration from Bapu, she wishes to rebuild India and her people:

“Were my values so fragile had Bapu lived and died for nothing? That I could so easily lose courage when he was no longer there?.....



Bapu's ashes had been scattered over the Ganges, but what if he had gone? We were still there, young, strong and proud to bear his banner before us....Gandhi was dead, but his India would live on in his children."<sup>37</sup>

Thus, Sahgal's autobiography is centered around four main figures in her life-her Papu, mamu, Bapu and her mother. Further more, unlike any other Indian woman autobiographer she has depicted the history of her times in the most remarkable way. She has woven into the texture of her life story all the pre-independence struggles of 20<sup>th</sup> century. She has marvellously portrayed the foundation of the first congress and leadership of Gandhiji. Though her autobiography was published in 1952-53 she has tried to recapture all the events of her past & those of India's in a very remarkable manner.

Recalling her memory, Sahgal recollects her visit to America and wonders at the courage and faith of her parents. Her parents had sent them America in the year 1943; when the Second World War was tolling the death-knell. Nevertheless her parents sent them away from homeland with a view to give safer environment to their kids. Her visit to America, her studies at various foreign colleges are interrelated with the 4 main figures by whom she was highly impressed.

Often in the narration of her first visit to America, a shy and docile typical Indian woman comes to the forefront. Sahgal recollects that whenever an enemy submarine attack was suspected there was a call from the ship captain and all the passengers were supposed to be gathered together on the deck. Once, there was such an announcement on the megaphone and Lekha called Tara but she was unable to respond to the signal as she was arranging her large, thick hair with a comb.

Sahgal has narrated the whole conversation with a nice sense of humour:

“Are you mad?”.... who cares what you look like if we’re attacked and have to jump into the ocean?” said Lekha”.<sup>38</sup>

Thus, basically Sahgal is a down to earth ‘woman’. She thought:

“If such were my destiny, nothing could deter it, I philosophized and continued to attend to my coiffure before each exercise”.

Relating her feminine qualities, Sahgal refers to one of the visits of Mrs. Sarojini Naidu at her place. When she was just a child of about 10, Mrs. Naidu asked her:

“Would you rather be the most brilliant woman in the world or the most beautiful?”

She replied: “the most beautiful”.

At this juncture Mrs. Naidu termed her “a true woman” and said:

“She doesn’t care a fig for brains. I hope she’ll have more sense later on!”<sup>39</sup>

Thus, Sahgal adored all the tender feminine qualities right from her childhood. In the second part of her life-story also we find her striving to maintain her house-hold duties with help of the servants. By hook or crook she allotted her time to her kids and played along with them.

Sahgal has further depicted her awe and wonder related to her visit to America in a very womanly yet natural way. As a curious onlooker of both the cultures she marvels in the art of translating cultures. In the chapter entitled ‘The First Glimpse’, she has depicted her first glimpse of friendly portrait of New York. This depiction implies her deep faith in human values. In the very opening part of the life-story her faith in humanity has been referred to:

“One of the remarkable things about life is that wherever one goes there are always some people willing to help one for no reason other than the goodness of their hearts. In san Pedro, one such chivalrous person

‘turned out to be an Australian, Mr. Quinlan who had travelled with us and who, like us, was in the United States for the first time’.<sup>40</sup>

Sahgal relates that the same Mr. Quinlan helped them with the hotel reservations in San Pedro. He helped them to stay there in a hotel for one night and then contacted Mrs. Frances Gunther at Los Angeles. Sahgal very funnily narrates how the hotel detective enquired them as it was a period of wars.

To Sahgal and her sister, Los Angeles seemed a ‘sprawling giant’. Its glitter and pomp made her home sick. As their hotel was situated in a noisy part of the city, it was difficult for her to get any sleep. The fire engines roared and banged and Jive music was constantly in the air. Young Tara told her Sister Lekha: “I don’t think these people ever go to sleep”.<sup>41</sup>

Sahgal further notes that whenever she & Lekha were wandering the busy streets of Los Angeles passers by stared at them. They were rather surprised at the way they were dressed in saris. One of the passers by asked them who they were and his girl friend had replied:

“You know, stupid, they’re from that country near Egypt.”<sup>42</sup>

At this juncture Sahgal felt hurt, she reflected that five thousand odd years of civilization and culture had been airily dismissed by that girl. Here author’s deep love for the motherland has been very effectively expressed.

Further Sahgal remarks that in Los Angeles people not only commented on their dressing sense but also asked a variety of questions ranged from, politics to fashion: they asked about Gandhian ideology, Hindu-Muslim integrity, which type of makeup Indian girls use, so on and so forth. Once, a girl similar to her age, expressed her wonder at the fact that if Indian girls did not go for dating, what the hell they did in the evenings. Thus, Sahgal came across a variety of queries in America

related to our culture, customs and mannerisms. Once, her sister was asked by one of the American reporters a question pertaining to untouchability in a very burlesque manner as follows:

“Isn’t it true that people of higher castes refuse to associate with untouchables, to eat anything cooked by them or even walk near them?”

Quick was Lekha’s reply:

“Don’t tell a soul, but our cook at home is an untouchable!”<sup>43</sup>

Thus, the author and both her sisters were like Indian comrades abroad, defending Indian cultural heritage in every possible way.

Sahgal opines that in the city of New York they were always referred to as ‘Nehru’s Nieces’. Due to their ‘Nehru’ lineage even in a foreign land; they were honoured with flowers, gifts, telephone calls and mails of the fans. They also received attention of the press and media. ‘Time’ Magazine had a paragraph referring to them as “the raven – eyed nieces of Nehru”. Another magazine referred to ‘Musical names Chandralekha & Nayantara’. Further, Sahgal has given a detailed portrayal of the contrast in Indian bazaars and American bazaars. Obviously she loves Indian way of shopping with all its dirt and flies, heat and dust but warmth and rapport with the shopkeeper.

Sahgal has also referred to various renowned people she met in America; like Paul Robeson, Hellen Keller, Mrs. Walsh. During their first month in New York she & Lekha stayed at Mrs. Dorothy Norman’s home.

Author and her sister were often invited to speak on India at student gatherings. There, most of the times she was asked about Gandhiji, his influence on India and her family; so on & so forth.

Further, Sahgal has narrated how she visited convocation function of her sister Rita’s graduation and her own experiences in Putney School, Vermont.

Further, she has given a pen-portrayal of her visit to the foundation ceremony of U.N. in 1946.

The first part of her life-story concludes with the death of Gandhiji but hope for India. In the same part she has narrated the variety of servants and governesses and their special places in their lives; which we shall carry further in the discussion of second part 'From Fear Set Free'

Moreover, we also find most of the general characteristics of the autobiography as a literary genre very well maintained by the author. Her Autobiographical account is truthful, confessional, picturesque, contemporaneous dealing with the greatest freedom struggle of India. This life-story is not only a life-story of Sahgal herself but a saga of Nehru's family, Ranjit Sitaram's family and above all India the motherland with her "Unity and Diversity".

One can get the ultimate picture of Indian multiculturalism here.

## References

1. Sahgal Nayantara, *Prison and Chocolate Cake*, P. 3.
2. Ibid, P. 21.
3. Ranjana Harish, translated by Bela Thaker, *Bhartiya Strioni atmakatha*, Gurjar Granth Ratna, amadavad, 2004.
4. As quoted in Bhatnagar M.K., *Encyclopaedia of Literature in English an Article on Sahgal* by Attia Abid, P.1618.
5. Ibid P. 1618.
6. Ibid P. 1618.
7. Sodhi Meena, *Indian English Writing. The autobiographical mode*, creative books, New Delhi, 1991, P. 138 – 139.
8. Sahgal Nayantara, *Point of View, A Personal; Response to Life*, Literature & Politics, prestige Books, New Delhi, 1997, P -17.
9. Sahgal Nayantara, *Prison and Chocolate Cake*, Harper Collins India, reprinted in 2007, first published in – 1954, Introduction, P. 18.
10. Ibid P. 4.
11. Ibid P. 16.
12. Ibid P. 16.
13. Sodhi Meena ‘Indian English Writing – The Autobiographical Mode’, creative books, New Delhi, 1991, P. 140.
14. Sahgal Nayantara, *Prison and Chocolate Cake* Harper Collins India, reprinted in 2007, first published in 1954, P. 27.
15. Ibid P. 29 – 30.
16. Ibid P. 30.
17. Ibid P. 64-65.
18. Ibid P. 66.
19. Ibid P. 67.
20. Ibid P. 29.

21. Ibid P. 31.
22. Ibid P. 32.
23. Ibid P. 34.
24. Ibid P. 48.
25. Ibid P. 126.
26. Ibid P. 149.
27. Ibid P. 220.
28. Ibid P. 25, 26.
29. Ibid P. 143.
30. Ibid P. 143.
31. Ibid P. 144.
32. Ibid P. 223.
33. Ibid P. 223.
34. Ibid P.224.
35. Ibid P. 228.
36. Ibid P.233.
37. Ibid P.234.
38. Ibid P. 9.
39. Ibid P. 141.
40. Ibid P. 120.
41. Ibid P. 123.
42. Ibid P. 123.
43. Ibid Pp – 131.



**CHAPTER: III**

**PART – II**

**FROM FEAR SET FREE:  
A TRUE TASTE OF FREEDOM**





**CHAPTER: III**  
**Part – II**  
**FROM FEAR SET FREE:**  
**A true taste of freedom**

*From Fear Set Free* is Sahgal's Sequel to the first part of her life story *Prison and Chocolate Cake* published in 1952.

It is published exactly after ten years in 1962. It begins from where *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (1952-53) had ended. The previous one concluded with the passing away of Mahatma and his dream India. This sequel begins with Mahatma Gandhi's faith in universal brotherhood, love, Satyagraha and Non-violence. The book *From Fear Set Free* is dedicated to her husband referred to as "G.S." It has a preface quoting Gandhiji: "The outward freedom that we shall attain will only be in exact proportion to the inward freedom to which we may have grown at a given moment." <sup>1</sup>

Thus, the preface to the book is a key-note to the whole book. It depicts the true definition of freedom. One's head can be held high only when one feels the true spirit of outward as well as inward freedom. Furthermore, outward freedom can be attained only through inward freedom. In order to attain inward freedom one must be fearless. Sahgal has entitled the book *From Fear Set Free*. In the very first chapter Sahgal has given a formula to set one's fear free. She opines that 'Love' is the ultimate remedy for all the problems of the world. If your heart has wide store of love; Fear will remain far away from you. Non-violence, Satyagraha and Freedom – struggle are all Synonyms of love.

She observes: "Love had pervaded my childhood and charity, its counterpart, the political climate of my country even at its most turbulent, when the people who had followed Gandhi towards the goal of freedom

had cheerfully gone to prison without rancour against the government that imprisoned them. Love, the guiding principle of all good men, had been Gandhi's lodestar too..... He believed that the individual could bring about a change in the heart of his opponent through love and non-violence....”<sup>2</sup>

Again, recollecting her memory lane, Sahgal depicts the all-pervading power of freedom and opines how the spirit of freedom had coloured the lives of all her family members. She observes: “Freedom had brought changes for members of my family too, taking my uncle to New Delhi as Prime Minister, my mother to serve in diplomatic missions. In Allahabad our home, Anand Bhawan, would stand deserted not far from the confluence of the Ganges and Jumna, where my father's ashes had been scattered three years earlier....”<sup>3</sup>

Sahgal recollects her earlier ‘Anand Bhawan’ which always remained ‘A home’ for her throughout her life. Her Papu had allotted a task of looking after a boat named ‘Nagkanya’ to one of the boatmen. The boat along with boatmen & her father were resurrected in her mind after so many years.

She wondered whether the boatmen would be still looking after the boat the same way after so many Years. Readers can feel the prick of thorn in Sahgal's heart. One can feel her sense of loss mingled with home – sickness.

Giving a key to the title again Sahgal refers that her Papu never tolerated bondage in any form. Sahgal reveals her pain at the fact that her Papu was no longer with her to see India completely liberated.

Again becoming nostalgic Sahgal relates that her father became angry about two things: “the dammed British” with their conquering arrogance and the “dammed Indians” who were supine enough to submit to conquest. He did not easily accept Non-violence as a way of life. In

one of such interactions when Sahgal asked her father whether king of England's picture would always remain on Indian postal stamps or not. He replied with a calm smile: "One day it won't". Definitely that day came but with so many after-effects.

For Sahgal, Partition turned out to be one of such after-effects. Recalling the refugees sheltered nearby area of Connaught place, Sahgal observes:

"Next-door at a cloth merchant's a salesman showed the latest in sequined and embroidered Saris to a young woman shopping for her trousseau, while just outside, in a pale slab of sunlight below the pavement, sat as though carved in granite, a band of refugees in their soiled garments. The recently coined Hindi word for them termed them the "Shelter – seekers" yet seeking did not describe this group. Their eyes were empty, giving them a curiously faceless look and they were silent."<sup>4</sup>

Thus, recalling the loss of her father stimulated the loss of one part of the country. Sahgal's deep love for the father and the motherland is apparent.

In the second part of her life-story Sahgal depicts her return from America to the motherland. Thus, She is a foreign – returned onlooker of independent India .When she had been sent to America country was not independent. Having returned from the foreign land, Sahgal finds an altogether new India imitating western culture:

"In Connaught place, the shopping centre – a circular group of white washed, many-pillared buildings- the counters at the leading chemist's gleamed with American lipsticks, French perfumes and an assortment of high-priced toiletries"<sup>5</sup> In the same vein Sahgal depicts a club evening in India'

"The club represented a portion of India that had remained untouched by the drama of the last twenty-five or thirty years, it was

confusing suddenly to be a part of it. I could not say that, in the India I had left a few years earlier, I would not have been sipping sherry in a club or he sitting beside me.....”<sup>6</sup>

Having returned from America, Sahgal finds an altogether new face of India. She has a mixed feeling for this new free India. Nevertheless, she is very receptive to the new changes.

For a male autobiographer success is related to career and external world of work and woofs. On the other hand for an Indian gynographer success is always judged in the terms of marriage, family and house-hold. Most rich and famous women like Shobha De also do not consider herself a careerist. Same is the case with NayanTara Sahgal. Here in Sahgal has given a full-length account of her very private intimacies and relationships. As an inherently Indian woman marriage did matter most to her. Very opening of *From Fear Set Free* is hinted at her female-like hunt for true love resulting in marital bliss.

She observes: “Love was Max’s favourite theme and he could talk about it as tirelessly as any art collector about his most valued treasure.”<sup>7</sup>

It is apparent that Sahgal has a hidden soft-corner for Mr. Max. Admiring Mr. Max Sahgal refers that he had a kind heart and his affection for her family had made him their firm friend during her stay in America. Gradually and that too very efficiently Sahgal has correlated Max’s views on love with Gandhiji’s concept of Non-violence. Obviously, Max’s firm decision on settling in New York subdued her soft-corner for him. Sahgal was bent upon to return to homeland. Max advised:

“Life in India would be bleak and unrewarding after New York. “You could stay here.” “Make it your home.”<sup>8</sup>

Thus, far & no further. Sahgal returns India & doesn’t recollect the soft friendship with that family friend.

Suddenly an old verve of mild soft-corner for Max has been artistically recollected when she refers to the Tarrot card-reader Sikh. She notes:

“A Sikh carrying a tattered notebook and sporting a pencil behind one ear followed me to the car, talking rapidly as I emerged from the chemist’s with my purchases: “Your fortune Madam Two men compete for your affection but you will not have either. You will marry a man with much money.”<sup>9</sup>

The Sikh wanted to judge whether Sahgal was pleased by his prediction. Nevertheless Sahgal did not pay heed. Having shut the door of her car she went home.

Further, she refers that she had every intention of marrying a history professor. That was her adolescent fancy. She wanted to devote her life doing research into some remote period of Indian history. Sahgal accepts that, dreams seldom turn into reality. Life had something different in store for her. With a romantic fervour she narrates that the gymkhana club where she had been often invited did not abound in “history professors.” How she is overwhelmed with the magic of romance has been marvellously depicted in her first meeting with her would be husband.

A woman autobiographer has to use a magical key to unlock her heart. Using the Same key Sahgal voices her innermost feelings thus: “It was a Tuesday or a Friday night. At any rate, it was cocktail dance evening at the club. The Tennessee waltz trickled timidly into the ballroom and couples slowly circled the floor.... Soon I was dancing with one of the anonymous young men. He was not in the Foreign Service like some of the others; I found, but with a British firm. Polite conversation offered. Little range for arresting comment..... But the difference of this particular man was soon apparent in a restlessness that had very little to

do with formal attire or party small talk. I stole a tentative look at him out of the corner of my eyes and my history professor wavered like a reflection in water.”<sup>10</sup>

Thus, Gautam Sahgal broke all the fancies of the author of marrying a history professor. Though he was not a history professor of her dreams Sahgal was attracted to her. Soon the attraction strengthened in the form of love. She thought that it was a pity, that he was not a history professor. Nevertheless, even in the hurly burly of partition-period suddenly the club began to interest her. Leafing through the book, we feel that Sahgal took the institution of marriage very sincerely. She felt that one has to work hard to keep the magic going. One has to be quite assured about it. when Gautam proposed her in a moonlit garden inquiring her whether she had informed her mother, he assured her “we are going to be very happy,”<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless Sahgal pondered over Gautam’s positive, confident & determined statement. In her first meeting with him Gautam had assumed her to be hardly sixteen but she had already entered into her twenties. She had flung away all her history professor’s fancies and began to think about marriage seriously. she observes:

“Getting married would be stepping outside the intimate family circle into the unknown.”<sup>12</sup>

Thus, her upbringing in the elite class & American higher education had given a worldly wise tone to her personality.

Though she is very rational about marriage she is not very conventional. She firmly believes that one should live with an individual with whom one is comfortable. She has given a generation-wise report on the marriage as an institution:

“For my elders marriage both by law and tradition had been indissoluble, a choice once made irrevocable. For my grandchildren, who

would grow up in a greatly changed India, it would, in all probability, be more flexible and less stable institution, yielding more and more to the pressures of personality and society. For me it would fall midway between the two, the law eventually facilitating divorce while tradition and sentiment were still ranged against it. It would not be the impregnable institution it had once been. Where the responsibility for it rested with oneself one had to be all the more certain.”<sup>13</sup>

Thus, to Sahgal, entering into any relationship meant a life-long bridge. Marriage meant a life-long alliance which gave an individual cent-percent space & freedom. A sense of freedom and respect matters the most. Her ideas related to marriage are very factual and rational. In the backdrop of the partition experience Sahgal has depicted her fragile relationship with her husband. Following the autobiographical tradition she has also depicted a very matter-of-fact character-sketch of her hubby Gautam Sahgal.

Giving live colours to her hubby’s personality, Sahgal notes that the partition became for her more than a troubling event. Relating partition experience and its impact on her husband, Sahgal observes:

“Because of it (partition) I had met a young man employed in a British firm, an Indian whose India had been as different from mine as any man I could have met, whose home in Lahore had had the best of linen, glass and wine that his father’s frequent trips to Europe could provide, in contrast to mine,…”<sup>14</sup>

At the outset Sahgal confesses that she was well aware about the differences between the culture, customs and even ideologies of Gautam and those of hers. In Gautam’s house there was a plenty of linen, glass & wine imported from Europe. On the other hand Sahgal’s parents and even grand parents abandoned all that was termed ‘foreign’. They were the pioneers of Swadeshi movement in India. Sahgal herself had imbibed

Gandhian ideology as her own. She remarkably refers to the notable difference in Gautam's mental make up and that of her own. she observes:

“....this was an Indian to whom Gandhi was just a name and freedom for his country an event that had deprived him of his home and a part of his inheritance”.<sup>15</sup>

When Gautam had asked Sahgal whether she had talked to her mother about their acquaintance she was quite worried about the differences between them. Nevertheless, she was assured about Gautam's tact in solving the problems. She was well aware that Gautam disliked hesitation. Considering Gautam's tact, Sahgal depicts her own dilemma like a confessional autobiographer:

“He tackled problems with a figurative lawnmower.....For me life resembled a rock-garden full of small crevices and obstructions. How could I enter his world or he mine? We would make a new one, said Gautam”<sup>16</sup>

Soon after Gautam gifted Sahgal with a tiny golden cocker spaniel as a sign of their engagement.

Prior to their betrothal Sahgal met Gautam so many times even though the country was involved in the imbroglio. Whenever they met, they discussed current scenario of India:

Sahgal seems to have accepted Gautam's rational attitude as an outcome of his family background, his relations with the British & the sense of loss during partition.

Depicting the contrasts between herself & her spouse, Sahgal remarked that like so many Indians, Gautam too doubted the efficacy of Gandhi's teachings. He certainly did not accept non-violence as an aid to peace when the whole country was steeped in blood and terror of partition. He certainly did not consider non-violence as a natural tool for



peace when there was blood and terror all around. He always referred to Lahore in very nostalgic manner. He grieved at the massacre of partition and Jallianwala bag. He represents intellectuals of the twenties and was without any illusions or glorified views about non-violence & all the Gandhian movements. Sahgal was quite aware about the differences in tone & temper of her spouse. Nevertheless, she accepted him as he was. Again, referring to the rational attitude of Gautam the author gives an extraordinary pen-portrait of her hubby:

“Sleeping with a gun beside him, alert to the crackle of a twig or the sound of a footfall, every night had had its quota of sinister imaginings. And, unbelievably, all this had happened in his own home, the city where his family had lived and prospered for generations, where he had grown up – that city-like-no-other, Lahore, to which he so often nostalgically referred. It was little wonder he had no illusions. With the Punjabi’s earth-bound instincts he had always believed in his strong right arm. The partition had convinced him of the efficacy of this. everything else was talk. Non-violence had gone up in blood and smoke.”<sup>17</sup>

Sahgal has remarkable contemporaneousness. With a finesse of a skilled weaver she has woven partition experience, Hindu-Muslim conflicts, Gandhian ideals of non-violence, Satyagrahis, Nehru as a worried uncle, Gautam viz a –viz Tara into the texture of her life-story. Referring to the current times and plight of India she accepts that the country was in a great turmoil. It was not at all the best time to be engaged. Still, as a young girl of an elite class she was not directly involved in the freedom struggle. Nevertheless, she was quite aware about what was going around her. She was quite aware about contemporary national as well as international struggles as she herself says that they were “Nehru’s nieces”. Again, giving contemporary account she observes:

“We were intensely aware of the world beyond our domestic frontiers, a world into which Mamu’s views, his work and his Vision had opened a door. As children our miseries were not so much over pocket money or treats denied as over the injustices we read and heard about.....”<sup>18</sup>

Right from her childhood Sahgal was quite aware about the problems of her era: She was worried about the next door drunkard man thrashing away his servant, the Jews treated like dirt in Germany, the maltreatment with the blacks, the untouchables prohibited in the temples and so on. Despite the inadequate Media facility she was well informed about Japan’s attack on Manchuria, Mussolini’s war on Abyssinia, the tragedy of the Spanish civil war and the rise of Hitler. Sahgal confesses that she became well-informed about the current scenario through her Mamu.

The same enlightened Mamu kept a vigilant check on his young niece and inquired the well-dressed young niece where she was going. Short was her reply: “to dinner”. Objecting his niece, Nehru said in a very dignified manner: “This is the fourth time this week... I don’t like it.”<sup>19</sup>

Thus, Nehru took a motherly care of his nieces in the absence of his sister. Soon after, Sahgal wrote to her mother about her wish of marrying Gautam. She was pleased with her daughter’s announcement and instructed her to go to Moscow with two domestic help. She also expressed her wonder at Sahgal’s announcement and added:

“I am always taken unawares”. Mrs. Vijayalaxmi had also told her daughter:

“A daughter is too precious to be handed over in haste to anyone, however good – at least, that is how my father felt about me and how I feel about mine.”<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, Sahgal has depicted her visit to Moscow in a very detailed manner. She came across the whole Russian culture along with Russian kids, diplomatic and non diplomatic staff of Russian embassy, annual music conferences, Russian ballet and theatres. Sahgal has also noted that in 1948 travel in soviet-union was forbidden except by special permission to specified place. Hence they did not develop much contact with common soviet citizens, while returning from Moscow Lekha reminded Sahgal that they had forgotten to see Lenin's tomb. Sahgal relates that she left Moscow with a feeling of frustration but with a hope to travel freely next time. Thus, her sense for freedom was very powerful. She believed in freedom from within and without. Afterwards her mother had been appointed as an Indian Ambassador in Washington.

Sahgal is that well versed artist who has portrayed the past, present and the future of her country with lucidity. She is well aware that the British gifted India with an altogether new world. They employed the policy of divide and rule but they had also shown India, wonders of the world especially in the form of new technology. Nevertheless, she knows very well that modernity had not covered up rural India. She observes:

“With the coming of the railways, roads, telegraph wires and electricity superimposed modernity on the map of India. It was a surface modernity, not a sign of the country's own economic vitality or advancement or prosperity. It did not penetrate the rural areas where lived three quarters of India's people. But the cities reflected it...”<sup>21</sup>

Description of people, events and places gives a special fervour to an autobiography. Sahgal suggests that the upcoming modernity in 50's & 60's had not penetrated the rural India but it was quite apparent in the Urban. Depicting the impact of modernization on Indian cities she again presents full-length accounts of the cities like Allahabad, Kanpur Delhi & Kolkata. Portraying the true picture of Northern India Sahgal relates that

in northern India nearly every city developed among similar lines: “”Its English crust, crisp and light and removable, atop a filling of Hindu and Islamic culture”.<sup>22</sup>

Allahabad too developed as a city of amalgamated cultures of the English, the Hindu and the Islamic. It had a well-to-do residential quarter where the houses stood apart with well-cultivated gardens. Allahabad also consisted of crowded quarter where the streets were narrow and the buildings ranged from hovels to structures which looked as if they would crumble down any time. Giving a pen-portrait of Allahabad Sahgal again goes back to the history of the city. She records that right from the time of Mahabharata, the area of Allahabad was scattered with reminders of its past history: “There was the Ashoka pillar, erected in 240 B.C. the fort at the junction of the Ganges & Jumna rivers, which in Akbar’s reign had been the most heavily fortified stronghold in India.”<sup>23</sup>

Further, Sahgal has depicted the colourful ‘Khusrau’ garden with its interior decoration having the paintings of birds & flowers. The same garden commemorated the rebellious son of Jehangir. Having the historical fervour of its own the city of Allahabad in Sahgal’s time was enclosed within the neat picket fence of British Occupation.

In Allahabad, public entertainment was most of the times contributed by the British. The annual flower-show had been introduced to the city by the British. The missionary schools organized charity bazaars and fetes. The occasional plays performed in one of the cinema houses was performed either by a foreign touring company or the local English dramatic group. The British influenced at the crust level. Nevertheless, below the crust level the filling had its own separate existence. That is to say the local ethnic groups organized the annual music conferences at the university and young budding talent from all over the country participated. With a tinge of sparkling humour Sahgal

remarks: “The conference lasted several days, each day’s items continuing well into the night, for the great ones warmed to their themes only after midnight. In the early hours of the morning, only the true lovers of classical music remained in the hall.”<sup>24</sup>

Further, Sahgal relates that major part of the city was much under the impact of the movement for freedom. Many a times she observed the huge crowds of men and women in the public meetings induced to fight with the weapon of “Satyagraha.”

Portraying the beauty of Delhi even at the time of partition Sahgal observes.

“New Delhi in the welcome sun shine of an approaching winter looked deceptively like a peaceful sprawling suburb, its single-storeyed houses set in gardens well back from tree-shaded avenues.”<sup>25</sup>

Sahgal has also depicted the towering figure of Delhi with her secretariat building, army and Air-force head quarters and the houses of parliament. She terms Delhi as a city of historic imperial traditions far ancient and a thousand years earlier than the Christian era. In the same vein Sahgal has depicted cities of Kanpur and Calcutta.

Having Returned from Moscow, Mrs. Vijayalxmi Pandit was welcomed like a princess in her home-town Allahabad. She was the daughter of the town and now it was the time for the daughter’s daughter to be departed. All the servants of Anand Bhawan busied themselves for the wedding at hand. Sahgal’s mother instructed Vyasji to bring samples of flower jewellery for Tara, as it was a family custom that the bride only wore flower jewellery. Mrs. Pandit also decreased the clusters of lighting arrangements and asserted that it should not be arranged all over the house gaudily but along the front and in some of the trees. Above all it was a wedding, not a circus.

Having discussed the wedding details with Vyasji Mrs. Pandit went to Jaipur with her brother Jawaharlal Nehru to attend the congress session. Vyasji was surprisingly shocked at the determination of a mother who was first a public servant and then a mother. Vyasji groaned whether that family would ever behave normally. Mrs. Pandit could not attend the 'Mehendi' of her daughter but returned from Jaipur on the wedding day as fresh as ever.

For Sahgal, it was quite a difficult task to get adjusted into the family which differed from the smallest detail to overall picture: She had to shift from "a world where men wore Gandhi caps and Indian clothes made of hand-spun cloth to that of European suits and ties, from orange juice to the cocktail circuit ... From the atmosphere of a political crusade to one of commerce."<sup>26</sup>

Within a short span of her marriage the young couple shifted to Kanpur where Sahgal's husband had been posted. There they stayed in a double storeyed hotel. Wherever Sahgal went with her hubby her train of servants accompanied her. One of her servants -Sundar accompanied her to Kanpur. Further they enjoyed few days at the largest houses in Kanpur in the company of the caretaker Mr. Gill. They enjoyed tennis & Squash courts as well as swimming pool. Returning from Mr. Gill's retreat, they also visited Gautam's friend sonny's house. There she became acquainted with Gautam's love for meat and wine. She also visited her Hem Masi's house in Lucknow. Thus, the early marriage life of Sahgal turned out to be 'happy, healthy and gay'.

Bearing and rearing a child is a special pleasure with which only a woman is endowed. Sahgal notes very zealously that Mrs. Vijyalakshmi Pandit invited her to Washington to have first baby and told her "Every girl should have her first baby in her parents' home."<sup>27</sup> Sahgal replied that such a situation would be ideal when one's parents are living in the next

town. Mrs. Vijyalakshmi considered the whole world as a global village even in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and insisted that Sahgal should deliver her first baby in Washington and meanwhile her husband would also have a nice outing in America. It is obvious from Sahgal's narration that Mrs. Vijyalakshmi Pandit was quite advanced in her views related to delivery. When Sahgal hesitated to visit America for delivery, her mother replied: "You children never take advantage of all the wonderful opportunities you are offered. Besides Gautam has long leave and he hasn't been to America".<sup>28</sup>

Thus Sahgal's mother provided her with all the moral courage a woman needs at the time of pregnancy and Sahgal flew to America along with her husband when she was six months pregnant.

Cynthia Huff in her essay "Delivery: The cultural representation of childbirth" observes that a woman's life "delineates a significant life event rather than the form of a life lived, describes an experience which only women can have and furthermore, characterizes a cultural phenomenon which metaphorically embodies physical as well as textual creation".<sup>29</sup>

Thus, the personal narratives in women autobiographies may abound by her birth experience either in the form of a woman giving birth to a child or helping in the process of delivery. We are all aware that child birth in India is familial, social and cultural matter. It seems that Sahgal's first experience of having a baby was quite painless. Even in those early days of moderate scientific advancements America was very well advanced. Along with her husband Sahgal had to fill up few forms and deliver a baby in quite painless manner. She observes: "of the actual process of having a baby, which I had eagerly looked forward to, I remembered nothing. I woke up in my hospital bed sometime after the delivery and was told I had a daughter".<sup>30</sup>

Thus, Sahgal's first delivery was an easy way out and she named her daughter 'Nonika' following the text of Raj Tarangini the Sanskrit history of Kashmir translated by her father in English.

Sahgal's second experience of child-birth was a really painful one. It was the birth of her son Ranjit in very simple but cosy environs of Allahabad hospital which gave Sahgal pains of mother hood.

Along with its warps and woofs Sahgal regretted the fact why she was unlike other women who did not shout at the time of labour pains. Further she also gave birth to Geeta the youngest one.

Sahgal frankly confesses that she was not a very skilled homemaker. She did not manage her home as skilfully as her mother did. Most of the times she had to depend on the servants. Further more, her husband had to transfer from one city to another so often that she could never make any city her home. Neither her homestead was fixed. With a tiresome job of nine to seven her husband could not allot enough time to the kids & the wife. A woman who had enjoyed carefree world of girlhood and adolescent managing a home turned out to be a pity plight. Sahgal has given so many illustrations of her inefficiency in managing a home and kids. She spoilt her cooks and servants because of her prodigal nature. Often tears rolled down her cheeks when in a kitchen less accommodation of Jaipur house she and her cook Bhagirath were troubled by the tender Ranjit's hunger wails. She has tongue in cheek' quoted the advice of her friend Malti:

“A woman who kept no keys, who did not lock the provisions, who did not recognize in its raw state one dal from another deserved what she got....”<sup>31</sup>

It is obvious that right from her childhood Sahgal was much closer to her servants. She never ordered them but obeyed them like her parents. Often she had to pass her days under the care and guidance of



governesses and servants when her parents were imprisoned during freedom struggle. Hence in both the parts of her autobiographies we find elaborate descriptions of the servants and their involvement in Nehru household. In the first part of her life story Sahgal accepts:

“No Story of an Indian home can be complete without a description of those whose life’s work it is to serve it. Our family servants played a major role in our lives. During our absences from our parents we would have felt lost and uprooted if we had not had them around us, to bring us up with love and care, looking up as their own children ...<sup>32</sup>

Sahgal notes that her servants served them with calm devotion and reflected the very soul of India.

She begins her narration with their sweeper-woman Lachmania who served them continuously year in and year out with a broom in hand, back bent, removing the leaves from the lawn of Anand Bhawan.

She was fond of ornaments. Sahgal notes that though she was poor and of humble origin, she was “a woman, with a woman’s pride in ornaments.”<sup>33</sup>

Secondly, Sahgal has given a pen-portrait of their bearer ‘Sundar’ who belonged to the ‘untouchable class’ He waited on them at meals and looked after their rooms. Her Papu used to tell them that he could hardly be called ‘Sundar’ considering his looks.

Sahgal has also depicted the family tailor Mohammed Hussein with his mastery over tailoring. Sahgal has given marvellous pictures of the two chowkidars Bansi & Hari again the untouchable. Formerly Hari was a rogue like figure & used to steal things from the household. Once he was sacked off by Motilal Nehru. However after some time he was again posted in ‘Swaraj Bhawan’. Later on the same Hari was imprisoned for participating in the freedom struggle. He also contested election of the Legislative assembly as a congress party candidate in 1936 in U.P. Sahgal

happily notes that a little waif had come a long way in life. Further Sahgal has also given a full length account of the gardener Rama who was a favourite to her Papu. Rama could never control his tears when Ranjit Sitaram was arrested. Ranjit Sitaram also believed that, it was for men such as Rama that India's freedom must be achieved. The soil of India really belonged to 'the simple, gentle people' like Rama.

In prison and chocolate cake we also find references to European governesses specially appointed for the kids of Mrs. Pandit. Governesses like Miss Collins, Mademoiselle and Tante Anna were much involved with kids and taught them English mannerisms. Mademoiselle subscribed for a magazine called 'Wee Wisdom' for kids. Tante Anna was an ardent believer in cold showers, exercise and sunbathing. Mrs. Collins always ignored Sahgal's excuses on Sunday evenings related to not attending the school the next day.

In the sequel to her first life-story, when Sahgal has turned out to be a married mature woman we still find her total dependence on her servants. In *From Fear Set Free* we mark that her servant Sundar accompanied her to Kanpur in very early phase of her marriage. Later on, her husband appointed a cook named Bhagirath in Jaipur house at Delhi. Her mother's Indian cook Buddhi prepared cakes at home more delicious than those of the English Bakers. We find so many references to the cook Buddhi. Later on, when her husband Gautam was posted to Bombay, Gautam's family cook accompanied them. In a small flat of Bombay the old servant Meghram had to manage shopping and looking after the house. Two other cooks namely Ramlal and Sukhlal had been appointed to help him. There was also another governess named Angeline to look after the kids. It is obvious that the mistress of the house needed 4 domestic helps to run her home of 5 members.

It is interesting to note that Sahgal concludes her autobiography with her discourse with the servant Ramlal. Prior to that she has woven into the texture of the book the love-triangle of Sukhlal Ramlal & Sushila. We are also informed that a new house has been built up for her and she & Gautam are shifted to Chandigarh- Punjab the native place of Gautam. At least, Gautam felt so. On their first day in Chandigarh Gautam said: "It's the Punjab, it is whatever its citizens will make it."<sup>34</sup>

The critic Meena Sodhi opines that autobiographies are not histories or life account of only an individual. They also contribute to the historical understanding of that particular period in which the writer lived. As such the autobiographical mode is used to expose not only the real determining instances in a person's life but also a historical interrelation between the past and the present. In the course of her life-story Sahgal has given glimpses of so many current events and its connection with the glory of India. She has depicted the instrumental changes in the parliament and the lok-sabha Hindu code Bill debate related to laws concerning divorce, dowry & legacy; students' involvement in politics and in Satyagraha. She has also depicted the impact of industrial revolution on Indian craftsmen and artisans, leading to unemployment. She has marvellously portrayed the immigrants' sensibilities remarking: "Even after 30 years the sikhs in California still speak broken English and long for their native village in Punjab." We also find references to the Chinese aggression like "Hindi chini Bhai-Bhai." Gandhian ideology with all -pervading effect on her character has been very well depicted. Thus, her life-story is not only the depiction of the self but that of incredible India.

Sahgal's habit of story-telling obviously suggests that she is a novelist. Nevertheless her habit of story-telling and the use of anecdotes have definitely enriched the organization of experiences in her life-story.

She has depicted nature full-bloomed in the most natural spots like Khali, Kashmir and Darjeeling. In Roy Pascal's view, the principal aim of autobiography must be a discovery of one's inner understanding. Sahgal's life-story is a true picture of her inner misgivings and apprehensions. The inner self of Sahgal finds its expression in the portrayal of her life. Her inner revelation of coming to terms with herself with the world and her life has been marvellously depicted.

In the last few chapters we are informed that Gautam Sahgal has a house constructed in Chandigarh. Though Mrs. Pandit didn't like it for practical purposes it became the home of Rajiva and Sanjaya, Sahgal's nephews. Nothing is openly stated but we come to know that, after the birth of her three kids, Sahgal is alone with her uncle, Jawaharlal Nehru. Her uncle gives her a solace that every thing will be well at the individual, national and international fronts. The most important aspect of life was

“Private harmony, a peaceful relationship between two people living under the same roof... This peace concerns us most from day to day as its destruction is the one that most poignantly affects us”.<sup>35</sup>

Sahgal ponders over life and its problems. In the very beginning of her life story Sahgal is quite convinced about the cultural distance between herself and her partner. She confesses:

“Had my marriage been arranged, I should not have married Gautam. We should in that case, have married partners from our own province and caste... The need for a common background is particularly significant in a country where provincial differences range over dress, food, language and customs.”<sup>36</sup>

In *From Fear Set Free* Sahgal does not directly express her feeling of suffocation in her marriage life. However she often expresses some kind of fear and being habituated to the monotony of life. While caught in

the trap of her confusion, she also discussed her confusion related to marriage with her Mamu and he advocated a sense of freedom in every area of life:

“It is possible to do many things once fear has been shed... Not conquered, not overcome, merely discarded like a restricting garment so that the body can breathe unimpeded.”<sup>37</sup>

Thus, we find an urge for freedom inherent in the texture of her life-story.

Thus, Sahgal’s life-story expresses her inner life as a reflection of outward movement of India’s freedom struggle. Her autobiographical works truly express the tone and temper of her Era. Hence we feel that they are the true records of 20<sup>th</sup> century India & further. She has reflected India with all her cultural diversity. The upcoming 20<sup>th</sup> century Indian woman is apparent through her self – portrayal. Her references to chowkidars, Maniharans and servants truly portray her as an on-looker of Indian soil. As she believes in complete inner freedom, often in the course of the book she feels ashamed about the fact. She was the only member in the Nehru house-hold who had nothing to do. She always pined for not doing something creative. Hence she pursued the path of creative writing. She firmly believed that Indian woman did not need to unfurl feminist flag. Gandhi illumined her with the spirit of Freedom;

“Indian women did not have to march in suffragette processions to proclaim their equality with men, or don bloomers in place of their feminine garb. No such measures were necessary. Gandhi’s call to women to take part in the national movement beside their men brought them forward as natural as if they had been born to such a life.”<sup>38</sup>

## References

1. Sahgal NayanTara, *From Fear Set Free*' Hind pocket books, New Delhi 1962 (P. 6).
2. Ibid, P. 7,8.
3. Ibid, P. 9.
4. Ibid, P. 13.
5. Ibid, P. 13.
6. Ibid, P. 14.
7. Ibid, P. 7.
8. Ibid, P. 10.
9. Ibid, P. 14.
10. Ibid, P. 20.
11. Ibid, P. 21.
12. Ibid, P. 21.
13. Ibid, P. 32.
14. Ibid, P. 21.
15. Ibid, P. 21.
16. Ibid, P. 21.
17. Ibid, P. 27.
18. Ibid, P. 29.
19. Ibid, pp – 30.
20. Ibid, pp – 33
21. Ibid, P. 43 .
22. Ibid, P. 43.
23. Ibid, P. 43.
24. Ibid, P. 45.
25. Ibid, P. 13.
26. Ibid, P. 53.

27. Ibid, P. 79.
28. Ibid P. 79.
29. Sodhi Meena, Indian English writing The autobiographical Mode', creative books, New Delhi, 1991 P. 106.
30. Sahgal NayanTara, *From Fear Set Free* Hind Pocket books, New Delhi 1962 P. 87.
31. Ibid , P. 115.
32. Sahgal NayanTara, *Prison & Chocolate cake*, Harper Collins India, 2007 first published – 1954 P. 73
33. Ibid, P. 74
34. Sahgal NayanTara, *From Fear Set Free* Hind Pocket books, New Delhi – 1962 P. 186 .
35. Ibid, P. 192.
36. Ibid, P. 32.
37. Ibid, P. 6.
38. Sahgal NayanTara, *Prison & Chocolate cake*, HarperCollins India reprinted in 2007, First published in 1954, P. 67.



**CHAPTER: IV**  
**AMRITA PRITAM'S**  
**THE REVENUE STAMP:**  
**A CANDID EVIDENCE OF**  
**INDIVIDUALITY**





**CHAPTER: IV**  
**Amrita Pritam's**  
**THE REVENUE STAMP:**  
**A candid evidence of individuality**

**“There was a grief I smoked in silence, like a cigarette  
Only a few poems fell out of the ash I flicked from it”<sup>1</sup>**

Amrita Pritam has been variously described as the goddess of defiance, a rebel and recalcitrant and even a revolutionary born in the western part of Punjab, presently in Pakistan in 1919 to a Sikh family, Amrita started her writing career at the age of 16. At the time of Partition she moved to New Delhi which she made her second home. She began to write in Hindi as opposed to Punjabi, her mother tongue. She worked until 1961 for All India Radio. She divorced her husband Pritam sing in 1960 and dedicated her later part of life to writing.

For about half a century, Punjabi literature was predominantly under the progressive movement. Amrita's first collection of Punjabi poems was published in 1935 when she married an editor Pritam sing to whom she was engaged in early childhood. Be it *Amrita Leharan*, *KagazTe Kanvas* (1970, for which she was awarded the Jnanpith award), *Suneherey* (1950), *Kal Chetna*, *Agyat ka Nimantran* or any other works, Amrita Pritam never failed to provoke readers with her rebellious thoughts.

Amrita Pritam is the first woman Punjabi poet. She is the first woman recipient of the Sahitya Akademi award for her collection of poems 'Sunehere'. In 1969, she received Padma shree from the president of India. In 1982 she received Bhartiya Jnanpith award for her collection of poems *Kagaz te Kanvas*. Recently, a film has been made from her novel *Pinjjar* (1950). She has more than 75 books to her credit.

Renowned poet novelist and short story writer, Amrita Pritam, 86, passed away on Monday 31<sup>st</sup> October 2005 at her Hauz khas residence in New Delhi.

After the legendary poet Sitakanta Mohapatra, Amrita Pritam's works have been translated in English, Albanian, Bulgarian, French, Polish, Russian, Spanish and all the 21 Indian languages. Amrita Pritam has been widely read, nationally and internationally. Very few writers have earned this distinction. The nuances of Punjabi and Hindi, so eminently and intuitively exploited by Amrita will continue to be a challenge for translators. Amrita Pritam's life story *The Revenue Stamp* has been also translated in many languages including English. Krishna Gorowara has translated *The Revenue Stamp* with so much precision that it gives the fervour of the original.

In contemporary Punjabi literature Amrita Pritam is an indisputable phenomenon who has no parallel. Her autobiography *Rashidi Ticket, The Revenue Stamp* first published in 1976, is an honest chronicle written with warmth and truthfulness. It may be compared to Dom Moraes' *My Son's father*, which has been described as 'a minor classic' by Stephen Spender. However, critic Suresh Kohli considered *Rashidi Ticket* as nothing more than just a 'half baked onion', for it had none of the things you wanted to know about her life, her relationship with Sahir Ludhianvi and then with Imroz. She was known as a ravishing beauty in Lahore. Yet, in 'Rashidi Tickat' there was little to no account of her early years".<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately, this too is quite controversial. Once, the fate of this life story was about to be hermetically sealed. Later, it appeared in both the Hindi and English versions. Retrospectively, when Amrita Pritam disclosed her plans to write an autobiography to Khushwant Singh, he commented: "what is there to your life? Just an incident or two...you could use the back of a revenue stamp to write it"<sup>3</sup>

In brief prologue to *The Revenue Stamp*, Amrita Pritam shot back, “Whatever happened in my life happened between the layers of thought that found their way into novels and poems. What was left? Still, I thought I might write a few lines - something to complete the account book of my life and at the end, seal it with this revenue stamp as it were or am I with this revenue stamp setting a seal to my novels and poems... my entire, literary work.... I wonder”.<sup>4</sup>

Amrita Pritam’s autobiography is a master piece. She is basically an artist. Her artistic sensibility continually comes to the fore front in her autobiography. Through her artistic touch she has revealed herself as a writer as well as a woman. Time and again we find the illustrations from her poems in her life-story. Her vision of life is broad and all pervasive. Each page of her life story appears an individual poem.

An autobiography is an account of the life of its writer built up by him/her with the help of his/her memory. Amrita Pritam recalls her memory and begins her life story thus:

“Is it Doomsday? Moments of my life in the womb of time lived a while and after Time’s span, seemingly entombed are today alive again, stalk past me... However all the graves yielded to resurrect those moments? It must indeed be Doomsday...” (Page 1)<sup>5</sup>

Thus, one can perceive the intensity of Amrita’s memory coming down the lane. The very title of the first chapter ‘Resurrecting Time’ sounds very artistic. We dare not to expect a factual record from such a chapter. In a very poetic manner Pritam exposes her birth and parentage to us.

Digging up her memory, she narrates that she is a child of enterprising Sadhu Nand Baba and mother Rajbibi. In very sparkling terms Pritam depicts her family history. Through this history we are

bound to accept that revolutionary spirit is inherited. Let's have a look at this hereditary revolutionary spirit in Pritam's family:

Amrita's father had four brothers and a sister. Two of his brothers had died. One Gopalsingh forsook his family for his love for drinking. The other Hakim Singh became a 'Sadhu'. Hence, Nand knew only the elder sister Hakko. This elder sister was also a bewitching creature. Having married a person called Bella Singh, she realised that they were not made for each other. She returned to the parental home, fasted for forty days and renounced the world to become a 'Sadhvi'. Amrita's father Nand followed his sister's path and became a 'Sadhu'. He renounced his forefathers' legacy and joined saint Dayal's Ashram. Mean while; Nand's uncle had betrothed him to a girl in Amritsar. Nand broke off the engagement and began writing poems steeped in the spirit of renunciation.

Amrita's mother; Rajbibi too flung away all the social codes of conduct. She was from Monga village of Gujarat and was married to soldier through the barter system. The soldier never returned from the army and Rajbibi's life turned out to be an empty cup. Amrita Pritam observes:

“...But what matters is not life but the courage you bring to it”<sup>6</sup>

Rajbibi began teaching in a school at Gujranwala along with her sister-in-law with whose brother she had been married. Prior to her school hours Rajbibi regularly visited Dayalji's Ashram with her sister in law. Once, it rained very heavily, none was able to leave that Ashram. At that juncture St. Dayalji instructed Bal Sadhu to recite few poems. While reciting the poems Bal Sadhu closed his eyes. As soon as he opened his eyes, they were directly fixed upon Rajbibi. Having noticed this, Dayalji soon advised Nand Sadhu to return to the family life. Nand Sadhu married Rajbibi and turned out to be an ideal 'Grihastha' (home maker).

As a married gentleman Nand Sadhu changed his name to Kartar Singh. Thus, Amrita is a daughter of the revolutionary parents. . Just like her parents Amrita pursued her inner voice and lived life on her own terms.

Thus, Pritam's autobiography is an account of her life built up with her memory. She has collected the scattered material of her life and conveyed a very novel vision of life.

The great critic George Gusdorf compares the autobiographer to a historian, who narrates his/her own history. He is the hero of his own tale and wants to unfold his past in order to draw out the structure of his being in time".<sup>7</sup>

Recollection of past is dependent upon creative memory. Memory is very elastic phenomenon and utilizing it at her best Pritam regenerates her material and reshapes it. The whole process of her recollection is very artistic. Again, recollecting her past through her powerful memory, Pritam remarks: "The most remarkable thing about father was that a life of riches or renunciation came alike to him..."<sup>8</sup>

Her father gifted his own home to a friend and for the rest of his life lived in rented places. Pritam with a great pride confesses that half a century later both riches and renunciation had taken birth in her as well. Her own disposition resembled with that of her father's. She could see with the same eyes as her father did. That is to say, just like her father she considered the life of riches and renunciation alike.

Moreover, recollecting her past Pritam relates how her faith in God was shattered after her mother's death. As advised by her father Amrita turned to poetry after her mother's death. Her father detached himself from all the subservience of life but did not renounce the world only for Amrita's sake. Amrita complains God for not listening to her plea to save her mother. At the tender age of ten, she lost her mother.

Like a skilled dramatist Amrita presents several indirect suggestions of her future. She relates to the treatment of her grandmother towards Muslims. She explains how her grandmother used to keep three tumblers on a separate shelf and offered tea or lassi to her father's Muslim friends in those tumblers only. Once she stubbornly demanded tea in one of those tumblers only. She succeeded in revolt and joyously comments that, afterwards no utensil was labelled 'Hindu' or 'Muslim' in their household. Here one can read the most secular personality coming to the forefront. Further, she comments that neither she nor her grandma knew then that the man she was to fall in love with would be of the same faith as the branded utensils were meant for.

Further, recollecting her sixteenth year, Amrita sounds more of a poet rather than a mere prose writer. Very artistically she depicts her sweet sixteenth:

“Like a thief came my sixteenth year, stealthily like a prowler in the night, stealing in through the open window of the head of my bed...”<sup>9</sup>

Pritam accepts that she had a clandestine relationship with her sixteenth year. Just like Amrita her sixteenth year too was scared of her father. Her father wanted a Amrita to be an obedient, submissive daughter but her sixteenth year questioned the parental authority, all the 'do's' and 'don'ts' and the entire stratified social scheme.

She observes that her house was full of books but most of them were on religion and about meditation. In her sixteenth year she was much impressed by the books which narrated 'apsaras' like Menaka or Urvashi out to seduce meditating 'Rishis'. Very remarkably Pritam depicts that just like Menaka or Urvashi; her sixteenth year invaded the purity of her childhood. She accepts that the sixteenth year had such an impact upon her that its memory creeps into every phase of her life. Each thought of hers intrude upon those innocent years. Pritam confesses that

even while writing the autobiography in her middle age she has not lost her spirit of sixteenth year. Whether at fifteen or fifty, her feelings have the same intensity. She has the same thirst for life. Whenever a wrong is done a deep sense of outrage arises in her - age is no bar.

Thus, except her mother's death and its bitter memories, Amrita had a very smooth, protected childhood. She questioned the parental authority but accepted the restrictions laid down by her father.

Self centeredness is one of the most important characteristics of an autobiography. Nevertheless, an autobiographer should maintain a kind of balance in giving account of other events and his self. Sometimes the writer's self completely dissolved in narrating other events, characters and place. This happens especially, when an autobiographer is public figure or a leader. Pritam's autobiography maintains cent-percent balance between the contemporary events and personal feelings. She has presented a vivid portrayal of the partition experience of 1947 not only in her novels but also in her life-story. Nevertheless, she has never dissolved her self portrayal in narrating other events. Her life-story centres round a fragile, sensitive human being who is not only a writer but a very tender hearted woman and a mother.

She celebrates femininity. Amrita very poignantly narrates her role as a writer as well as a woman. Generally, she considers Pritam – the woman, secondary to Pritam- the writer. Nevertheless, there are three incidents in her life when Pritam- the woman supersedes Pritam- the writer.

She confesses that Pritam- the writer has helped her discover Pritam – the woman.

The first incident is related to her dreaming of a child with a fair face with finely chiselled features when she had none. Sometimes while watering plants in her garden, she found this child springing up instead of

a flower from the plant. Here she remarks that, if she could not become a mother, could find no meaning at all in life. Further, a woman in her comes to the forefront when she healed Sahir by rubbing Vicks on his throat and chest in his illness. The mere contact had rendered her into a complete woman. Thirdly, a woman in her is aroused when Imroz dipped his brush into the red paint and dubbed a mark on her forehead. Thus, Amrita Pritam has rediscovered a real woman in her. Her treatment is realistic as well as literary. Through her artistic touch she has revealed herself as a writer as well as a woman. Thus, Pritam's autobiography is a well – documented account of the self.

In his novel *Waiting for the Barbarians*, African novelist J.M. Coetzee remarks: “Pain is truth”.<sup>10</sup> This remark is much applicable to Amrita Pritam. She has breathed pain but easily accepted it as a way of life. For her, pain is truth and truth is her need as a writer. Generally, an autobiography is considered as the gospel of truth. *The Revenue Stamp* is an intense experience of this search of the truth. The most touching aspect of Pritam's character is the way she embraced truth. She gave a new meaning to the expression “my life is an open book”. Whatever she experienced she recorded in her poems and novels her legendary love for Sahir Ludhianvi, the famous Urdu poet. Thus, many of her anecdotes revolve around her love for this man. In her life-story Amrita Pritam observes:

“I never told an untruth to father; I can never lie to myself either”.<sup>11</sup>  
(pg-4)

Thus, Pritam is truthful to herself. To reveal one's life story with a transparency is very difficult task. Pritam has exposed her inner feelings with a great precision. She is very confessional and candid in her tone. Once, her son came to her and said, “People say that I am Sahir Uncle's son”. Amrita replied; “I wish you were Sahir Uncle's son”.<sup>12</sup>



One can imagine the inner courage and conviction of a woman who could reply this.

For an autobiographer the factual truth subordinated to the truth about himself. He offers us a dialogue with himself. Autobiography is the affirmation of the man who seeks the innermost fidelity. The autobiographer gives a completely new perspective to his life. Amrita's relationship with Sahir and Imroz are presented with fidelity to the facts but she has given an extraordinary colour to these relationships. Thus, the autobiographical truth supersedes the factual truth. Amrita fell in love with the poetry of Sahir Ludhianvi and nurtured an infatuation for many years. She wrote his name hundreds of times on a sheet of paper while addressing a press conference. They would meet without exchanging a word and Sahir would puff away. After Sahir's departure, Amrita would smoke the cigarette butts left behind by him. After his death, Amrita said she hoped the air mixed with the smoke of the butts would travel to the other world and meet Sahir! Such was Amrita's obsession and intensity. Their intensity of love has been expressed thus:

“Aur mujhe lagta hai  
Ki shamshan ki aag, aag ka apman hai  
Kisi sohni, sassi ya Heer mein  
Jo aag jalti thi  
Mujhe us aag ki pehchaan hai”<sup>13</sup>

(I feel that the fire of the cremation ghat is an insult to the flame. I recognize the 'flame' that burnt in the hearts of any Sohni, Sassi or Heer). Thus, Pritam's autobiography is primarily valuable for its artistic excellence. Literary value of an autobiography is of far more significance than its historical or objective function.

Conflict is the predominant component of any literary genre. Without conflict literature can not be created. There is a vast difference

between conflict expressed in fictitious literature and the conflict expressed in life story. In other forms of literature conflict arises in the imaginative world of action. In autobiography the author himself is the centre of the conflict. The conflict is intense when the writer is a woman and that too a revolutionary one like Amrita Pritam. Nevertheless Amrita has treated the conflict in the most individual way. She has no regrets. She confronted conflict in dual way. Hers was a search for true love. In this search, she faced internal conflict as well as external conflict. Being locked in a loveless marriage to a businessman at the age of sixteen, Pritam fell in love with the poet Sahir Ludhianvi. Leafing through her life story we do not feel that she has complaints for her husband Mr. Pritam Singhji, whose name is attached to her till her death. In 1960 she took divorce and started living on her own terms. She nurtured a silent intimate relationship with Saheer for many years.

When she saw Saheer's photograph with his new girl friend on Blitz magazine; she was flabbergasted. She turned on the brink of madness. Her inner self was so much in conflict with herself that she was determined to commit a suicide. She had a nervous breakdown. The only thing that saved her was her poems. She confesses that her saddest verses belong to the year 1960, when she had to part herself from sweet memories of Saheer. Her saddest thoughts are expressed in the sweetest way thus:

“When you can not fill the goblet of night with the nectar of life:

When you can not taste the honey life offers you,

You can not call it tragedy...

Tragedy is, when you write your life's letter to your love and you yourself go and lose his address...”<sup>14</sup>

Towards the end of the year 1960 Amrita had to go through a psychiatric treatment. She became a patient of hallucinations and day

dreams. Still in the condition of mental wreck, Amrita went to Nepal, where she was honoured for the same pen with which she had written love songs for Imroz. At this juncture, she wrote to Imroz;

“Way farer! Why did you the first time meet me at an evening hour!

I am approaching the turning point of my life.

If you had to meet me at all why did you not meet me at high noon when you would have felt its heat”<sup>15</sup>

Due to her pious search of love Amrita had to confront conflict with the society. She had had many more detractors than her admirers. However, her dashing figure never yielded to anyone. She is annoyed when some one crosses the limits of decency and waits for the right opportunity to reply. When she was working for Delhi Radio station, Sajjad Zaheer declared that few delegates were supposed to visit Russia but their wives disapproved of Amrita’s company. Amrita swallowed the mockery and replied:

‘You have taken all the trouble to come, but how did you assume I’d be wanting to go? I have made up my mind.

If at all I am to venture out to any part of the world one day, I shall go alone. Should the Russians want me to visit their country, they will send me an invitation. If they don’t, so what?”<sup>16</sup>

And to make her words true, in next few years she was invited to Moscow, Bulgaria, Rumania, Hungary, West Germany and most of the parts of the world. Thus, Pritam’s will power lifted her above all storms of life. She had a spirit to fight and finish. Pritam remarks that she had the utmost respect for her contemporaries but her sad experience with them left her wondering why her respect for the word and the pen did not vanish long ago.

It was with artist Imroz that Amrita chose to make a home in Delhi. It was a relationship of rare understanding and the companionship lasted

over four decades. Amrita's relationship with Imroz was fascinating. A man, so much younger than her with whom she lived in the heart of middle class Delhi and her children lived in the same apartment complex but a floor below hers:

:Yeh mein hoon yeh tu hai, aur beech mein hai sapana".<sup>17</sup>

(This is me and that's you and in the chasm is the dream)

Autobiography is a reconstruction of the past. The autobiographer has to face a complex situation in revisiting the past. The autobiographer becomes almost a stranger to himself when he thinks of his life in retrospect and arranges the past events in the light of the present. He not only describes what has happened to him in the past but also records what he is out of what he had earlier been. The writer has to overcome the time gap between the life lived in the past and its depiction in the present. Prof. Meena Sodhi remarks that the recollection or recapitulation is dependent upon creative memory, "that apes and reshapes the historic past as in the image of the present, making the past as necessary to this present as this present is the inevitable outcome of the past".<sup>18</sup>

Amrita Pritam possesses this creative memory through which she has maintained a perfect balance between her past and the present. Her autobiography was published in the year 1976. That is to say, when she was 57 year old. Nevertheless her account of the childhood and her youth appears as fresh as flower. Her search for the truth and true love never ends. Her complete being in the present appears an inevitable outcome of the past. Every narration is quite poetic. Her accounts of the partition experiences and her visits to various places of the world like Bulgaria, Russia and others are quite fresh and racy. She appears a curious traveller through out her life. As a traveller, she travelled with time but never forgot the path she had trodden. Hence, we find a compact

interrelation between her past and the present. She has rightly given a true picture of her life as a grand tour in following words:

“From the Ganges to Vodka is this a travelogue of my thirst”.<sup>19</sup>

The autobiographer who recounts his life’s history is on a search for his self in the annals of history. It is not a ‘disinterested endeavour’ but a case of personal explanation. Gerhard Stilz thinks that in order to bridge the gap “between past and present, autobiographer borrows the models and devices of historiography which help him to show how the present, complicated state of affairs can be convincingly derived and explained by relating it to identifiable and well arranged steps performed successfully in the past”<sup>20</sup>

Amrita Pritam possesses the extraordinary talent of relating her present with her past. She marvellously uses the technique of flashbacks and flash forwards and thus presents historical consistency in her narration. For instance, she associates the partition experience of 1947 with the separation from her husband. Amrita declares that like a comb in tousled hair, her thoughts too would often get tangled. She advocates complete individuality of thinking. She advocates that one day she will have to give accounts of what attempts she had made for inner freedom. She felt that every woman has looked sixteen graces in some mutiny against society. She was determined to unfurl all the bondages. She felt that she could not work out a living together with her husband. There was a vast distance between the ways their minds ticked. Hence, after long discussions in a friendly fashion they decided to change their respective courses of life. Further she adds that she had such a feeling long before partition:

“Fellow traveller, we are parting company today”.<sup>21</sup>

This distance between us will grow...

Amrita Pritam has never repeated the scenes but always given new perspectives on the same scenes of life. She has given a well trimmed graph of her life, which is compact and comprehensive.

An autobiography can be viewed as a history, philosophy and psychology. As a work of art it is not only a focus on the author's life, but an artistic creation which employs all narrative devices and restrictions like accuracy, impartiality and inclusiveness. Though Pritam is writing about herself, she is not far away from her contemporary era. She has marvellously mingled political, social, religious and literary conditions of her times and given a full length portrait of twentieth century. She has given a poetic fervour to the history of her times. She has presented a date wise record of her times but she never appears a mere chronicler. She has reclothed her characters and reshaped her past in a very artistic manner. Nevertheless, she has never forgotten her role as a writer amidst the changing conditions of her times. Like a true painter, Amrita has painted the portrait of her era thus:

September 9-22, 1967:

“I meet Vihar Bela, the Hungarian poet who remarks ‘The moment an invader set his foot on the soil of a country; the books are the first to start shrinking...But when a poet sets his foot on the same soil, the same books are again the first to swell out...’”<sup>22</sup>

Under the same title of September 9-22, Amrita narrates her meeting with various poets like Yobaj Karoj, Gabor Garai and others. Here, Amrita also relates to her visit to the south of Budapest, where Ravindranath Tagore had planted a sapling and had written: ‘May this add to each new season of yours even when I have passed away from this earth’.<sup>23</sup>

Amrita also remarks that Tagore's statue stand nearby. Further, Pritam has narrated her second visit to the Poetry Festival at Struga in

1972, where the organizers had given her a warm welcome and special evening session had been organized for the recital of Amrita's poems.

November, 10-16, 1972:

Here, Amrita has depicted her visit to Italy in the most remarkable terms:

“In a way, each country is a poem in itself some of the poem's lines are set in glittering gold; others steeped in bloodshed by foreign guns and some remain evergreen.... Yet there can be a country like an incomplete poem. Italy gives me the feeling of being both a complete and an incomplete poem...”<sup>24</sup>

Thus, in the course of the 1967 cultural exchange Programme' Amrita Pritam was nominated poet by the Government of India for her visits to Yugoslavia, Hungary and Rumania. In *The Revenue Stamp* we find some passages of her diary directly included right from May, 24, 1967 to November 1972. However, this record is not at all monotonous but markedly poetic.

*The Revenue Stamp* has been narrated with a remarkable contemporaneousness. Throughout the book we find a shadow of the partition experience of 1947. Further, Amrita's visits to various places like Taskand, Moscow, Teheran and other places prove her as a poet of international renown. Amrita observes that, in 1947, when all social, political and religious values were crashing down like pieces of glass under the feet of people in flight... those same pieces of glasses bruised her soul and her limbs bled. She wrote for the suffering of those who were abducted and raped. Recollecting the terror of the partition period, Amrita observes that the most gruesome accounts of marauding invaders in all mythologies and chronicles put together can not be compared with the blood curdling horrors of that historic year. It would cover up a whole life time to retell the hair raising events of those years. Amrita compares

the year 1947, with the pitch black darkness of the night. Uprooted from Lahore, Amrita rehabilitated for awhile at Dehradun but later went to Delhi for work and a place to live in. On her return journey, she could not sleep in the train. Winds echoed the sounds of terror. The trees loomed larger like sentinels of sorrow. Stark aridity surrounded her and Amrita wrote her immortal poem addressed to 'Waris Shah' with her trembling fingers:

“From the depths of your grave, Waris Shah,  
Add a new page to your Saga of love  
Once when daughter of Punjab wept  
Your pen unleashed a million cries,  
A million daughters weep today, their eyes turned to you, Waris Shah”.<sup>25</sup>

This poem, transcending geographical and communal boundaries, captured the pain of the partition. After this poem Amrita became dear to the heart of the Punjabis on both sides of the border. Over the years, her fame spread worldwide.

Returning to the history of her times Pritam recollects the mutiny of 1857 and associates its terrors with those of 1947 partition. With an artistic precision, she fills up the gap of one century. She observes that her Grand – Father in law had inherited a carpet from his forefathers and preferred to sleep on that relic when the family lived in Lahore. It was looted by a Sardar from a melee in Delhi right back in 1857. The migration from Lahore to Delhi turned out to be so much shocking for the grand father that he died within a few days on the same carpet in Delhi. After his death the carpet was given away to a Fakir. The family members thought:

“What belongs to Delhi has been returned to it after a century”.<sup>26</sup>

In Amrita's view, loot too is a sort of debt that one has to repay.



Amrita's life is an account of honest, intimate human relationships. She had always maintained her relationship with pious, transparent heart. Her love for mankind was selfless. During her life time she had maintained pure friendship with persons like Sajjad Haider. In the conservative Indian scenario of twentieth century people doubted whether there can be a friendship between man and woman. Surpassing all the social, religious taboos Amrita continued her friendly gestures with Sajjad Haider. He was perhaps the first real friend she had. They often met in Lahore. Amrita had a sense of great reverence for him Sajjad used to visit Amrita even at the times of riots whenever the curfew was lifted. The whole family of Amrita was surprised when Sajjad came with a birthday cake on Amrita's little daughter's birthday.

Meanwhile, Amrita moved from Lahore to Dehradun. Nonetheless Sajjad wrote her letters regularly. They saw each other's sons through the photographs.

One day when Amrita's son was contacted with fever, Sajjad prayed for him and wrote to Amrita in a return letter:

"I have been praying all night for your son. There is an Arabic saying: When the enemy prays, the prayer is bound to be granted'. In the eyes of the people I am an enemy of your country at this hour... God forbid that I ever become one of yours or your child's..."<sup>27</sup>

Such was the understanding and intimacy of Sajjad and Amrita. Then after Amrita and Sajjad did not meet for many years. After wards, Sajjad also translated one of Amrita's poems entitled 'Neighbouring Beauty' and got it published in 'Pakistan Times'. Having read Amrita's poem 'seven years' written for Saheer, Sajjad wrote to her that he wanted to talk with Amrita about the person for whom she had written 'Seven years'. Further, when Sajjad was in Delhi for eighteen days Amrita and Sajjad often met; when Amrita realized that a poem can not only be

written out of the passion of love, it can be crated for the passion of friendship also. Parting from Sajjad she wrote:

“Buy me a pair of wings, stranger or come and live with me”<sup>28</sup>

Thus, Amrita – a woman of manumitted shared her deep rooted love with her fellow travellers and led an open hearted relationship with each fellow being that came enroute.

In March 1971 Amrita Pritam remarks that, a tenderly nursed friendship passed away. It died suddenly like the failure of a heart. Sajjad’s death caused an earth shattering effect on Amrita and again she pays tribute to her near and dear friend:

“there was to be an end to the friendship, so it ended...

Good by my friend!”

Speak of it in amity or disdain whatever we feel....

It makes not the slightest difference now if you enshroud it I splendid brocade or wretched rags.

Will I have to hear the entire story?

No it’s not Doomsday,

So it can not be resurrected...”<sup>29</sup>

Another literary figure who was much influenced by Amrita’s towering personality before partition was the most revered poet of the time Mohan Singhji. Amrita recalls, engaged at the age of four, she had been married off at the age of sixteen in the usual manner. She had not been involved in any noteworthy incident. Nevertheless, in literary circles romantic fire works keep cracking. Amrita had a heart felt respect for Mohan Singhji. But Mohansinghji adored her a lot. Once when Mohan Singhji visited Amrita along with his friend Kapursinghji and Kapursinghji commented that Amrita was misunderstood by Mohansinghji, Amrita replied:

“Mohansinghji... You have all my respect I am a friend of yours... What more do you want?”<sup>30</sup>

Once, Pandit Satyadev Sharma, the staff artist at the Lahore Radio Station, wrote a story in Hindi entitled *Twenty six Men and a Girl*. This story very interestingly referred to the number of gentlemen who were interested in and spell bound by Amrita’s personality. There are many more poets and poetess who belong among Amrita’s fans. Amongst these friends Zulfia Khanum ranks first. She pulled Amrita out of the quagmire of her mental condition after her break up with Saheer.

Amrita remarks that, with tears in her eyes, Zulfia could establish a relationship with women all over the world. Zulfia remarked that in Uzbek a girl is called ‘Khan’ but she becomes ‘Khanum’ when she grows up. Hence, she used to call Amrita – ‘Amrita Khanum’. Translating the word ‘Amrita’ in Uzbek become ‘Ulmus’ khanum! Amrita accepted joyfully the new rhyme of her name and said:

“When pen embraces page, earlier silence are forgotten  
Love reveals its secrets;  
In Uzbek or in Punjabi, the rhyme is the same”<sup>31</sup>

Further Amrita has noted her remarkable assets – the list of the gifts gifted to her by her dear ones and friends. Amongst these assets also belong the letters written to her by Imroz and her children.

Every dark cloud has a silver lining. Amrita not only had roses but also thorns in her life.

Many poets and critics of her times poked acidic criticism at her. Amrita compares her life long battle with her contemporaries as the battle of Dharma – Mahabharata. She had to fight against the people belonging to her own community – the poets.

Amrita remarks that her reverence for poets like Sant Sangh Sekhon and Mohan Singhji turned out to be proper. On the other hand,

her poets like Navjot Singh and Kartar Singh Duggal did not deserve the praise she merited them in her articles ‘Mera Humdum Mera Dost’ and ‘Thanda Dastana’, faith and hope shattered in both the literatures. Literary figures like Sadhu Singh and Hamdard indulged other contemporaries in their mudslinging against Amrita. They were also malicious. Amrita’s faith in the great literary figure Gurbachan sing Bhullar also shattered when she read the story connected about Harbhajan Singh and herself by him in *Preetlari*. Amrita was really shocked by the irresponsibility of the communist press. The daily ‘Lok Lehar’ of this press charged that Amrita’s monthly magazine *Nagmani* was vulgar, sex oriented and pornography. Nevertheless not a single soul supported Amrita and protested against ‘Lok Lehar’. Amrita’s heart became heavy with such an attack and she wrote:

“You, who leap at Shadows must know,  
Hearts, in flames, do not bear shadows”<sup>32</sup>

Writing is a mission for Amrita Pritam; she is least concerned whether she is cent percent approved by the society. She feels that even if none has benefited from her stories it does not make her stories less worthy. She observes; “In my eyes, my own face becomes real and alive only when I am in the act of writing a poem”.<sup>33</sup> The warmth of the language always penetrated her very being.

Amrita Pritam remarks that bits and pieces of a writer’s life always creep into hi/her literary works. In one of the chapters of her autobiography entitled *In Silence Passion Smote*, Pritam has elaborately expressed the sources and inspirations behind her famous novels and poems.

Amrita confesses that the central heroine ‘Sunderam’ of her novella *Yatri* published in 1968 was a replica of her self. While reading

the first draft of novella in the presence of Imroz a lump came into her throat on the mere mention of the heroine's name.

Further, a character called Jagdeep in her work *Ik Savaal* stood beside his mother's bed exactly the way in which Amrita stood beside hers. Just like Jagdeep, Amrita too prayed to God to save her mother. Jagdeep too lost his trust in God just like Amrita when God did not pay her heed and her mother died.

Amrita Pritam relates one more incident from her life which has direct association with the story of 'Ik Savaal'. When she returned from the convocation ceremony at the University, Davinder shoved something into the pocket of his shirt and called her:

"Didi!" Then he stuttered, " I must be...er...permitted...I feel like performing a ceremony too. May I? You won't get angry? Say you won't".<sup>34</sup>

Then he pulled out the silk handkerchief in which he had packed some cardamoms, candy and the traditional sum of Rs. 21. Then, he told Amrita that if her father had been alive or if she had a brother, they might have greeted Amrita in the same manner.

When Amrita had written this incident in *Ik Savaal*, there was no idea about Davinder in her mind. But, the same incident happened in her life and came out directly from the pages of her book. Further connecting the story, Amrita observes that after the death of his father the hero Jagdeep gives away his step mother to the young man of her choice. Later, the stem mother invited him to dine at her place and suggested that the mother and son should eat from the same plate. At this juncture, the hero wanted to know" "Tell me first... are you mother, sister or daughter to me?"<sup>35</sup>

Amrita remarks that after fourteen years when Davinder offered her the silk handkerchief, the words came to her lips again: "Tell me first.... Are you father, brother or son to me?"<sup>36</sup>

Further, Amrita accepts that several characters like Rajashree are not associated with the real life but after their depiction in the story they get associated with life in one way or another. Love-lorn Rajashree often thought of ending her life in the same way in which Amrita and her father's sister Hakko did. Amrita's life – story is full of shadows and dreams which inspired her to depict immemorial characters.

*Do Auratan* is another such story which Amrita had witnessed when she lived in Lahore. It is the story of two women - a kept and a wife. Tamancha Jan the nightingale of Lahore was invited to grace the wedding ceremony of the Shah's son. She performed well and looked gracious. After Tamancha Jan had sung, the bridegroom's mother took out a hundred rupees note pay Tamancha Jan. Having felt insulted, she restrained herself and said: "Keep it after all, it is not the first time I've eaten from the Shah's house". Shahani replied, "From, the Shah, yes... but when will you ever take anything again from my hands?"<sup>37</sup>

In this way, the story of *Do Auratan* deals with the deeper meaning behind the social values of the time. Although Tamancha was a young, fragile and attractive and the Shahani, an ageing and bulky women whose pride in being a wife and mother could not be weighed down by the beauty and charm of Tamancha Jan.

Further, Amrita relates that the film *Kadambari* was based on her story of *Dharti Sagar te Sippiyan*. The character of Chetna in the film is based on Amrita's own revolutionary spirit where in the heroine waved all social acceptances aside and is totally involved with her love. In 1975, when Amrita was invited to write lyric for the film, she recalled the poem

she had written for Imroz in 1960. She turned the Punjabi into Hindi version and animated 'Chetna' of fifteen years earlier:

"Today we took the cloud – lip from the bowl of the sky  
And supped – sip of moonlight."<sup>38</sup>

Further, Pritam observes that the central heroine Nina in *Aalna* was conceived in her imagination. In this novella Amrita has depicted the story of three generations. Later on without disclosing her identity one of the readers of the novella wrote a series of letters to Amrita confessing that she was the Nina of Amrita's book. Amrita had no way of communicating with her and never found out what happened to her thereafter.

Similarly, when 'Ik si Anita' was published in Urdu, a prostitute from Hyderabad wrote to Amrita that the story of Anita was hers. She also offered to meet Amrita in person at Delhi, but afterwards withdrew the plan. Further, Pritam comments that the heroine of 'Arial' came and lived with her for a full month and a half. Amrita read the first draft of the novella in her presence and she often wept with satisfaction. Amrita observes that such a satisfaction was of greater value to her than the fact of publication. She believes that a work of art is near intended to be the cause of pain to anybody. It is primarily meant for study.

The story of *Bulava* was based on Faiz, the distinguished painter from Bombay. Another famous work of Amrita, *Jeb-katre* was based on the relatively immature years of her son's life. In this novella, Pritam has penned down the usual joys and sorrows of growth, their dreams, and their views about life. Having completed *Jeb-Katre* she gave it to her son to read. Most of his friends read it soon than him and recognized themselves and appreciated Amrita's achievement. When it came to heron's turn, he was not entirely satisfied. He said: "Had I written it, it would have been altogether different".<sup>39</sup> Amrita accepts that it was to be

so. Her attempt was just to bridge the gap between the two generations. Her point of view is bound to be different from that of her son's. She definitely belonged to the earlier generation.

Whenever Amrita's son Nawroj came home for the vacation, he used to be full of all sorts of Hostel News. Amrita used to make notes of such news and included in her stories when needed. One day, he startled her with his agonizing question: "It was all very well of you, Mamma, to give a new turn to your life... but did you ever stop to think what mental suffering we two children of yours went through?"<sup>40</sup>

Amrita was really stunned. She accepts that, when a house crumbles it causes much pain to kids and they have to confront twin – loyalties.

On her son's insistence Amrita attempted to depict the suffering of a child from a broken home in *Midnight Fears*. This work cent percent depicts Nawroj's state of mind.

Amrita confesses that her kids and near ones has never caused her any pain in life. She has always managed with her temperament, while replying them anything. But only those have given her pain, who have had nothing to do with her in life. She had to suffer by the adverse criticism of other writers and rivals of her time.

Thud, Amrita Pritam's literary works are the outcome of the conscious and subconscious merging into one another. She observes that her real wealth consists in the characters. She has created and she is bound to them with a deep feeling of love. Many a times she becomes so much involved with her characters that their sufferings became her own. It is quite clear that Amrita could not have found life worth living without writing. Her love for creation and creative writing is focused when she remarks:



”There have been so many days when I have held my pen close to my breast and wept and wept....”<sup>41</sup>

Further, Amrita comments that she had to go through many struggles and difficulties in life. After partition, she got a job with All India Radio. She had to stick to it for a full twelve years...For the first few years she had a daily contract of Rs. 5! Even if she had a cold or fever she could not miss a day. One of her colleagues Mr. Kumar helped her a lot and gave her the shorter announcements by taking the longer ones himself.

Amrita comments that, whatsoever life offered her, the one thing that did not let her down during the most depressing times was her pen. She observes:

“Whether I wrote my own thoughts down or wrote about partition, my pen was as much a part of me as the limbs of my body...”<sup>42</sup>

Thus, Amrita – heart – core writer lived with the magic of imaginative invention. She flew into the open, free sky with the wings of imagination. Apart from above mentioned works Amrita also wrote ‘Sunehere’ (a collection of poems for which she was awarded the Akademi award in 1957). In memory of Saheer. When she came to know the news about Akademi award, she thought that she hadn’t written ‘Sunehere’ for an award! The book is not worth the award until it is read by Saheer. When the reporter and the photographer from the press came and insisted that Amrita should pose as one engrossed in writing, she filled up; a whole sheet of ‘Saheer’! She herself remarks that it was like living through the classical romance of Majnu calling out “Laila, Laila, Laila...”

She was relieved when next morning she found that her pretty follies were not printed in the news papers.

Further Amrita notes that her novels namely *Ashu*, *Ik si Anita* and *Dili Diyan Gallian* are also remarkably inspired by Saheer.

Many of Amrita's novels and poems are inspired by partition experiences as she was eye witness to the partition experiences of 1947. Among the works about partition experiences her novel 'Pinjar' is noteworthy. This novel portrays the agony of communal riots, abduction, trauma and symbolic reunion of victims and victimizers in the prophetic hope of communal amity. Here Woman's agony is a connecting theme. The novel was recently made into a Hindi film by director Chandra Prakash . In the novel Amrita also talks about the thousands of women who suffer in times of war who are raped, tortured, killed abducted or left to die.

Amrita is stronger as poet so far as the depiction of partition experience is concerned. 'Waris Shah nu' is the most memorable poems of hers.

Here are some lines from *The Scar*:

"I am also of human kind  
I am the sign of that injury  
The symbol of that accident,  
Which, in the clash of changing times,  
Inevitably hit my mother's forehead  
.....  
Who can guess  
How difficult it is  
To nurse barbarity in one's belly  
To consume the body and burn the bones?  
I am the fruit of that season  
When the berries of Independence came into blossom"<sup>43</sup>

*Jalte Bujhte log* (None lives abroad!) is another noteworthy work of Pritam. It has been considered as Amrita's Swan Song containing three novelettes written earlier: *Jalawatan*, *Jeb Katre*, and *Kachi Sadak*. Here Amrita Pritam has shown the feeling of an alien living in a distant land.

We do find the feminist turn in Pritam's works. After her divorce in 1960, Amrita's work turned explicitly feminist. Amrita was overwhelmed by the suppression of women, because of their economic dependence on the male members of the family. The women had become just an artefact, an object through her deeply felt handling of delicate subjects of women; she captured the hearts of her readers and placed Punjabi literature on national scene. She was not only fluent in her mother tongue but also equally at ease in Hindi. Pritam has gifted Punjabi literature with some powerful women characters like Sundaran in *Yatri*, Pooro in *Pinjar*, Chetna in *Dharti Sagar te Sippiyan'* and many more.

Amrita's heroines like their creator are always in search of truth. When Pritam found out that she could no longer pull on with her husband, she decided to face the truth of their separation. She confessed in his presence that they should go their own ways and should not be worried about the wagging tongues of the society. Amrita always felt that she had stolen shelter under her husband's roof. The voice from the depth of her heart could no longer go unheeded. Hence, she reflected: "I have nonetheless a sense of pride in this bowed head of mine I have not had to pay the price of security. I have not allowed the prestige of family life to suffer, nor have I fallen for any of the usually accepted social sanctions. I have always had, in the course of my journey over each milestone in life's mutiny, the realisation of having been able to pay back the debts I owed."<sup>44</sup>

Thus, Amrita Pritam sounds very individual and independent in thinking. She was honest to herself and heard the inner voice of her heart.

She not only thought of her freedom but also regarded the freedom of others as her own. She also separated herself from Imroz for three years prior to taking any decision of living together.

Once, the great critic Revti Saran Sharma asked Amrita a notable question: “Amrita! If the heroines of your novels in search of truth leave their homes, don’t you think the effect of it can be shattering in the social context, I mean?”

Amrita replied: “If false social values have until now accounted for broken homes, let a few more be broken but, mark you from now on, at the altar of truth!”<sup>45</sup>

Thus, Amrita’s life is a long and painful search for the truth. The same is true in the case of her heroines. There is no space for hypocrisy and snobbery in her life and in the lives of her characters. She firmly believed that truth brings harmony between the body and the mind.

In spite of her individual and independent thinking Amrita was never bereft of tender motherly feelings. She believed in the principle of sharing and not dominance. She always enjoyed her femininity and its various role patterns like daughter, mother and wife. She illustrates her maternal feeling of the year 1969. She notes that, suddenly a trunk call of her son from Baroda University came. In reply to all the letters she had written, after a long time – span her son said on the phone: “I’m fine Mamma – in perfect health.”<sup>46</sup> Amrita very lucidly depicts her deeper feelings at this juncture. Listening to the ring, Amrita felt warm enough. She remarks: “My flesh melted into my very spirit and fed the pure naked soul to a flame..... As lightning in the dark, a thought flashed across my mind if I, an ordinary woman, could get a mighty thrill from the sound of my son’s voice, what must Mata Tripta have felt during the time she was carrying Nanak?”<sup>47</sup>

Thus, Amrita enjoyed her femininity from the very root. The writer in her always rejuvenated the woman in her.

Amrita's life long search for true love ends with Imroz a real confidante and a true friend. Her affection for him is beyond time and space. Imroz followed her like a shadow. Amrita Pritam remarks "What is it that nourishes the appetite one has for certain things of life? The friendships with Sahir and Sajjad blossom at the same time as my relationship with Imroz... and they turn life into a veritable oasis".<sup>48</sup>

Amrita's thirst for truth and love was quenched by Imroz. Imroz always shielded Amrita from the adverse criticism of her times and never allowed any untruths to surround her. Imroz had a great faith in the spirit of freedom. He believed in the freedom of mind, heart and soul. He opined: "Why should the law interfere when you choose a path for yourself alone. To subject such choice to restraint of any kind is an insult both to the feet and to the path".<sup>49</sup>

Once a palmist said to Amrita that, she would never be in want of money as the lines of wealth on her palm was deep and unbroken. He prophesied the reverse in Imroz's case. Imroz clasped Amrita's hand and declared that they would hang on single line and that one of Amrita's. In the earlier years Imroz served in an advertising firm with a pay scale of Rs. 1200 or so. He had also to work at night which brought him another Rs. 500 per month. Imroz always dreamt of having extra 10,000 rupees with him to chunk his monotonous job and all of his time for his passion – painting. Amrita strived hard to make Imroz's dream come true.

Once, in Amrita's absence Imroz experimented with the batik – print occupation. As a matter of fact he was an artist and not a businessman. Hence he failed. With a very mild yet fun rollicking sense of humour Amrita relates the whole incident of Imroz's failure in the business. She narrates that Imroz's tailor went snip – snap with 500

pieces of batik shirts in such a way that once a person wears it he/she can not do away with it. Once, when an American woman came to buy those pieces and went for a trial, she literally screamed for help: “P-l-e-a-s-e get me out of this!” Amrita forgot saving Rs. 10,000 for Imroz. To make the matter worse, Imroz had to sell the only piece of land he possessed for Rs. 6,500 to repay the debt of Rs. 20,000 invested in batik experiment.

Imroz as Amrita introduces had a creative mind. He expressed his ideas through paper, canvas, wood and so forth. He did beautiful designs on paper but to transfer the paper work on to cloth was not within his reach. Amrita `tongue in cheek’ expresses that those who owned mills did not understand the beauty of his designs. Thus, artists are meant to be starved.

In the same way, Imroz worked on designs of calendars but did not gain much. Further, Pritam remarks that in her relationship with Imroz, there were not roses, roses all the way. Their relationship was oscillating between merging and clashing. It merged like the water of streams and clashed like rival peaks. Nevertheless, after fourteen years of togetherness she observes that she was not regretful about the path she had chosen.

Imroz`s personality was like the flow of a river. He could only maintain relationship if only there was nothing to bind it. Reality of life is quite different.

Pritam recollects one of the most memorable incident of her interaction with Imroz. Once, when she was ill, she pleaded Imroz that after her death he would not live alone in the world but choose another life partner. At this juncture, he replied: “Who by the way, do you take me for? A Parsee... that I must be thrown to the vultures to be pecked at...? You’ve no business to die on my hands like this... When I haven’t yet had one desire of mine fulfilled? I must see the film through. Now

you promise me you're going to jog along until we're both ready to go together....”<sup>50</sup>

Thus, Amrita and Imroz were two different selves with one soul. They were really made for each other. They loved, respected, understood and took care of each other's freedom in a unique way without any social or religious bondage. Hats - hats off to such pious souls!

Further more Amrita has noted how wonderfully Imroz offered his share in each house hold chores. If Amrita scrubbed the dishes, Imroz helped her by heating and pouring the water for the washing and so on.

When Imroz ran out of funds Amrita bought all his pictures and offered him money to purchase new canvas. When the sales of Amrita's books were delayed and she was distressed, Imroz helped her and kept her morale strengthened. Amrita always prayed to get a partner like Imroz in her next birth also.

In the last few chapters of her book *The Revenue Stamp*, Amrita Pritam has narrated her discourses with the first woman Prime minister of India Mrs. Indira Gandhi.

Through the letters written by Mrs. Gandhi to Amrita, we come to know about the intimacy between the two tough women of the times. Mrs. Gandhi appreciated Amrita's talent and courage to tell the truth. Amrita had also written a script on Mrs. Gandhi's life for the film by Basu Bhattacharya.

Once, Amritaji asked Indiraji whether the fact of her being a woman had created any difficulties in working with others. Indiraji replied: “...Physically, I would not presume to match a man's strength...but in every other way I am confident I am more capable. That is why perhaps I've never considered the accidental factor of being a woman as a handicap. Those who had taken me merely for a woman had certainly underestimated me”.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, both the women had very independent ideas regarding femininity. Nevertheless, Amrita opined that to Indiraji the sense of freedom came very naturally but Amritaji's path was indeed steep and tortuous. Indiraji belonged to the elite class. Being one of the common mass and that too in conservative Gujranwala – Amrita had to strive hard to get the same freedom.

In one of her letters Indiraji commented that *The Revenue Stamp* contained the depiction of Amrita's self and yet it had something universal. She remarked: "Patterns are different but the essence of dreams and of struggles exist in some measure in all humans".<sup>52</sup>

Thus, both the strong women considered each other's worth in equal measure.

In the last chapter of her life story entitled 'On one palm Henna on the other Blisters', Amritaji has narrated various scraps from her diary depicting some immemorial events of her life. One can't call it last literally but it is so chronologically. In 1980 the book 'The Revenue Stamp; was published in Gujarati and became a course book in S.N.D.T. University of Bombay. In the same year the doctors diagnosed that Amritaji had some heart problem. Here, she comments that at that moment the simple she had fallen in love herself and she wrote two poems – 'A complaint' and 'Processing'. The poem 'A complaint' goes like this:

"Oh deceitful! You my beloved you rule the breath, so how come you are tired?"<sup>53</sup>

And the poem 'processing goes like this: "...I have come on a pilgrimage to the river of my soul, I offer the sun in obeisance..."<sup>54</sup>

In the same last chapter under the subtitle 'A Blank Sheet' Amrita notes that after twenty days of the diagnosis of her heart problem, she received the news of Sahir's death of heart attack. Amritaji remarks that it



was the mistake of death to identify Saheer as Amrita. In 1980 Amritaji considers her book as the tale of an empty blank paper in which there are no words.

In 1982, she received 'Bhartiya Jnanpith' award for her book of poems *Kagaz Te Canvas*; This was the same year in which her son who was not ready to remarry after his divorce, reversed his decision and married a very gentle natured girl at the end of the year.

In 1983, Jabalpur University honoured Amritaji with a D. Lit. This was the same year in which her grand daughter Shilpi was born. In the same year, one of the poems published in *Kagaz Te Canvas* was considered objectionable, as it hurt the religious sentiments. This poem depicted the nine dreams of Guru Nanak's mother, before the birth of Guru Nanak. These were very tense days for Amrita. During those tense moments, Amritaji had a kind of realization of God. She could hear the divine without any confusion. She was face to face with Nanak in her half-awakened state. She observes: "suddenly in front of my eyes a glow appeared and an electric current passed through me. No face appeared but I heard a distinct voice: "Have you seen the proof you wanted?" And in the half awakened state I said "Yes I have seen it."<sup>55</sup>

In the concluding pages of her life-story Pritam depicts her inner – sorrow at the death of India's legend – Mrs. Indira Gandhi. She seems to have accepted death as a natural course of life. She opines that birth is reality, death is like a sound of water going away from the water. Amritaji herself seems to be led on the path of glory and the divine. Often she narrates her experience of having seen "a circle of light spreading across the whole sky constituted of small particles of light with music emerging from it."<sup>56</sup>

Thus, Amrita went through the mixed feeling of agony and ecstasy. She opines that some of her experiences of the divine can cover up a whole

separate book. Some of her unspoken feelings have been preserved by the AIR Archives in her own words. In the twilight of life she enjoyed playing with her two grand children and writing.

An autobiography can never be a complete whole. It is always an unfinished everlasting account of the search of truth. Pritam herself opines that art consists in recreation. Her inner experiences in which she has created an unbroken bond with the divine, needed a whole separate book. She has written a supplementary to her life story entitled ‘Shadow of Words’. Here, she captured her entire life span with all its warp and woofs on a completely spiritual base. It was her innate belief that experiences of her life have been created and lived under some shadow or another. Death casts its shadows right at the time of the birth, then after fall the shadows of weapons, words, dreams and power. These reflections affected her intense desire to present to her readers an incisive insight into her inner world. *Shadow of Words* can be rightly called a spiritual biography.

Amrita Pritam’s life is an open book of a life lived with all its colours and shades. It is a beacon – light for all her fellow beings. With Amrita, whole era of literature has passed away. She had been a voice of Punjab, voice of India and a voice of millions of daughters of the world. Throughout the Ages human race will remain indebted to her. Physically she is no more but her soul will always remain with us:

“May be I will turn into a spring  
And rub the foaming  
Drops of water on your body  
And rest my coolness on  
Your burning chest.  
I know nothing else

But that this life  
Will walk along with me  
When the body perishes  
All perishes  
But the threads of memory  
Are woven with enduring specs.  
I will pick these particles  
Weave the threads  
And I will meet you yet again.”

## Reference

1. [www.languageinIndia.com/Dec2005/amritapritamsunwani1.html](http://www.languageinIndia.com/Dec2005/amritapritamsunwani1.html).
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Pritam Amrita *The Revenue Stamp*, Student Edition, Vikas Publishing house Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi – 2004, P. 1.
6. Ibid, P. 3.
7. As quoted in Sodhi Meena, *Indian English writing The Autobiographical Mode*, Creative Books New Delhi 1999 P. 17.
8. Pritam Amrita *The Revenue Stamp*, Student Edition, Vikas Publishing house Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi – 2004, P. 3.
9. Ibid P. 11.
10. Coetzee J. M, *Waiting For the Barbarians*.
11. Pritam Amrita *The Revenue Stamp*, Student Edition, Vikas Publishing house Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi – 2004, P. 4.
12. [www.languageinIndia.com](http://www.languageinIndia.com).
13. Ibid.
14. Pritam Amrita *The Revenue Stamp*, Student Edition, Vikas Publishing house Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi – 2004, P. 36.
15. Ibid P. 39.
16. Ibid P. 46.
17. [www.languageinIndia.com](http://www.languageinIndia.com).
18. Sodhi Meena, *Indian English writing The Autobiographical Mode*, Creative Books New Delhi 1999 P. 20.
19. Pritam Amrita *The Revenue Stamp*, Student Edition, Vikas Publishing house Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi – 2004, P. 45.
20. As quoted in Sodhi Meena, *Indian English writing The Autobiographical Mode*, Creative Books New Delhi 1999.

21. Pritam Amrita *The Revenue Stamp*, Student Edition, Vikas Publishing house Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi – 2004, P. 28.
22. Ibid P. 55.
23. Ibid P. 56.
24. Ibid P. 59.
25. Ibid P. 24,25.
26. Ibid P. 28.
27. Ibid P. 17.
28. Ibid P. 18.
29. Ibid P. 61.
30. Ibid P. 21.
31. Ibid P. 43.
32. Ibid P. 93.
33. Ibid P. 70.
34. Ibid P. 99.
35. Ibid P. 99.
36. Ibid P. 100.
37. Ibid P. 102.
38. Ibid P. 103.
39. Ibid P. 106.
40. Ibid P. 107.
41. Ibid P. 115.
42. Ibid P. 116.
43. [www.languageinIndia.com](http://www.languageinIndia.com).
44. Pritam Amrita *The Revenue Stamp*, Student Edition, Vikas Publishing house Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi – 2004, P. 30.
45. Ibid P.P.-77.
46. Ibid P. 60.
47. Ibid P. 60.

48. Ibid P. 116.
49. [www.languageinIndia.com](http://www.languageinIndia.com).
50. Pritam Amrita *The Revenue Stamp*, Student Edition, Vikas Publishing house Pvt. Ltd. New Delhi – 2004, P. 120.
51. ibid, p p 148.
52. ibid, P. 151.
53. ibid, P. 151.
54. ibid, P. 152.
55. ibid, p p 156.
56. ibid, P. 161.

~~~~~

**CHAPTER: V**

**KAMALA DAS'S**

**MY STORY**

**A BOLD ASSERTION OF THE SELF.**

~~~~~

**Chapter: V**  
**Kamala Das's**  
**MY STORY**  
**A Bold Assertion of the Self.**

“Dress in saris, be girl. Be wife, they said. Be Embroiderer,

Be cook, be a marveller with servants. Fit in, Belong, cried the catergorizers.”<sup>1</sup>

Above quoted lines express Kamala Das's defence against pre established canons of feminine identity. Formerly women, generally princesses, political leaders and social workers had been writing their life narratives but they were not provocative. Such life narratives delineated of their social-relations, religion, family or at most politics. Several women writes revolted against the pre-established patterns. But above all a woman's autobiography remained a definition of her subjectivity as against the backdrop of something more powerful. With Kamala Das, we come across a new kind of woman's writings which is bold, daring, tantalising and self assertive. Here is a woman conscious of her femininity but determined to vindicate it against male supremacy. For Kamala Das it was important to be a woman and a lover with a body and a soul. The autobiography becomes a vehicle for voicing an inner privacy.

Kamala Das's autobiography *My Story* reveals that a woman is naturally creative and if given a room of her own, she can defend her selfhood and narrate the story of her life boldly. There is nothing unnatural in woman's literary creativity, though it can not be a rival to her biological creativity. The radical feminists are right when they consider woman's creativity to be a superior endowment:



“...the literary professions were first to be opened to women, the status of the women writer has long served as an index of a society’s views on female abilities and rights. Although writing has never been regarded as an unfeminine accomplishment. Women writers have always encountered more critical resistance than men.”<sup>2</sup>

Kamala Das too had to confront the critics of her time and negative gazes of so called civilized society. Nevertheless she kept writing candidly about her physical hungers and inner most feelings.

Kamala Das Surraiya was born on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 1934, in Malabar, Kerala. She has been considered as one of the outstanding Indian poets writing in English. She also wrote poems in Malayalam, her native language. Much of her writing in Malayalam came under pen name Mahdhavikutty. She is the daughter of V.M.Nair, a former managing editor of the widely circulated Malayalam daily ‘Matrubhumi’ and Nalapat Balamani Amma, a renowned Malayali poetess. Nalpat Narayan Menon, who was a prominent writer, was her great uncle. Her love of poetry began at an early age through his influence. She was also much influenced by her mother’s poetic fervour and the sacred writings kept by the matriarchal community of Nairs. She was privately educated until the age of 15. At the same age she was married to K. Madhava Das. At the age of 16, her first son was born. But she was not mature enough to handle the situation. Her husband often played a fatherly role for both Das and her sons. Having completed her domestic chores, Das used to write at night on her kitchen table. She is probably the first Hindu woman to talk about sexual desires openly and honestly. She has been considered as an iconoclast of her generation. Her conversion to Islam in 1999, led her into the whirlpool of controversy. Recently on April 18, she was hospitalized in Pune and died on June 31, 2009, after a prolonged illness.

In 1976, at the age of 42, Kamala Das published her autobiography, baring the secrets of her heart. It created a lot of interest and controversies among people though not for any literary value. She later confessed that it was after all a work of fiction and not to be taken literally. Acclaimed as one of the 10 best books of 1976, *My Story* had cascading effects on her life. Conservative society of Kerala was stunned into disbelief when *My Story* was published. The book was hailed as a “refreshingly candid, poignant and delightfully provocative”, account of her life, as well as the lives of countless tormented and tortured women.

Kamala Das declared in the preface to the book *My Story* is my autobiography”. She began writing it during her first serious bout with heart disease. She observes: “the doctor thought that writing would distract my mind from the fear of sudden death and besides there were all the hospital bills to be taken care of”.<sup>3</sup>

After the publication of *My Story* when she went to her home for a short vacation; she was not welcomed with warmth. *My Story* as well as several others of her past sins began to haunt Kamala Das. She had to confess that *My Story* was not a truthful account but a mix and match effort.

The critic Meena Sodhi opines that the autobiographical form of writing helps to bring into focus “the search for self delineation” through the “lifelines”. The journey into the past can be proved cathartic and is a ‘catalyst for healing. *My Story* is one such autobiographical journey which helped Das in coming to terms with her self and proved extremely cathartic:

“I have written several books in my lifetime, but none of them provided the pleasure the writing of *My Story* has given me. I have nothing more to say”<sup>4</sup>

Kamala Das started writing her life story to distract her mind and to recover herself from illness. Nevertheless she did not give a second thought to her private life and “found the courage to move forward into as yet unnarrated and unexplored ways of living”<sup>5</sup>

Kamla Das found a voice of her own but only when she realized that she was face to face with death:

“I wanted to empty myself of all the secrets so that I could depart when the time came, with a scrubbed out conscience”<sup>6</sup>

Autobiography is a never ending dialogue with the self. It is a depiction of the self by the writer himself. Das’s dialogue with the self reveals her urges, yearnings and her inner longings. She knows that:

“One’s real world is not what is outside him. It is the immeasurable world inside him that is real. Only the one, who has decided to travel inwards, will realize that his route has no end”.<sup>7</sup>

Kamala Das has tried to depict her inner self in the most candid manner. Nevertheless we are not assured whether this candid nature aims to give fictional account or the factual. Generally for an auto biographer, the factual truth is subordinated to the truth about himself. *My Story* is a life narrative of Das’s inner journey. It is a search for an identity. It is an identity of the split self craving for true love. We find introspection and self analysis in her life story. While searching the true self, she is aware of her being as a woman and expresses the limitations of her gender in the poem 'The conflagration' in a very acidic tone. She observes: “Woman is this happiness, this lying buried beneath a man?

It’s time again to come alive.

The world extends a lot beyond his six foot frame”<sup>8</sup>

Thus, Kamala Das, while talking about herself relates herself to women in general. Definitely her autobiographical account is narrated objectively but her self – portrayal is at the centre. Hence, one can say

that there is marvellous self analysis, introspection and to some extent self centeredness in her autobiography.

Memory is the base on which an auto biographer builds up the story of his/her past and connects it with the present. An auto biographer must have powerful memory to recollect his/her story. Digging up her memory lane, Kamala Das begins her story with the depiction of her childhood and adolescent period.

Das confesses that she had a very nice humpty dumpty childhood at Nalapat house. For a few years she studied at a European school in Calcutta. While giving contemporaneous account, Das observes that in those days it was quite normal for a British family to have friendly relations with Indian families. Her father worked at a private firm selling cars. He also had British friends who often visited their house. They had intimate British friends. Nevertheless, at school they were treated quite indifferently by the British and the Anglo – Indian classmates. She has depicted a heart wrenching account of the brown children discriminated in a European school. She narrates that her brother was the cleverest in his class, yet he had been treated very rudely by the British counterparts. Once, a fellow student named William refrained: “Blackie, your blood is red.”<sup>9</sup> Kamala scratched his face in a mad rage but another Anglo Indian supported the white man. Thus, Kamala and her brother always confronted the tortures of the British fellow students.

Recollecting her school days, Das narrates that the

Britons were treated with a sense of partiality while the Indians always had a secondary lot. Once, a girl called Shirley Temple was asked to read a poem composed by Kamala Das in an assembly. When the visitor asked who wrote it, the principal said that it was written by Shirley. The Governor’s wife offered her a special kiss considering her beauty with brains.

Das also observes that when the visitors came the brown children were always discretely hidden away. Thus, as an Indian Kamala Das had to face colour bar meted out by the British teachers and students.

As tender kids Kamala and her younger brother always bore the burden of a swarthy skin and ordinary features. Not only in her school but also at home Kamala and her brother felt that the colour of their skin might have disappointed their parents. She narrates that her parents never told them that they were disappointed by the colour of their skin but it was evident in their every move and gesture. She recollects how her father roared to make them drink the monthly purgative and told her grandma to apply turmeric and oil on Kamala's skin.

It is crystal clear that the parental behaviour always affects the kids. Das remarkably notes that her parents were dissimilar and horribly mismatched. Her mother did not love her father. Like a typical Indian wife, her mother's timidity had created an illusion of domestic harmony which satisfied their social circle.

Das's father was not proud of his kids but only pitied them. He constantly tried to improve their behavioural pattern to fit them in the then developing Indo-British cultural scenario.

Child psychology is much influenced by parental bondage. It appears that Das's parents did not encourage her poetic sensibilities. In her tender childhood, Das was not only aware of the colour discrimination meted out by the Britons but also about the fact that the Britons encouraged Arts and Literature unlike their Indian counterparts. She remarkably declares: "I wondered why I was born to Indian parents instead of to a white couple, who may have been proud of my verses....."<sup>10</sup>

Thus, Kamala felt alienated. At school she was a brown child humiliated by the European teachers.

At home she was a naïve girl whose behavioural pattern needed to be mended. Her teachers considered her a peculiarly lonesome kid. Once, when she went to a picnic with her classmates, she felt so lonely that she shared her feelings with the objects of nature: “I went away to the farthest fence and lay near a hedge of Henna which had sprouted its tiny flowers. The sun was white that day, a white lamp of a sun on the winter sky, I was lonely. Oh! I was so lonely that day. No one seemed to want my company, not even my brother who was playing a kind of football with his classmates.”<sup>11</sup> Further, when her teacher called her she felt:

“.....And the white sun filled my eyes with its own loneliness. The Smell of Henna flowers overwhelmed me. Sobbing, I rose and walked toward my teacher.....”<sup>12</sup>

Thus, right from her childhood Das shared her feelings with Nature.

Kamala Das notes that her parents were not aware of the independently developing personalities of their kids. Recollecting her mother’s leisurely hours Das declares that her mother Spent her time lying on her belly on a large four-post bed, composing poems in Malayalam. As readers we feel that Das had inherited the art. At the tender age of six Kamala Das used to write poems on her dolls.

Each of her poems on her dolls made her cry. Nevertheless her parents were least concerned with what she felt. She observes that her parents “took us for granted and considered us mere puppets moving out limbs according to the tugs they gave us. They did not stop for a moment to think that we had personalities that were developing independently.”<sup>13</sup>

Das’s life–story is centred around her inner self – many a times we doubt the authenticity of her account. Nevertheless she sounds very convincing

when she narrates the experiences of the inner self of a Woman in a typically Conservative Social Scenario. She has remarkably displayed self-Centeredness in her life-story. She has depicted incidents, events and character sketches of other people but her inner self is at the Centre.

How the inner being of a woman grow from a child to the youth and then to the middle age has been remarkably portrayed.

Another remarkable feature of autobiography is the Conflict.

Here is a woman who is at war with the Society and it's so called standards. She has drawn out rules of her own but she is hesitant to completely throw away the age old standards. Hence, we find internal as well as external conflict in Das's life-story. Like all literary genres autobiography is also a product of the Conflict. The autobiographical work develops as the author develops. According to A.O.J. Cockshut, a true autobiographer has to answer a question related to the development of his self: "How did I become what I am?"<sup>14</sup>

Kamala Das has successfully revealed her true self by replying this question put forth by Cockshut. Talking about her lover, Carlo Das Says: "Society can well ask me how I could become what I became although born to parents as high principled as mine were. Ask the books that I read why I changed. Ask the authors dead and alive who Communicated with me and gave me the courage to be myself. The books like the mother Cow licked the Calf of my thought into Shape....."<sup>15</sup>

There must be a certain kind of magnitude in the autobiography. The writer has to maintain interrelation between his past and present and offer a creative and Consistent draft of his life. In autobiography, the author himself is the thesis of his book but he writes as if he were another person. The journeying into the past is very tiresome process where the author has to be very careful in articulating those Special incidents of his life which shaped his personality. Many a times the writer has to

withdraw himself from the society, temporarily to reconstruct his/her past. While recollecting the past the writer discovers the past “I” to be different from the present ‘I’. Das’s autobiography is a marvellous example of the life-story where the past events have played a vital role in making her what she presently is. Here we constantly feel that though she is the thesis of her book, she views herself as a different persona.

Magnitude of the autobiography depends upon the writer’s skill to arrange the past, and present of his/her life in an organic whole. *My Story* has no dates. The great critic Shirley Neuman opines that a woman’s autobiography ‘has “discontinuity and fragmentation... as opposed to chronological, linear and coherent narrations by men”.<sup>16</sup> (103, as quoted by Sodhi). The narration of *My Story* moves back and forth in time. In one episode we find the vannery children’s Dramatic society at Nalapat and in the other Das takes us inside a boarding school where her father admitted her to be a disciplined child. Later in Calcutta, her father employed an art-tutor for her, who was a young Bengali and she often admired his pink ear lobes. This was her first encounter with a man who could attract her.

Kamala Das’s life story is set in the once matrilineal framework of the Nair Tharavad. Colonization and the imposition of western notions of morality upon the native systems influenced her peculiar individual position. From the secure and serene warmth of the Nalukettu, both Kamala and her mother were taken away into the rashness of a city culture. They were not accustomed to their new social set up. From a matrilineal and matrilocal framework that offered complete security to the woman and their kids were thrust into a westernized patriarchal society. Women who were habituated to gentle maternal care and consideration certainly are at a loss in a male centered society. Men folk



of Nayar Tharvad turned out to be efficient to cope up with the emotional as well as economic requirements of their counterparts.

Subaltern structures, supportive of the women's role in society were broken by patriarchal values. The woman who had once controlled the whole family was reduced to a degraded point. Talking about her mother's timidity which created an illusion of 'domestic harmony' Das narrates:

“She was mortally afraid of the dark stranger who had come forward to take her out of the village and its security.

She was afraid of her father and afraid of her uncle, the two men who plotted and conspired to bring for the first time into the family a bridegroom who neither belonged to any royal family nor was a Brahmin.”<sup>17</sup>

Such patriarchal rule would have been impossible in the unbroken Nair Tharvad where the woman was economically independent and had a voice of her own. When that matriarchal structure was broken down the norms of a colonial culture overpowered and reduced the power of woman in native structure compared to her female counterparts in the west.

Das's mother very naturally taught her to accept her puberty. Das too prayed to God to bless her with a son in future just like Kunthi and other mythological figures. Her mother taught her to accept her menstrual cycle as an inevitable phenomenon for procreation. Further more Das also encountered lesbian advances made to her by a college going brutal girl. Afterwards she went to Malabar and met her would be husband. He was a regular contributor to the magazine jointly edited by her bother and herself. At the age of fifteen she married him, who was quite elderly. He was working in the Reserve Bank of India at Bombay. In his pre-engagement visits he used to quote from Huxley and Bertrand Russell.

Das, ‘tongue in cheek’ remarks that when she was a child he used to swing her round and round like a swing. He was thin walking with a stoop and had bad teeth. Nevertheless he looked intellectual. Thus, we find a gap of one whole generation between the couple. Das’s account clearly expresses that her husband was all for lust. He expected Kamala to satisfy his physical needs and to be cowed by him.

According to O.J. Thomas:

“Kamala Das’s story is the story of a woman who was denied love, when she valued nothing but love in all her life. Love and affection remained a craze, a longing and a dream for her. She got almost everything in life-name and fame, a degree of wealth but she could never get love, as she saw it. It is in this background that she writes about love in all her writings.”<sup>18</sup>

Das firmly believed that Love is the essence of life for a woman. She longs to receive and to give love. Her romantic ideas about love and home have been shattered by an insensitive husband. Her husband hurt her and evoked a sense of disappointment in her. The very first attempt that he made to express his love and affection towards her produced a negative effect. This point has been clearly depicted in her life-story:

“Before I left for Calcutta, my relative (her future husband) pushed me into a dark corner behind a door and kissed me sloppily near my mouth. He crushed my breasts with his thick fingers. I felt hurt and humiliated. All I said was a good bye”.<sup>19</sup>

This ‘good-bye’ suggests life-long lack of communication among the couple. An utter sense of loneliness has been depicted by Das in her conjugal life. Basically, her husband was not a bad man but she could never like him whole-heartedly. One of the reasons behind this aversion was that he was a close relative and they grew up together. Das admired

him almost as a friend and as a brother. Their sudden change of roles turned out to be earth-shattering for Kamala.

Das has also given graphic accounts of her relations with her husband before their marriage. We can better understand the embarrassment with her and showed interest in her as a woman. It is clear that she admired him but we do not find glimpses of her love and affection for her hubby as a man or as a lover. In 'My-story' she has expressed her romantic ideas of an ideal lover. She writes:

"I had expected him to take me in his arms and stroke my face, my hair, my hands and whisper loving words. I had expected him to be all that I wanted my father to be and my mother. I wanted conversation, companionship and warmth. Sex was far from my thoughts. I had hoped that he would remove with one sweep of his benign arms, the loneliness of my life".<sup>20</sup>

Das is unhappy about her marriage. She appeared to be a puppet, the strings of which being held firmly by her parent she wasn't given a free choice to select an ideal lover. Her preference was not considered by her parents. She expresses:

"I was burden and a responsibility neither my parents nor my grandmother could put up with for long. Therefore with the blessing of all, our marriage was fixed".<sup>21</sup>

What hurt her most was this indifference to her individuality, she did not like the way in which her marriage was fixed.

The account of Das's physical relationship with her husband and his obsession with her body shocked many conservative readers. Right from her childhood a woman is taught to be docile and reserved about her instincts. Kamala Das also observes that woman of good Nair families never mentioned sex. Nevertheless Das is very candid in expressing her relationship with her hubby. She observes:

“The rape was unsuccessful but he comforted me when I expressed my fear that I was perhaps not equipped for sexual progress. Perhaps I am not normal, perhaps I am only a eunuch, I said.... Again and again throughout that unhappy night he hurt me and all the while the Kathakali drums throbbed dully against our window and the singers sang of Damyanti's plight in the jungle”.<sup>22</sup>

Das has been termed as an exhibitionist by critics because of her frank and confessional tone. In her teens she had viewed marriage through the glasses of romance she opines:

“I thought then that love was flowers in the hair, it was the yellow moon lighting up a familiar face and soft words whispered in the ear... At the end of the month, experiencing rejection, jealousy and bitterness I grew old suddenly, my face changed from a child's to a woman's and my limbs were sore and fatigue”.<sup>23</sup>

Suddenly, Das fell down to the earthly realities from her dreamy sky. Suddenly she had to answer the realistic question. Her husband's matter of fact behaviour left her gasping for love. She considered herself a helpless victim of a young man's carnal hunger:

“I was a victim of a young man's carnal hunger and perhaps out of our union there would be born a few children”.<sup>24</sup>

Further, Kamala Das notes that she was a plaything for her husband. At the time of her marriage she was so much deeply in love with him that she was ready to undergo any tortures made by him. However her body was not ready for love-making. On the other hand, her husband had rowdy ways of sex which he had practised with the maids working at his home.

Further, more whenever her husband came to Nalapat house he was offered bathing water in the dark bathrooms by the working maids. Kamala Das also relates to the fact that her husband had a spicy

homosexual affair with one of his friends from Y.M.C.A. Thus, the age-difference between the couple played a major role in turning them into an incompatible pair. After the birth of her first son Das's life took a new turn completely. She had found a toy to play with. Her world became full of colours. She disliked the idea of leaving her hubby to have her first child at her grandma's place. Nevertheless, the husband had grown weary of her temperament and decided to send her to Nalapat. She observes:

“Tearing myself away from the man who did not ever learn to love me, I went back to Malabar with an uncle who had been sent to take me home”.<sup>25</sup>

Her husband was not excited at all after becoming a father. He was annoyed by the child's cries at night.

Cynthia Huff in her essay ‘Delivery: The cultural representation of childbirth’ observes that a woman's life.

“delineates a significant life event rather than the form of a life lived, describes an experience which only women can have, and furthermore, characterizes a cultural phenomenon, which metaphorically embodies physical as well as textual creation”.<sup>26</sup>

Cynthia Huff opines that it is necessary to examine the personal accounts of childbirth. Such personal expressions of women's autobiographies depict a woman's ecstasy of being a vital entity capable of creating a new world. Bearing a child is a feeling the excitement of which can be felt by woman alone. For the first time in the history of Indian autobiographies by woman Das's *My Story* signifies “the delivery of her experience of parturition textually.” Kamala Das herself calls her experience of child bearing ‘One of life's major milestones’. Her first experience of carrying a baby in her womb was when she felt a ‘quickenings’ in her womb and knew that her child “had become a live being”.<sup>27</sup>

For her the process of labour was just a celebration. She rejoiced the feeling of pain. She observes:

“When the labour began, I put old record on the gramophone and chatted courageously with my cousins who had come to watch me have the baby. All of them sat outside my door, leaning against the verandah wall. The most excited of all was my younger brother who kept asking me every minute or so if the baby was coming out. I was not prepared for the great pain that finally brought the baby sliding along my left thigh and I could not smother my scream.”<sup>28</sup>

In India child-birth is not a private event. It is more of familial, social and cultural event. In Das’s family deliveries usually took place inside the home, where the whole family would excitedly await the cry of the new born. Kamala Das has composed textual accounts of her three deliveries in the most effective terms. She had a great craving for alcoholic beverages in subsequent two pregnancies. Her creativity reached its zenith and she sat up throughout night writing poetry. Delivery at home was risky and only lucky women escaped death in the process. They often became victims of puerperal fever and other diseases. Das contracted with such diseases but was lucky to have been nursed by her grandmother and mother-in-law at Nalapat.

It is clear that apart from one or two infatuations in her youth like her attraction for the art tutor and an eighteen year son of her family friend; the only person much closer to her was her Italian lover Carlo. She has also mentioned one grey eyed fellow whom she adored. Her love for Carlo is a bond as pure as that of Radha for Krishna. The critic Devendra Kohli observes: “When Kamala Das speaks of love outside marriage, she is not really propagating adultery and infidelity, but merely, searching for a relationship which gives both love and security.”<sup>29</sup>

She was yearning for love. When her hubby was unable to give her the love she was searching, she decided to seek it ‘Outside its legal orbit’. She made up her mind “to be unfaithful to him (her husband) at least physically.”<sup>30</sup> Das wishes to assert her individuality. If her husband could satisfy his sexual urges elsewhere, then why cannot she? Nevertheless, she is conventional and God-fearing we as readers feel that she has deliberately brought in the religious aspect. In one of her poems ‘Radha’ she becomes Radha worshipping her ideal lover,

“O Krishna, I am melting

Melting, Melting

Nothing remains but you.....”<sup>31</sup>

In one of her interviews Kamala Das declared that her love-poems are based on love of Krishna and Radha they are not at all obscene. The lover that she sought after was Lord Krishna. The God of Love for whom Mirabai left her husband and family.

We feel that motherhood brought in a great change in Das’s attitude to life. She shed all her ‘Carnal desire’ and became religious. After the birth of her third child she decided to settle in Malabar, where her relatives did not welcome her with warmth. They thought that her twenty four years marriage was on rocks. It is surprising to know that though her marriage life was ‘flopped’ she did not divorce her husband. She is well aware that she went a strayed from her path. In one of her poems “An Introduction” she observes:

“I am the sinner

I am the saint. I am the beloved and the Betrayed. I have no joys which are not yours, no aches which are not yours I too call myself I”.<sup>32</sup>

In India divorce is not a common feature. A lot of stigma is attached to a divorced woman. Das too is very much bothered about public opinion she sticks to her marriage while suffering within. She was

not educated enough to get a good job and live independently. Furthermore, as a mother of three kids she had to give a second thought to the matter of divorce. The reasons she gives for not getting a divorce are noteworthy. She observes:

“My parents and other relatives were obsessed with public opinion and bothered excessively with our society’s reaction to any action of an individual. A broken marriage was as distasteful, as horrifying as an attack of leprosy. If I had at that time listened to the dictates of my conscience and had left my husband, I would have found it impossible to marry me, for I was not conspicuously pretty and besides there was the two-year-old who would have been to the new husband an encumbrance”.<sup>33</sup>

Having settled in Malabar, where her relatives were not happy to see her Kamala Das cultivated her lands with the field hands and became the mistress of Nalapat House. She wrote very well. However, another illness and that too a heart attack, took her once again to Bombay. Her life had come full circle:

“Illness and my writing helped me to turn into an island. People had to go out of their way to visit me.... I wanted only love and kindness.”<sup>34</sup>

Her pen brought her name and fame. She was also invited by different institutes to deliver lectures on her poetry. Her hungers were “Contented” and her desires were purged. At such a ‘U’ turn of her life. She questioned the validity of her life.

“What did I finally gain from life? Only the vague hope that there were a few readers who loved reading my books although they have not wished to inform me of it. It is for each of them that I continue to write, although the abusive letters keep pouring in. I tweak the noses of the



puritans but I am that corny creature, the sad clown, who knows that the performance is over.....”<sup>35</sup>

She is well aware that Death is not the end of the world. Life continues to flow even after our death she has great expectations from the posterity. She feels that her sons shall produce “Brilliant children”:

“My descendants shall populate this earth. It is enough for me. It is more than enough....”<sup>36</sup>

Thus, Das’s life-story concluded with the hopeful note. Nevertheless we can’t say that it is the ultimate conclusion. An autobiography, like other forms of literatures does not have conclusion. It is never complete. We get more information about Das while going through her interview with eminent scholars, published after the publication of ‘*My Story*’.

So far as truth in the autobiography of Das is concerned one can say that is more of an imaginative rather than factual. *My Story* has received mixed reactions from the readers and the critics. There are two factors brought up to demean any woman autobiographer:

- (1) Autobiography as mere personal hysteria supported by Freud
- (2) Autobiography as a fictional construct.

As an auto biographer Kamala Das caters to both these factors and becomes the victim of criticism. She projects herself as the passive female, incapable of action and relapses into hysteria when the surroundings become intolerable for her. She compares herself with house with its lights put out. The same lecherous husband gave her complete liberty to go to any extent in one of her poems entitled ‘compositions’ she remarks:

“When I got married  
My husband said,  
You may have freedom

As much as you want.  
My soul balked at this diet of ash.  
Freedom became my dancing shoe,  
How well I dance,  
And danced without rest,  
Until the shoes turned grimy  
On my feet and I began to have doubts.”<sup>37</sup>

The husband who was so liberal and caring can ever be so indifferent towards her kids to shut them in another room to have a peaceful sleep?

In one of her interviews Das has confessed that without the care, support and cooperation of her hubby she would have been a zero. Most of the times Das’s own extra marital affairs appear quite fictitious. They have been narrated in a very hasty manner. Whether it is an infatuation towards an eighteen-year boy or love for Carlo, readers are quite convinced that the auto biographer’s account is quite fanciful. In *My Story* at one point she says that she returned from her home to Bombay in an aero plane and a few pages later she writes that her financial condition was so weak that she had very few blouses and sarees “two oranges and a green one”.

Dr. Joya Chakravarty observes that *My Story* is a manifestation of Das’s poems. It is difficult to judge whether Das has derived her life-story from her poems or vice-versa. Das’s poetry is spontaneous, straightforward and simple. Nevertheless it has an alert and inquisitive approach to life. She draws inspiration from the simple, the sad and the gorgeous in the old Nalapat house, the silence around the hanging corpse of a maid servant, the frenzied dance of the eunuchs in the burning Calcutta afternoon, the smell of death in the hospital wards, the Anamalai hills, a brown comrade in a Sri Lankan street, a vigorous but loveless

lover, all inspired her to write. Contemporaneousness is one of the prerequisites of any life-story in unravelling the inner sorrow and desires of a woman. Kamala Das has given a voice to the thousands of modern urban women. For the first time in the history of Indo English literature we listen to the voice of inner urges of a woman. Same is the case with her poems. Her poems in *Summer in Calcutta* (1965), *The Descendants*, (1967), *Old Play House and other Poems* (1973), *Collected Poems* (vol-1) and *Anamalai poems* deal with her personal experiences in relation to time and space. Four out of the seven poems published in *Indian Literary review* 7, 2 express her concern over the prevailing atmosphere at home and abroad. Apart from these poems, her other poems present her personal ecstasies, sorrows and convictions in a way that could shatter our preconceived ideas of India of her times.

An autobiography must depict several life-sketches of different people. Das is at her best in depicting the picture of her grandmother and her younger brother. In her *My Story* she is unable to tolerate the silence and darkness of her parental home after the death of her grandma. Giving a feministic outlook to her grandma Das notes:

“She was the great grandmother of the women’s lib; upholding the rights of women whenever a controversy cropped up and a female, exploited and pregnant came to our courtyard weeping.”<sup>38</sup>

Another person whom Das worshipped like an idol was her brother. She opines that her brother was her personal hero right from her childhood. Depicting her intimacy with her brother Das observes:

“When we were separated, my brother and I, I felt alone and lost, for between us even in the silence we shared was a pure kind of communication, an interminable dialogue that went on and on like that of the wind with the earth or of the sun with the trees”.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, Das is a master-artist in the portrayal of human relationships.

Whether factual or fictitious Das's autobiography has carved a niche in the area of women's autobiographies in India. She has opened up new vistas of autobiographical writings. She has been considered as a writer who fought for the rights of women. Due to her suicidal tendencies she has been also compared with Sylvia Plath. She even questioned her father about the validity of her existence:

“Father, I ask you now without fear  
Did you want me  
Did you ever want a daughter  
Did I disappoint you much with my skin as dark as yours.”<sup>40</sup>

Thus, Das comes to the fore-front with the innermost doubts and wishes of the modern Indian woman. The most remarkable point of Das's life-story is her confessional tone. She is at her best in the exploration of the female self. Her autobiography is the collective repository of woman's experience that would ordinarily be treated as superfluous. Nevertheless, Das has subverted patriarchal stereotypes by externalizing her innermost self.

#### **References:**

1. As quoted in Sodhi Meena *Indian English writing The Autobiographical Mode*, creative Books, New Delhi 2004, P. 105.
2. Ibid, P. 74.
3. Das Kamala, '*My Story*', Sterling publishers, 1978, preface.
4. As quoted in Sodhi Meena *Indian English writing – The Autobiographical Mode*, creative books, New Delhi, 2004, P. 101-102.
5. Ibid, P. 102.
6. Ibid, P. 102.
7. Ibid, P. 102.

8. Das Kamala, *The Conflagration, The Descendants*, Calcutta: Writers workshop, 1967.
9. Das Kamala, '*My Story*', Sterling publishers, 1978, P. 2.
10. Ibid, P. 9.
11. Ibid, P. 9.
12. Ibid, P. 9.
13. Ibid, P. 74.
14. As quoted in Sodhi Meena *Indian English writing*', *The Autobiographical Mode*, creative books, New Delhi, 2004, P. 36.
15. Das Kamala, '*My Story*', Sterling publishers, 1978, 152-153.
16. Sodhi Meena *Indian writing in English, The Autobiographical mode*, creative books, New Delhi, 2004, P. 103.
17. Bhatnagar M.K. *Indian writing in English*, Vol. – VIII, Atlantic Publishers, 2001, P. 212, an article by Dr. Usha V. T.
18. Bhatnagar M.K. *Indian writing in English*, Vol. – VII, Atlantic Publishers, 2001, P. 183.
19. Das Kamala '*My Story*', sterling Publishers', 1978, P. 82.
20. Ibid, P. 84.
21. Ibid, P. 82.
22. Ibid, P. 90.
23. Ibid, P. 90.
24. Ibid, P. 90.
25. Ibid, P. 92.
26. As quoted in Sodhi Meena, '*Indian English writing – The autobiographical mode*, creative books, New Delhi, 2004, P. 106.
27. Das Kamala '*My Story*', sterling publishers, 1978, P. 92.
28. Ibid, P. 93.
29. Kohli Devendra, *Kamala Das*, Delhi: Arnold Heinemann, 1975, P. 25.

30. Das Kamala '*My Story* ', sterling publishers, 1978, P. 95.
31. As quoted in Ed. By Dodiya Jaydipsinh, *Contemporary Indian writings in English*, ch-1 by Joya Chakravarty on P. 4, Atlantic Publishers 1998.
32. Das Kamala, *An Introduction, the old playhouse and other poems*, Delhi: orient Longmans, 1973, P. 27.
33. Das Kamala, '*My Story* ', sterling publishers, 1978, P. 102.
34. Ibid., P. 208.
35. Ibid, P. 209-210.
36. Ibid, P. 219.
37. Das Kamala *Composition, The Descendants*, Calcutta: Writer's workshop, 1967.
38. Das Kamala *Frigidity and the sepia – Tainted photographs*, opinion, No- 27, 1973.
39. Das Kamala, '*My Story* ', sterling publishers, 1978, P. 50.
40. Kamala Das, *Next Indira Gandhi, only the soul knows how to sing*, D.C. Books kottayam, 1996, P-118.

~~~~~

**CHAPTER: VI**

**SHOBHA DE'S**

**SELECTIVE MEMORY: STORIES**

**FROM MY LIFE:**

**INDIAN WOMAN IN NEW AVATAR**

~~~~~

**Chapter: VI**  
**Shobha De's**  
**SELECTIVE MEMORY: STORIES FROM MY**  
**LIFE:**  
**Indian Woman in New Avatar**

**“God must be a mother.....”<sup>1</sup>**

Above sentence inscribed by Shobha De in her book ‘Speed Post’ is a keynote to her personality. Here’s a writer who talks about woman without waving a feminist flag. Her life story is a document of a woman-writer for whom mother-hood and family-life is a celebration. She enjoys being a mother of six and her family is her greatest possession. She is the first modern mother who has a great faith in the new and candid generation. She frankly confesses that she has learnt a lot from this new generation to which her kids belong to. Surely, she is not a person whose chief interest is personal advancement in her profession. Her high voltage Career happened in unexpected ways. She claims: “I was not a careerist. So many years later; I still don’t consider myself one.”<sup>2</sup>

Shobha De – super model, celebrity journalist and best selling author is the true observer of the slice of Indian urban life. She was born in Maharashtra in 1948 and was educated in Delhi and Bombay. She graduated from St. Xavier’s College, Bombay with a degree in psychology. She began a Career in journalism in 1970, and edited three popular magazines ‘Stardust’, ‘Society’ and Celebrity. She was also consulting Editor to ‘Sunday’ and ‘Mega city’. At present she is working as a free lance writer and columnist for several leading newspapers and



magazines. She is mother of six and lives in Bombay with her family. Today, at the age of sixty one she is as charming as ever. Recently, she also organized a fashion show of Designers' Exclusives.

One of her fans observers: "Was this the face that launched thousands of books?"<sup>3</sup> Definitely yes. Shobha De is the author of twelve books. In 1988, she wrote her first novel – *Socialite Evenings* and in 1990 she published *Starry Nights*. In 1992 her third novel *Sisters* was published. Her other novels are *Sultry Days* (1994) *Strange obsession*, *Snapshots*, *Second thoughts* (1996) *Uncertain Liaisons* (1993), *Shooting from the Hip* (1994) *Small Betrayals* (1995), and *Surviving men* (1998). In 1998, at the age of 50 she published her life-story entitled *Stories from My Life*. A marriage manual entitled *Spouse* offers her prudent views on marriage as an institution and a collection of the letters written by De to her kids is a luminous record of guidelines to the posterity. *S's Secret* is her recently published work. Most of the titles of her works begin with syllable 'S' being the first syllable of her name.

Shobha De has been many things to many people. Her high Voltage Career happened in unexpected ways: right from her unplanned entry as a teenager into the glamorous world of modelling to her high-profile years as a magazine editor, Columnist, TV script writer and author. In these incarnations she minutely observed the upcoming India. - She has depicted this brash, affluent ambitious India with an altogether distinct touch in her memoir- *Selective memory*. Here's a memoir written with a detached attitude, covering high-society hi-jinks, movie star follies, Celebrity neuroses and much more. Here's a voice of a new Indian woman that speaks of choices she made, the decisions she took and the influences that shaped her. Written in a confident and Candid Voice, 'Selective Memory: Stories From my life' is remarkable for the

honesty with which it Captures Life story of a woman who has been a legend in her own time.

Selective memory is preoccupied less with the myth as projected by the media and more with the reality that Shobha De embodies. Here she has been projected as a daring daughter, a homemaker wife and a worried mother. Generally, Shobha De has been considered a glamorous person lacking in the commitment to Social Cause. ‘Selective Memory’ has worked wonders in favour of De. Leafing through the book; De emerges as a new woman possessing a mischievous charm and immense Capacity to judge and understand other people. She is at her best in depicting the ties of human – relationships.

Whether ‘Selective Memory’ can be considered an autobiography or not is a debatable question. Some scholars admit that ‘Selective memory’ is strictly speaking, not an autobiography.

‘Selective Memory’ does not depict the continuous chronological flow like biography or autobiography. Here Shobha De omits, sums up, and comments about the large chunks of her life. Her readers are often left dangling, wondering what had happened, how it had happened and what led to what. A temporality is characteristic of both autobiography as well as memoir. Women’s autobiographical texts, being consciously or unconsciously gender-driven resist the utopianism of autobiography proper and align themselves to the discontinuity of memoir. For instance, Virginia Wolf’s *Moments of Being* has a memoir like discontinuity.

Critics also advocate that an autobiographer may begin his life-story from any point. S/he is free to choose the events of his/her life. Nevertheless s/he should be very judicious in his/her choice. Regarding the choice of events, Andre Maurois says, “A biographer or autobiographer is obliged to omit from his narrative, the commonplace of daily life and to limit himself almost exclusively to salient events,

actions and traits. The writing and the reading of the bulky volumes otherwise required would be alike impossible.”<sup>4</sup>

The importance of an event is judged not from general point of view but from the point of view of the autobiographer. Those events and characters which are of immense significance in building his/her character should be definitely included in his/her life-story. Thus, whether ‘Stories from life’ or ‘Stories of life’ De’s life-story definitely has an autobiographical charm. She has a wonderful mystery in selecting and weaving a chain of such events that have shaped her mind and influenced her character. In the prologue to her book she observes: “If nothing else, Selective memory aided and abetted the transformation, kick started, and the process as it were. Forced me to glance over my shoulder. Look back, sift, discard, reinforce, assess, re-assess, come to terms, recognize, accept above all, and accept.”<sup>5</sup>

According to Roy Pascal :

“In the autobiography proper attention is focused on the self.”<sup>6</sup> The real charm of an autobiography consists in the image of the self emerges through it. The depiction of the self is at the centre in autobiography. Sometimes too many events and characters shatter down the charm of the self in autobiography.

Shobha De, whose entire career is one of rebellion against patriarchy might accept the authority of authorship in her belief that she is in control of her matter and medium but in selective memory her construction of selfhood is subverted by the way she has “Chosen to Carve up her life into those segments (she has) no reservations about revealing and serving up to readers.”<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the self of the writer is de centered here. Shobha De has deliberately omitted some sensitive topic and in this process she has left out herself. ‘Selective Memory’ is a record of her achievements, her

views on life, society and human relationships but it is not a full circle to her life. This fractured selfhood emerges at the end when she does not find her own words to express and quotes from Frank Sinatra's song: "I did it my way."<sup>8</sup>

Her self-examination is tentative and subversive. Its presence is felt through her gaps and silences and in her refusal to reveal her hidden self.

Memory cannot be retained in its original form. It is a mingling of many foregone incidents. Memory has its own significance in De's autobiography as its title is – *Selective Memory*. A human mind always likes to retain that which is precious, poignant and painful. The autobiographer reconstructs the images of the self lost in the irrevocable past. These images are not only mental constructs of the autobiographer himself but often shaped by the society. Hence, the autobiographer is bound to select and eliminate. Human memory is sometimes unreliable, wistful and recollection of past itself is selective at the natural, involuntary level. Shobha De is a conscious narrator restructuring contacts of the images of herself as a model, columnist and a novelist addressing the vast audience of Indian English writing. Reconstructing oneself from the memories of various echoes and images is a different kind of experience. It makes the person aware of changes and transformation taking place in one's attitude.

Shobha De's 'Selective memory' has been written at a time in her life that is appropriate to take stock of things. In this epic first person narrative, Shobha De talks about the art of autobiography like a self-conscious narrator. Suddenly she feels that five decades of her life has been already passed. In the 'Prologue' to 'Selective Memory' she describes how she was persuaded to write her life-story by David Davidar of Penguin India now that she was nearing the mid-point age of fifty, the time for "Stock-taking" and 'Flashback'. As she began the task of

“putting her life on line” the “exhilaration of forced remembering” empowered her to rediscover her past, which she had “lost touch with” “in her preoccupation with the present”<sup>9</sup>

De begins her life-story in the mood of ‘Sweet acceptance’. She doesn’t like to interpret this change as a sign of mellow. With a great zeal she welcomes her fiftieth year. She is not nostalgic to hanker after her earlier years, but ready to accept her new identity as a more experienced and elderly woman. She observes:

“Mellow? Who needs mellow? I am not ‘nice’, you neither dumb clucks nor mellow. Merely older. I can’t be a brat at fifty. It’s obscene. Fortunately, a few remnants of that other woman are still intact. I found myself squaring my shoulders, sticking my chin out and thinking, ‘So what?’ I’ve changed, I am entitled to. Those who are looking for the familiar me will just have to settle for this one or lump it. For, this one is here to stay. And frankly, I’m rather enjoying being her”<sup>(10)</sup>

Thus, De enjoys each stage of life she likes to flow along with the flow of life.

Recalling her past, Shobha De recollects her childhood, birth and parentage. Shobha De has marvellously portrayed her earlier years and her relationship with her parents and siblings. Though, she was born to well to do and a high principled parent, her birth was not very much welcomed by them under the impact of our social setup. Even today in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the birth of a girl child is not cherished in her life-story, she has depicted this gender-discrimination still prevalent in our country. She observes: “Unfortunately for my mother I was not a second son she had prayed for. My birth could not possibly have been a day of celebration for the family especially since my maternal grandmother was around to remind everybody that a third daughter had arrived as an additional liability and it had been rather reckless of my parents to have

gone in for a fourth child with no guarantee that it would be male”.....<sup>(11)</sup>

Shobha’s grandmother surely wanted her mother to feel guilty and wretched at the birth of a girl child. Only Shobha’s father, Rao Saheb was rejoiced at the birth of a daughter. He admired nature for the perfectly formed and inarticulate infant. He consoled his wife that God had blessed them by giving such a healthy and good-looking daughter.

There is still stigma attached to a birth of a girl child. Always secondary preference is given to the girl-child. When Shobha was born to her parents, the wives of Rao Saheb’s peons delivered boys and they had an upper hand over their master. Mr. Rao was a special magistrate but as the father of three daughters his status was lowered. While from the servants’ quarters, the victorious cries of mugla! (Boy) mugla! Arose, there were at the same time gloomy references to poor Rao Saheb’s mugli (girl). When Shobha’s elder sister Kunda rejoiced at the arrival of her younger sister, she did not know that it was only the birth of a son that was good omen for the family. When Kunda demanded Kumkum hand impression on her back, her grandmother scolded her saying: “what! You want Kumkum on your back? Go and fetch some cow dung instead. Do you realize there are three daughters in the family now? Weren’t two enough?”<sup>12</sup>

Fortunately for the family many changes for the good happened after the birth of Shobha. Her father always considered her lucky for the family. Thus, the initial feeling of being let down by the daughter’s birth was transformed to warmth and love soon after.

After Shobha’s birth, her father got a job in Delhi and the stay in the metropolitan city liberated the family from the narrow notions of a small town in Maharashtra. When her father was transferred to Bombay and from Ghatkopar to a flat opposite Church gate, the process of

liberation was strengthened. In spite of the changes in the family scenario, her father continued to tell: “character-building, youth is meant for character-building.”

She lived in the most fashionable part of Bombay. “I loved my new home, more than the area. This was downtown Mumbai fashionable, affluent and sexy”.<sup>13</sup>

Narration of childhood is something very special for women autobiographers. Childhood memories are often secondhand. Parents and grandparents often narrate incidents from early life. Hence, recollection of childhood is generally no more than what the writer has heard about himself / herself from others. Nevertheless childhood memories do present a reality of a person, when narrated with sincerity.

Meena Sodhi observes in her book. “For women, adulthood – marriage or spinsterhood – implied relative loss of self. Unlike men, therefore, they looked back fondly to the relative freedom and power of childhood and youth.”<sup>14</sup>

Definitely, De recollects her childhood memories fondly but she experienced a sense of freedom not only in her childhood but also in all the phases of her life. She grasped freedom like an invaluable coin.

Some of De’s childhood memories are second hand but they are narrated with utter sincerity. For instance, in the very first chapter ‘Glancing Back’. She narrates that her sisters always told her about her childhood pranks. They used to tell her that as a child she was an insufferable brat constantly whining and clinging to her mother. The doctor who visited when she was delivered in military bungalow in Satara was paid Rs.30 as his professional fees and another hundred was spent for a week’s stay. Further she recollects that she was the only child in her family whose birthdays were celebrated. She had very definite ideas on what exactly she wanted on her ‘big day’. She opted for a pink theme.

Her uncles and cousins were told to search for pink booties, a pink frilly frock, pink frocks and a pink cake with pink candles on it.

De further remarks that each time she visits Delhi she goes to Khan Market. Most of the old stores from her Childhood have disappeared but the smells are still the same. Walking through the long Corridors, her senses are over taken by aromas and tastes that she associate with a particularly happy phase of her childhood, she feels that she has forgotten the feel of Delhi winters apart from a tiny electric heater and a cardigan against her skin. Nevertheless she recollects the Delhi summers very well. She recollects, 'Long' still afternoons spent in darkened rooms filled with 'government furniture' numbered clunky desks, chairs, sofa-sets, beds. She considers her parents' move from Delhi to Mumbai very favorable she feels that even at the age of ten, Delhi seemed too small and slow a town to her. Though she was not quite in touch with Mumbai along with her parents and siblings she also felt as if they were finally going 'home'.

Mumbai milieu gave Shobha an altogether different look. She grew faster than her elder sisters. She introduced them with the latest fashions and always used slang speech. She introduced them with pop music, western style dancing, trendy hair-styles, high heels, mascara, Hollywood magazines, racy books and much more. She remarks that if she had a separate room to herself, she might have safeguarded her privacy. However, as there was none, she preferred to seize her sisters on the same side.

On the other hand, De had to live under the prescribed rules of her father. She had to obey to all the dos and don'ts of her father. Kids were not allowed to remain indoors with their rooms locked. Shobha was not allowed to wear sleeveless blouses, cut her hair in a fringe, use make-up, listen to the western station of All India Radio, and dance even by herself.



Wear perfume, jeans or grown-up out fits or behave in any manner that might attract attention. Shobha De obeyed the inhibitions laid down by her father and followed them. She also remarks that her parents were very-protective of their daughters.

Recalling her childhood she has also noted one unfavorable incident. Her father's colleagues often used to visit them. When she was only two years old, one of her father's colleagues was invited at home. She notes down: "I can still see the expression in the eyes of one particular man when he asked me to lead him to the wash-basin to clean his hands. While I waited holding a hand-towel, this man who was in his mid-forties made a crude pass, pretending it was an accidental touch....."<sup>15</sup> Shobha briskly realized his intentions and fled. Her mother asked her what had happened and told everything to her father. In a great rage, her father adjourned the dinner and the man was never invited back.

Conflict is one of the most significant factors of autobiography. Shobha De notes how her ideology was much in conflict with that of parent's. Her father disapproved of her career of modeling. She pursued modeling career as a college student. She thought that, it would give her some pocket money and a sense of independence. She had frankly told her mother about her plans. Her mother however dared not to reveal that to her father. De's observation on her father's reaction is quite significant: "As soon as I came clean about my modeling to the rest of the family, all hell broke loose. My mother was caught in the cross-fire instantly, "Who allowed her to accept these shows?" My father thundered. It was my mother's turn to take the rap and mutter softly." It isn't as bad as you imagine. She hasn't done anything wrong....the people she is working with are quite decent". My father didn't wish to listen. He wasn't ready to be convinced. And that is how it stayed even five years later. He

disapproved period. He didn't want his daughter to be in a field. He considered cheap and disreputable.”<sup>16</sup>

Her father wished that his dear daughter should become a doctor, a lawyer or an engineer but she was quite different. Her ideas about life and what she wanted from life were quite different. All she wanted was to be a happy, carefree young person.

In spite of her father's disapproval, De continued her career as a model. Her face appeared on the cover of two of the leading women's magazines, 'Femina' and 'Eve's weekly'. She also got a chance to work as a model with Zeenat Aman. She was also featured in 'Vogue'. Modelling gave her an exposure to the world of glamour and advertising. Surprisingly, what Shobha's father was unable to do was done by Shobha's daughters. He did not succeed in making her realize the shallowness of modeling but her kids did. Once, her eldest daughter Radhika comes home with a calendar of sixties in which there were three photographs of Shobha. Those snaps displayed her in ugly, gaudy outfits, her hair teased into an unnaturally large bouffant and her eyes painted peacock blue and the lips outlined in pink. At this juncture, her daughter Arundhati said: “Mother, you look so much better now.”<sup>17</sup> De couldn't deny the words of her daughter as she had said it with utmost sincerity. De hugged her gratefully. Her daughters made her aware that modeling led to a sort of commoditization of women. De had spent five years of her youth as a model still her views about that vocation are blunt and harsh. She comments; “No matter what they say, modeling was and remains a thinly disguised cattle show”.<sup>18</sup>

Apart of modeling Shobha had passion for athletics and painting. Her father also disapproved her of wearing shorts except on the field. She had also won medals and certificates in athletics. Her sister Kunda encouraged her in her passion for painting. She bought a wooden easel;

oil paints and brushes for her from her meager medical internship stipend, Shobha De remarks that the first ambitious canvas that she had painted was rather a voluptuous one. Her father disapproved it and commented:

“Paint flowers, trees, birds, mountains, scenic themes. Not these types of vulgar, shameless pictures.”<sup>19</sup> Then after, De’s passion for painting also subsided.

Above all, ‘Selective Memory’ is a celebrity memoir. Shobha De has shared all her experiences with the world of stars and Bollywood Bingos. In the chapters entitled ‘Blazing Trails’ and ‘Shining Through’ De’s complete focus is on the public and private lives of the stars. Herein she has presented a series of Bollywood life in very lucid manner. Her experiences with the star-world during her career as an editor of ‘Stardust’ and ‘Society’ have created a pictorial symphony.

De has depicted remarkable traits of many celebrated actors and actresses. She has admired all that is positives in them but has not forgotten to pin-point their darker sides. She narrates that the inaugural issue of stardust in 1971 started with a headline that asked ‘Is Rajesh Khanna secretly married?’<sup>20</sup> She also recollects that issue sold out within a week. She also notes that stardust become so much popular because of its content. The staff members of the stardust including herself were quite unaware of it success. They worked with scientific precision and clarity but never expected any return. Recollecting Rekha’s personality, She observers: “Rekha was an unknown when she walked in with Vinod Mehra (dead now)..... She was overweight, load, giggly and ridiculously dressed. Nobody could possibly have Visualized the Rekha of today-sultry siren-seductress supreme”<sup>21</sup>

De further notes that in her earlier career, Rekha was very camera conscious and a naive. Once, the clicking began she abandoned her silly, childish prattle.

Other issues of stardust narrated things like : “My best friend is my mother, says Sharmila” or I sleep with my teddy bear , admits Nanda “<sup>22</sup>

De remarks that as an Editor of ‘Stardust’, she never stepped into a film studio or attended a Muhurat or visited a Star Home or party with the film Crowd. She however remembers two exceptions – the premier of the film Shalimar and a small dinner party at the home of the late Shankar B.C. She did not want to befriend with movie people she preferred a favourable distance from them. She strongly confesses: “I abhorred the film world.”<sup>23</sup>

Further, De recollects her impressions of Dashing figures like Kabir Bedi. She remarkably narrates that Kabir Bedi’s dashing personality is irresistible to even women of strong determination. He is a man of concrete confidence but surely he cannot himself fall in love very deeply with anyone. He is a towering rational alpha man with a strong ego. Shobha De comments that Kabir Bedi was not meant for Bollywood. His high ideology of Zen thoughts, Krishnamurti’s views and Buddhist philosophy was not accepted by the Bollywood. His entry into filmdom was a favour in itself but he was not fully accepted by it. With a light tinge of humour, De remarks : “Kabir Bedi on screen is hard to separate from a gigantic log of wood”.<sup>24</sup>

De has also narrated her impression of Shatrughan Sinha. She comments that few years back when she met him for the first time, he appeared overestimated and today also he is the same. He is crude in his manner with strong Bihari accent. Once, he attempted to impress Shobha De by offering her a ride in his dull green Mercedes Benz. De narrates the whole event in a very simple yet lucid manner. she observes :

“He pointed and said, “That’s my car.” There were no audible gasps.’ How are you going home?’

‘Like I do everyday – I walk.’

‘Why don’t you come with me in my Mercedes?’

‘No, thank you. I need the exercise.’

He almost wept.”<sup>25</sup>

Thus, De was smart enough to handle any situation. Just like Candida of G.B. Shaw she knew all the tactics of a fair sex to handle men. At best, she knew very well how, why and when to tell ‘No’.

Recollecting the ‘Stardust’ days, she narrates her meeting with the beautiful heroine Zeenat Aman. De comments that Zeenat entered the film industry with an intention of making money and enjoy success. She entered the industry as a teenager and for five years her magic spell bound India. By that time stardust had become number one film magazine. She preferred to remain on the right side of the publication’s proprietor. So far as her off-screen performances with various married men are concerned ‘Stardust’ spared her by soft-peddling.

Sanjay Khan gave her a false sense of respectability and security by considering her wife number two.’ The most humiliating experience of Zeenat Aman with the star Sanjay Khan has been fearlessly and candidly narrated by Shobha De. De comments that their relationship ended in the lobby of the Taj Mahal Hotel. There battered and bruised Zeenat was publicly humiliated by Abbas Khan and his socialite friends. De considers it as one of the most shocking incidents in the history of Bollywood. Had it happened today, Abbas (Sanjay) Khan would have been jailed for abuse and assault.

Further De has noted a vast change in Rekha’s behaviourism and voice in nineties. Earlier, Rekha’s voice resembled that of a washer-woman. Later on, when De met her in nineties she found a completely new version: Today’s Rekha is a soft-spoken, soignée, sophisticated.”<sup>26</sup>

Recollecting the late Sanjeev Kumar, Shobha De says that he is not at all a polished, sensitive gentleman off screen. She remarks: “Rustic, ill-mannered and uncouth is what I found the late Sanjeev Kumar.”<sup>27</sup>

Further, Shobha De has remarkably narrated her meetings with great stars like Rajesh Khanna, Dimple Kapadia, Hema Malini and even the Big-B-Amithabh Bacchan. Dimple’s views about Rajesh Khanna are considerable. When asked to Dimple she told De: “He gives woman hell. He makes them feel unloved and insecure. He is mean with money. And entirely selfish...”<sup>28</sup>

De further notes that the d-word divorce was never mentioned in Dimple-Rajesh relationship but Dimple always appeared wounded. Their break-up was so much expected that it never became a media-mantra.

Narrating Bachchan’s visit to her home, De comments that Big B and Dilip De had an old acquaintance. Bachchan’s meeting covered two long-hours and she greeted him with some frozen samosas and two cups of coffee. It was her daughter Radhika’s birthday and kids were not much in a mood to greet Big B. Her servants were embarrassed and told her:

“Itney badey hero ko siraf samosa khilaingey?”<sup>29</sup>

Further, De narrates that her whole family was star immune. Once she met Urmila Matondkar in a beauty contest and invited her at her home and rang up her husband to talk to the servants and kids to remain prepared to welcome Urmila. The function ended at 10:30 and when they reached her home all the kids were feeling sleepy. All her daughters except Arundhati went to sleep without greeting Urmila. Urmila cooed ‘Hello’ to them. Nevertheless none responded. Movie masters were not a matter of rejoice for her kids and her husband. It was just an ordinary matter for them.

In the portrayal of film stars, Shobha De is at her best in writing the female. All her female stars are portrayed with a nice tinge of precision

and with deeper sense of sympathy. Dimple, Zeenat Aman and Hema Malini have been portrayed as calm wives fitted into the slot without blaming anyone for their plights. They are women with no complaints for the men-folk who hurt their feelings and left them all alone to care for their households and daughters. They performed their respective duties like karma yogis. They even ruined their careers for the sake of home and kids.

Same is the case with little star Sarika. De terms her the luscious Sarika – a spirited street-fighter in her own way. She had a very split childhood without the identity of her father. Her search of her real father ended in her adolescence. Her mother wanted to utilize her intelligence, smartness and good looks in the best of its manner. She wanted to earn money by utilizing Sarika's talent in film industry.

She did so and bought a comfy flat with Sarika's money. She did not approve Sarika's easy going relationship with Karan Kapoor. Her mother's priorities also changed with a brand new husband in a brand new flat. Sarika was torn emotionally as well as financially. She left home and preferred to live as a paying guest. She found a solace in a relationship with a married man Kamal Hasan. The result of this marriage was that Sarika turned out to be an entirely unselfconscious buxom creature. Two daughters were born to her and she became a bulky woman - a personal secretary of her hubby-deciding the shades and colours of his costume and a big zero as a film star. She continually wanted to prove something but she couldn't.

The most remarkable satisfied and confident female film-star that De found was Sharmila Tagore. De comments that Sharmila wears her age and position exceedingly well. She is highly intelligent, well read and down to earth.

In few more chapters Shobha De has depicted various turns of her career from ‘Stardust’ to ‘Society’ and then to ‘Celebrity’. In these chapters she has depicted few more celebrities like the painter M.F.Hussain, Cricketers like Ravi Shastri and Zaheer Abbas and Singers like Asha Bhosle. She has written about M.F. Hussains’ Madhuri fixation as a trick for self-promotion.

In the chapter ‘Naming Names’ De talks about Sunil Gavaskar, Kiran Bedi, Stevan Seagull, Naipaul, Morarji Desai, Imanan Khan and many more celebrities from India and abroad.

Generally, in an autobiography ‘self’ is placed at the center. Nevertheless man cannot live in isolation. An artist is a sum-total of his race, milieu and moment. De’s autobiography also is a sum-total of the experiences that she had in urban Bombay. Her life-story marvelously portrays the impact of other individuals on herself. Maintaining the centrality of her self. Shobha De has successfully crated a galaxy of brilliant portraits in selective memory. We have already come across how De has depicted the private and the public lives of some film stars. Shobha De seems to be highly influenced by two great persons in her life and they are: Her father and Nari Hira – the owner of ‘Stardust’ who inspired her to become a writer. At the very outset of the book, Shobha De gives effective account of a sensitive moment she shared with her father. On her fiftieth birthday, Shobha De received a phone call from her father. De observes:

“Suppressed excitement in his voice, a strange sense of urgency, secrecy. ‘My dear... can you come and see me today?’<sup>30</sup> De was mildly irritated because of interruption. She was pressed by the dead-lines. But he was unwilling to wait. She then promised that she would visit him at lunch-time. She failed due to her work. Exactly at 2:00 P.m. he called her again and insisted her to visit him immediately. He said: “Don’t



disappoint me and don't be late", on her arrival he told her that he wanted to give her something precious on her fiftieth birthday. The octogenarian father told her:

"In case..... In case ..... Something happens to me..... I wouldn't want the gift to lie unclaimed.... It has a special significance..... But if for any reason I am no more, this gift will lose its charm. You were born in free India. You will not know what that moment of freedom meant to people of my generation. So don't argue with me. Take it. And keep it safely."<sup>31</sup>

He handed over a small neat packet to De and asked her to guess what was inside. To her surprise, De found a gold coin commemorating fifty years of independence.

De responded: "Beautiful and so appropriate". De took the coin and stared at it for a long time. This small event is very effective and significant as well. People of earlier generation want us to realize the importance of hard-won independence. Such was the warmth of the relationship between the father and the daughter. They gifted to each other not only material things but the live emotions. In a very remarkable terms De comments that the coin " looked like a miniature sun on my palm".<sup>32</sup>

Thus, her father emerges as an independent live figure through various incidents and narrative flashes. His middle-class Maharashtrian male-domineering traits are revealed through a constant strain between the father and the daughter.

Another such event depicted by De is related to her image as a pornographic writer with a great pride De confesses that because of the support of her family, father and children she got the strength to bear the infamy of being a pornographer. Her disciplined father would not have approved his daughter's choice of modeling as a career. However, he

always respected her as a writer ,who could portray man-woman relationship with a great candour. once, he rang up his daughter at 11P.m. and said:

“I’ve been unable to find an answer to something that has been troubling me. May be you will be able to throw some light on it. I’ve noticed that in surveys about sexual attitudes, it’s always the men who are asked questions on frequency – how many times a week? A month? A year? Women are rarely asked this. Why is that? I gave him a ten-minute dissertation on the subject and he listened most attentively ‘Thank you, my dear’, he said politely. ‘I have learnt a lot tonight’.<sup>33</sup> That alarmed De and she told her father that she was not an expert on the subject. Her father replied with utmost sincerity that he had got the answer he was looking for a long time.

Thus, De’s father understood her from toe to head. He had his decided rules and regulations to follow but he was also open-minded and receptive person.

Due to his protective outlook for the daughters all the three daughters fared well in their respective professions. The glow of confidence which we find on De’s face is inevitably a result of her father’s trust and fostering care.

Just like her father another figure to whom De adores is Nari-Hira. This was the man who became a source of inspiration for Shobha De. Recalling Nari Hira, Shobha De comments that he was an excellent motivator of people and extremely dynamic. He always encouraged Shobha De. For the first time one of his staff-members Shilpa Shah introduced De to Mr.Hira. He took a spontaneous copy test of Shobha. De wanted to quit the modelling career and she needed a firm guide to lead her. Hira gave her a copy test during lunch sessions and she scribbled her notes like a school-kid. Surprisingly enough, Hira selected Shobha as his

editor and gave her the charge of whole 'Stardust' team. Hira discovered the real writer in De. De with a great sense of reverence comments that Nari Hira instilled confidence in the people he employed. He had a magnetic charm. De always counted on him in crisis. He was like a beacon guide to Shobha. With a sense of gratitude, Shobha De observes:

"I don't know why Nari Hira hired me. I never asked, he never said. I still don't know whether he thought I had it in me a glimmer of talent, some potential. There was no reaction from him, nothing to indicate what he'd made of my amateurish efforts. Today, we can joke about it, the encounter being at such a safe distance. Today, I can call him a friend even if I never address him by his first name. He was Mr. Hira then; he remains Mr. Hira even now."<sup>34</sup>

An autobiography is a process of becoming. The writer presents before us the whole procedure of how he/she became what/who s/he is. Shobha De relishes the moments of writing her first book. She observes: "One telephone call. That's it, just one, single telephone call it was that led to the journey I'm still on." (313) She liked the approach, business like, friendly enough but not familiar. David Davidar, the editor-publisher and CEO of penguin books India, was looking for new writers. He was a regular reader of De's columns and believed firmly that there was a book hidden in them. Nevertheless, it was his belief but not hers. She listened to his phone-call but not attentively as she was carrying at that time. David had the impression that she had "the pulse of the city". She could be the right person to portray the real Bombay. Shobha De replied him that she had never written a book before.

David insisted that she could write a fiction at least. She felt the whole business tedious. To cut short, she promised him to think about the matter. David said that he would be back in a month's time.

Exactly after a month the call came: “Have you got the outline?” De was panic-stricken. She felt like a school girl who hadn’t worked on her vacation assignment. She replied that she had done some work. David told her that he would approach her in an hour. She felt that it would be too humiliating to be exposed for ‘the cheap little fibber. She had to produce something-anything. She started scribbling something on the pad.

Shobha De very intensely focuses on that hast-tasty time span and observes:

“So many years later, I can still recall the rush I experienced during, those few minutes, as the outline for ‘Socialite Evenings’ took shape on the lined pages of a cheap pad. I cannot explain even now where the story emerged from, but as I began to write it down, I felt a sense of urgency to record it all before it went away..... disappeared altogether.”(316)

David approved the book and then started her journey as a novelist. De has candidly confessed her initial difficulty as a writer. Surpassing all the initial difficulties she became a widely read renowned writer. She simply talks about her great virtue of detachment which came naturally to her: “It was at this stage that I discovered something funny about myself – once the book was over and done with, I felt completely disconnected from its fate. The book was then on its own – free falling or scaling heights, all by itself. There was no emotional attachment left.”<sup>35</sup>

Discussing her devotion to the work of writing, De opines that one needs a sense of dedication while writing. It’s hard to keep one’s mind focused on domestic trivia while longing to write a book. De opines that a day can be termed ‘good’ only when the writing has gone well. It’s very hard to feign interest in family matters, a spouse’s routine conversation, a

child's prattle, while longing to get back to writing. These were the hurdles she had surpassed as a woman writer.

The whole process of writing has been remarkably depicted by De in the most touching manner. She observes her views as a woman writer:

“For a woman, a book in progress is like a secret lover she has to hide from her family. Steal time to go back to. Dream about. Luxuriate in. Fantasize about. It's a guilty secret she can't share with anybody. There is sense of regret – you can't make love to a book or talk to it. And yet the secret thrill of each encounter provides a high. The book makes you feel desirable, sexy, beautiful, interesting. It's better than the best sex.”<sup>36</sup>

After the publication of *Starry Nights* a gentleman asked her: “Madam, is it true that women in India do not experience real pleasure you know what I mean... and that they fool their husbands by pretending? What, according to you, is the percentage of ladies ... who... who... experience real pleasure?”<sup>37</sup>

Shobha De was annoyed at such a silly question. She felt like flinging the plate of fragrant Biryani at his smug face. She thought whether he considered her a sexologist with statistics at her fingertips.

Thus, De had carved a niche of bold women writing. However, the literary world termed her a Jackie Collins of India and she became popular as a queen of pornography. None was able to understand the beauty of various human ties which she wove in her novels. To her, physical love is a key to spiritual realization. So what? If society doesn't approve her ideas. As writer she was not worried about social approval but she was concerned about the approval of her husband, kids and the family members. Dilip always stood by her. Her children were too small to react during the publication of her earlier novels. It was the tact and insight of her husband that gave her the strength to bear the critics' attacks. Recalling the hard-times of critical attacks and her husband's

warm response, Shobha De observes: “Dilip would always make light of the whole thing and successfully blunted the edge of the unrelenting attacks. When I look back, it couldn’t have been easy for him, husband of a woman the entire critic’s community had dubbed pornographer”<sup>38</sup>

Whatsoever, it may be, De, as a writer, achieved a grand success.

Further, De has very candidly confessed how she drew out several characters of her novels from several living beings. Which of her characters are drawn from which person of her acquaintances has been remarkably confessed. For instance, she points out that her picture of that haute monde in *Socialite Evenings* is no Indianized version of Beverley Hills but an entirely accurate if merciless exposure of Bombay high society.”<sup>39</sup> Similarly, *Starry Nights* is the accumulation of countless images and memories gathered during (her) ‘Stardust’ period.”<sup>40</sup>

Shobha De remarks that there were very few people in *Socialite Evenings* who closely resembled real life Individuals – but they were broad ‘types’. There was just one character in the book that was real and as soon as she read the book she realized herself straightaway and wrote a letter to De. When they met each other after some time, she hugged De and tears rolled down on both the sides.

In *Starry Nights* De confesses that there are a few shades of Rekha in Aasha Rani and Akshay, is only a pale reflection of Amitabh Bachchan. The events in the book are not completely real but are based on reality. In ‘Strange Obsession’, De has depicted her own experience of a woman’s obsessive attention; she has been going through for the last twenty-five years. ‘Snapshots’ is a novel dealing with the reunion of De with her school-mates. The story revolves around the pictures of old school friends meeting at a lunch to one of the houses of a friend. The only difference in the book is that the protagonist was not the fat lady in an ill-fitting blue suit, but a gorgeous London-based operator, more on

the lines of Pamela Bordes. *Sultry Days* is an incarnation of her memories of St. Xavier's in the sixties. 'God' the male protagonist was a composite made up of several types De enjoyed inhabiting the female protagonist Nishi's skin for the duration of novel writing, but Nishi can't be called cent percent replica of De.

*Second Thoughts* is a quieter book with a single raunchy line. Here, De switched over from 'too much sex' to 'Zero sex'. That was again a matter of inquiry for critics and De comments that the interrogations of the critics: "Made me wonder who had more sex on the mind me or them?"<sup>41</sup>

*Shooting from the Hip* is a collection of De's columns dealing with politics, Travel and social issues. *Small Betrayals* is also a collection of her stories.

De has also written some remarkable prose-fiction in recent years like *Spouse* and *Speed Post*. Thus, Shobha De expressed the truth as she saw and experienced it.

Obviously, she is a best selling writer and her work is market based. Nevertheless, she is a writer with a mission. She has unfurled the hidden recesses of human mind like a true psychologist. Her degree in psychology has undoubtedly helped her to understand the true human nature. She is straight forward in her dealings and never appears a snob.

Depiction of marriage is one of the constant characteristics of women autobiographies. Woman's happiness depends upon the happiness in her conjugal life. Being an Indian New woman, Shobha De likes to be called married and is proud to be the mother of six. Marriage means a lot to her and she firmly believes that both the partners have to work hard to get the going smooth. Talking about her marriage, De remarks:

“Marriage to me connotes commitment and surrender. Merging with, blending, overlapping, combining. It is a symbolic relationship where one feeds on the other, needs the other.”<sup>42</sup>

She is so happy that she met Dilip and listened to her heart. In the chapter entitled ‘Getting Personal’, Shobha De has presented a full-length portrait of her husband-Dilip De. Shobha De was awarded the Reuters Fellowship and was given a few days to decide whether or not she was going to accept it. She was in a dilemma. She didn’t want to leave her children. She was miserable. she comments:

“I was restless and bored Demoralized and depressed..... I was wracked with self doubt and guilt..... I would lose the love of my children. My family would disown and despise me..... My flight..... was at dawn on 16 August. I met Dilip on the night of the 11<sup>th</sup>. It was a meeting that altered my life-and gave me the answer I was so desperately looking for.”<sup>43</sup>

‘Feeling Great’ is a chapter in which Shobha De describes her divorce with Sudhir and remarriage to Dilip De. In a very miraculous way she took a decision to remarry De. Her divorce came through at 11:30 a.m. and she married Dilip at 1 p.m. she was a divorcee precisely for one and a half hour.(474) Discussing the reality of marriage life, Shobha De confesses that her remarriage was not always a bed of roses. Roses are always in the midst of thorns. She observes: “We’ve had our rough moments bumpy patches, arguments, disagreements and fights. There have been tears, accusations and recriminations. But no real regrets. The parameters of our relationship have been drawn by Dilip.”<sup>44</sup>

It’s really tough task to handle a family consisting “Mine, yours and ours”. Very elegantly, De has performed role of a home-maker. No wonder that her children feel that she is too traditional, too middle-class a woman to be really called modern. In the last but one chapter, “Taking



Stock” , De confesses that she has learnt much from her children who have been utterly candid in their comments: “There have been several such incidents involving our children. Each time I learned a new and refreshing ‘truth’. They helped me change, reevaluate my worn attitudes, reassess my rigid positions on issues that concern us all. I feel thankful to them for having pointed out my mistakes”.<sup>45</sup>

Till the last few chapters, De has not mentioned even the name of her first life-partner. Readers wonder about her breakup with Sudhir. In one of the earlier chapters ‘Flying Solo’, she hints at her vulnerable condition but then she switches over to the discussion of the decline of her magazine ‘Celebrity’. In the same chapter she observes:

“Perhaps for the first time ever, I was dealing with failure on several levels. After eight years of being Mrs. So and so, I was being forced to deal with an identity crisis. Who was I now? What was my standing within the community? ..... Where had I gone wrong? ..... I’d made mistakes. I’d misjudge. Miscalculated ..... My self-esteem was in tatters ..... there was no place to call ‘home’ ..... since circumstances had spiralled out of my control, I didn’t blame myself entirely for the mess that my life had become.....<sup>46</sup>

At such a juncture of life, even her father had withdrawn and didn’t approve her conduct. Apart from Kunda (her elder sister) and mother none of her family members supported her. The office of celebrity was shifted to her cousin Gautam’s studios. Gautam stood beside Shobha like a silver lining around the dark cloud.

It is very clear from De’s account that something had happened between the husband and the wife because of which she had decided to quit. It was not simply her fault. Neither has she accused her husband. She has deliberately kept silence. “All memory is selective”<sup>47</sup>, claims Shobha De. (527) She has still maintained a friendly communion with

Sudhir. If Sudhir had his wife meet her by chance in a shopping mall she definitely greets them with a ‘hello’. Her previous mother in law definitely rings her up on her son’s birthday. Such is the magnanimity of her heart.

Obviously, she has learnt an art to live. As a true artist she has claimed privacy or surely in not revealing several facts. The dedicatory remarks to the book also hits the mark where she maintains:

“To Lord Ganesh from whom there can be no secrets

And

My beloved family, from whom I’ve still kept a few.”<sup>48</sup>

De has presented her life-story with detached acceptance of life. There are several recesses of a person’s heart which are reserved for none other than himself. De remarkably declares:

“I have chosen to carve up my life into those segments I have no reservations about revealing and serving up to readers. It isn’t lapses in memory I’m hiding behind. Rather, it is my conscious decision to exercise control over those aspects of my life I’m not ready to make public.....”<sup>49</sup>

De’s life-narrative is candid and confessional but certainly she has preferred to remain silent on several issues like that of her first marriage and its break-up. As a student of literature, we have to discover then, how much truthful De’s account is.

Truth in autobiography is different from the historical or fictional truth. The ‘naked, unblushing truth’ should be depicted in the autobiography. An autobiography should not depict the man in brilliant colours only. It must also depict his limitations, troubles, grief, virtues and vices as well. The lapses should be presented with equal transparency as are strong points. Shobha has struck a fine balance in confessing her positive as well as negative aspects.

As a citizen of twenty first century she has accepted that she has learnt a lot from her children. She accepts that her attitude is much more of a middle-class woman. She pines the fact that when her mother died none of her siblings along with herself were present and her octogenarian father had to handle the situation. She has never glorified the institution of marriage and she affirms that one has to work hard for get it going. She has never accused her first husband for the break-up. She accepted her new relationship very matter of factly. She has also accepted the darker side of modeling profession.

Shobha De's success as an autobiographer lies in her capacity to look at her own self with equal candidness and sharpness.

She firmly confesses that she is so earthly to have an ego. Talking about her ego she relates to an event related to her daughter's school assignment: In the complex where she lives, she is often visited by school kids who need a quick essay, points for debate, headlines for a project, missing words from a crossword, and even ad copy for their mothers' leaflets for 'Short Cookery Summer courses'. She writes all that is asked to 'obediently and thinks nothing of it'. She doesn't mind even if the young shop-keeper does not approve of the many names suggested for his man's boutique. He regretfully rejects her brilliant suggestions, but invites her for its inauguration. She has no ego problem but when her daughter doubts her capacity, the mother in her feels deeply hurt. She observes:

"My ego can handle it. But when my daughter's sixth-grade teacher rejects 'her' assignment – a poster for a blood-donation campaign, saying 'it doesn't make sense', I feel crushed and terribly hurt. Not because the teacher has told her it isn't good enough but because my daughter had started to think so too. So I smile a small smile and say, 'It's okay, darling we'll try harder the next time' and I really do."<sup>50</sup>

Thus, Shobha De never wants to prove that she is a divine being. She is an ordinary, earthly woman feeling pain and grief in very ordinary manner.

Obviously, De's life-story does not depict her as a feminist. She neither sounds a feminist in her novels. Through her novels also she seems to be fighting for human rights. She firmly believes that a woman should be treated as a human-being. Nevertheless she is not a rebel. She has a great faith in the woman of her times and knows that they are ready to surpass all obstacles. She does not long for anything grand. The concept of a rebel is very negative to her. She says: "The image I harbour of a rebel is a negative one of a person who determinedly shatters known rules of conduct and upset everybody. I did swim against the tide but while I was doing so, my own sights were on getting to the other shore, not on the turbulence I may have been leaving in my wake."<sup>51</sup>

On the other hand, De has scaled heights of success as an Indian woman" breaking through rigid barriers". In her novels she has epitomized the face of the new woman- an all powerful and not at all 'abala (the weaker one). Shobha De considers selective memory as a 'writerly text'. One very striking aspect of her autobiography is the handling of language which signifies her gender-consciousness. There is an attempt at demolishing the male Ego while writing about males. For instance, she observes: male as insecure who "Feel terribly threatened by self-sufficient woman".

She has also used animal imagery like, "The man was a dog. A rabid one I didn't see myself as a lamp-post."<sup>52</sup>

Shobha De belongs to the post-colonial Indian woman writers who have become more innovative, experimental, confessional and realistic than they were ever before. De's life-story is the story of the new woman of independent India. Her self-identification is described in the new

ideology. Her combat against the fixed identity of the docile, tortured and conformist woman of pre-independence turns out to be an individual protest under the impact of western culture.

Being a woman is bliss to Shobha. She narrates elaborately her experience of pregnancy, labour and child birth – unique to women and inaccessible to men. She considers giving birth as the most significant moment of her life: “One that I would cherish till my last breath. Too precious to dilute through conversation... even thought”.<sup>53</sup>

According to D. G. Naik: “Certain autobiographies enable us to know the history of certain periods in a far better way than the actual books of history”.

Shobha De has affluently portrayed the middle-class Maharashtrian families of her times. Through her adventures with ‘stardust’ ‘society’ and ‘celebrity’ she bluntly exposes the world of glamour “brash, affluent and ambitious” with their “hi-jinks, follies and neuroses”. Simranjit Singh Mann’s interview published in her magazine ‘celebrity’ highlights complex political situation. She didn’t know that Mann was on the ‘Most Wanted’ list as the main person accused of plotting against the government, the master mind behind Mrs. Gandhi’s assassination. She published the piece for two reasons, “to oblige Olga, my journalist friend and because I enjoyed meeting controversial kinky people”.<sup>54</sup> The situation in Punjab was violent. Mann had formed his own political party. He was regarded as “martyr to Sikh cause”. Shobha De was dragged into the mess. She was accused number two in a case of treason against the state of India. Just then the government fell, Chandrasekhar, as P. M. released all political prisoners. Shobha De delivered Arundhati and Mann went back as a hero to Punjab and contested the next election successfully.

Thus, man and society are interwoven together. Man is not an isolated self. Though self-portrayal is the main function of an autobiography, the autobiographer has to portray contemporary, history, nation and times in his/her life-story. De has no quarrel with changing mores, changing definitions. Every generation is worried about its falling standards. De is painfully aware of filthy lure of the present young generation for glamour and publicity. Everybody wants to be famous in these ‘celebrity-driven’ times: we are becoming a nation of fame junkies.”<sup>55</sup>

One more contribution of De to the literary world and the modern India is her use of Hinglish. She considers language as a powerful tool to convey ideas. She became a literary success because of her use of Hinglish in affectionate derision. She has made some Hindi words popular in English like ‘Bai’, Avatar, ‘Chamcha’.

In her need to write and be read easily she often sounds slipshod, informal and sometimes meaningless. For instance her use of the word ‘lousy’. Nevertheless, Shobha De knows very well to enact verbally. Her diction is chatty and distant. She says: “I’ve always found words very seductive. If they are arranged in a startlingly original way”.<sup>56</sup> Some of her usages are sparkling for instance “fluff and frippery.”<sup>56</sup> grime and grit”. ‘Festooned with flowers’ Pegs and Pakoras <sup>56</sup> (296) Pariahs and Parasites.<sup>56</sup>

Shobha De has a thoughtful message to convey to the women of her times. She is a treasure-house of experiences and in a philosophical Vein she observes:

“I fear for my generation of women they really are like daughters, neither here nor there. They definitely don’t want to be like their mothers and they definitely want to switch places with their daughters (what for, I ask you?) we talk of options, opportunities and choices – sure we have

them. What do we do actually with these goodies? We earn, we travel, we splurge... and we weep”.<sup>57</sup>

Thus, De advises to utilize our resources in the best manner and not to follow anything blindly. One should be proud of oneself. She solicits us to know our own selves and work efficiently. It is in the hands of would be mothers to create a sharper, stronger and brighter India. We are proud to be Indian women. We have not only surpassed our male counterparts but also our western counterparts. De’s life-story is a sparkling record of what an ordinary but determined Indian woman can do.

## References:

1. De Shobha, *Speed Post*, Penguin India, 1999.
2. De Shobha, *Selective Memory: Stories from My Life*, New Delhi, Penguin Books, 1998, P. 90.
3. <http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/shobha-De>.
4. Andre Maurois, *Aspect of Biography*, Cambridge university press, 1923, P. 141.
5. De Shobha, *selective memory: Stories from My Life*, New Delhi, Penguin books, 1998, P. 11.
6. Roy, Pascal, *Design & Truth in Autobiography*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962.
7. De Shobha, *Selective memory: Stories from My Life*, New Delhi, Penguin books, 1998, P. 527.
8. Ibid P. 527.
9. Dodiya Jaydipsinh k., *The Fiction of Shobha De – critical studies*, prestige books, in association with Saurashtra university, pp-317.
10. De Shobha, *Selective Memory: Stories from My Life*, New Delhi, Penguin books, 1998, P. 10-11.
11. Ibid, P. 12.
12. Ibid, P. 20.
13. Ibid, P. 20.
14. As quoted in Sodhi Meena *Indian English Writing, The Autobiographical Mode*, Creative books, New Delhi, 2004, P. 76.
15. De Shobha, *Selective Memory: Stories from My Life*, Penguin books, New Delhi, 1998, P. 22.
16. Ibid, P. 40.
17. Ibid, P. 79.
18. Ibid, P. 72.
19. Ibid, P. 26.



20. Ibid, P. 103.
21. Ibid, P. 105.
22. Ibid, P. 106.
23. Ibid, P. 108.
24. Ibid, P. 110.
25. Ibid, P. 109.
26. Ibid, P. 114.
27. Ibid, P. 115.
28. Ibid, P. 120.
29. Ibid, P. 123.
30. Ibid, P. 6.
31. Ibid, P. 7.
32. Ibid, P. 8.
33. Ibid, P. 364.
34. Ibid, P. 90.
35. Ibid, P 324.
36. Ibid, P. 332.
37. Ibid, P. 368.
38. Ibid, P. 363-364.
39. Ibid, P. 330.
40. Ibid, P. 331.
41. Ibid, P. 336-337.
42. Ibid, P. 481.
43. Ibid, P. 465-466.
44. Ibid, P. 48.
45. Ibid, P. 488.
46. Ibid, P. 203-204.
47. Ibid, P. 527.
48. Ibid, Dedicatory note.

49. Ibid, P. 527.
50. Ibid, P. 301.
51. Ibid, P. 32.
52. Ibid, P. 97.
53. Ibid, P. 497.
54. Ibid, P. 208.
55. Ibid, P. 227.
56. Ibid, P. 295,296,311,336.
57. Ibid, P. 414.



**CHAPTER: VII**  
**CONCLUSION**



## **Chapter: VII**

### **CONCLUSION**

The Four autobiographers namely Nayantara Sahgal, Amrita Pritam, Kamala Das, and Shobha De cannot be termed strictly feminists. Their life-stories do not voice a kind of protest but we find a strong sense of freedom in them. Their life-stories however truly exhibit their inner voyages and a woman persona within & without.

As a student of women autobiographies several terms associated with the concept of a woman needed to be elaborated. Such terms like Female, Feminine, Feminist, Sex and gender are markedly connected with women studies. Prof. Harbinder Kaur opines that the word 'female' is related to the biology. All women are obviously females but they may not be necessarily feminine. 'Female' is a matter of biology. 'Feminine' is a set of culturally defined traits. It refers to the patterns of sexuality and behavior imposed by socio-cultural norms. 'Feminine' represents 'nurture'. Feminism/Feminist is a political label, referring to the new women's movement emerged in 1960's. Accordingly a Feminist is one who advocates equality for women.

Sex-male/female is a biological phenomenon whereas gender is a psychological or cultural construct. Social construction of gender takes place through the working of ideology. Gender is a matter of culture. It refers to the social classification of 'men' and 'women' in to 'masculine' and 'feminine'. Patriarchy associates masculine with power, independence, self-assertion, domination and activity. Feminine is associated with docility, tenderness, dependence and submissiveness. Gender- defined roles serve male need for domination.

Here are the four women autobiographers who have subverted the marginal position and acquired an independent position in the male-

dominated Indian society. NayanTara Sahgal, Amrita Pritam, Kamala Das and Shobha De have expressed innermost desires and wishes of twentieth century Indian woman. They are the real selves of New Indian woman. Though born and brought up in the conservative environs of twentieth century India, they have been proved distinctly individual. Born with a female body, possessing feminine qualities they have been turned out as new women with strong determination. They possess strong sense of freedom. Neither have they ignored their responsibilities.

NayanTara Sahgal, born in 1927 in Allahabad, daughter of Mrs. Vijayalaxmi Pandit published her autobiographies *Prison & Chocolate Cake* in 1954 and *From Fear Set Free* in 1962. In the first part of her life-story, we are acquainted not only with Sahgal and her family but also with the true spirit of Indian freedom struggle. Sahgal is much under the impact of Gandhian ideology. In 1942 Sahgal went to America for further education. She is Nehru's niece and privileged to be so. She is an onlooker of all the events of Indian freedom struggle. Though personally she did not participate in Indian freedom struggle; she took pride in her parents' imprisonment for the sake of India.

As a member of elite class family she did not have anything to vex her. Still she was much concerned with the current social scenario. Wherever she went, she spread out an aura of the Nehrus. However she is also proud of her father's multifarious personality. The first part concludes with the death of Gandhiji.

The second part of Sahgal's autobiography depicts Sahgal's acquaintance with her husband Gautam. How a woman has to absorb a completely unknown culture as her own has been depicted through the portrayal of the differences in Gautam's family and that of hers. Gautam is a fruit of partition. He had to abandon his ancestral home in Lahore because of partition and migrate to India. He did not have faith in the

concepts of Non-Violence and Satyagraha. He was a British official serving in pre-independence India. He & his family had British tastes right from coffee & cocktail parties to every pinch of daily life. Sahgal's family absorbed Gandhian culture right from Gandhi caps to the Satyagraha for the sake of Independent India. Furthermore, Sahgal had to keep shifting from one place to another as Gautam's job was transferable. Sahgal became a mother of Ranjit, Noni & Geeta but she never made a permanent home with Gautam. Her narration suggests that most of the times she stayed at her Mamu's (Jawaharlal) home – either in Allahabad or in Delhi. She had to look after her three kids and home all on her own with the domestic helps. It seems that she was not a marveller with the servants. In her leisurely hours she began writing novels coloured with political consciousness. Gautam bought a new type-writer for her and instructed her to utilize it for writing her books.

At last, Gautam Sahgal also constructed a house designed by one of the architects of Chandigarh but it never turned out to be a true home for Sahgal.

*From Fear Set Free* does not openly condemn Sahgal's married life. However she often expresses a fear of being confined to a particular way of life. By traditional standards she should have been happy with the material comforts around her, but the lack of something as vital as oxygen suffocated her. At last, Sahgal left her husband and found the courage to live separately in a flat found by E.N. Mangat Rai. She was afraid of social upheaval and the expectations of growing children but desire of 'reaching for the stars' finally gave her courage. Gradually, People accepted her in this novel situation. She takes pride that at least people of India did not exhibit condemnation.

Apart from her life-history. Sahgal's life-narratives are the true records of Indian freedom struggle. As an elite class member Sahgal

never lacked material comforts but she always insisted for inner freedom. Whether it is a life of human being or that of a Nation Sahgal seems to have pursued the path of fearlessness and ‘Satya’ preached by Gandhi.

An urge for complete freedom is a major concern of all the four autobiographers included in the study. All of them have seen India developing step by step. A deep love for India and her ‘unity in diversity’ has been depicted in all the four autobiographies. So far as sense of freedom and space is concerned they stand on the same ground.

Amrita Pritam a beautiful Punjabi poet born in Gujranwala of Pakistan in 1927 also exhibits her true love for India through her poem ‘Waris shahnu’ where she pleads the poet to rewrite his poem voicing the pain of millions of daughters of Punjabi suffering the partition experience. Her life-story *The Revenue Stamp*, originally written in Punjabi is really a revenue stamp on a woman’s quest for true love & truth. Herein she has candidly confessed her intimate relationships with the Urdu poet Saheer ludhianwi and the painter Imroz.

Married off at the age of 16, to Mr. Pritam Singh, Amrita could never build up a rapport with her hubby. She never complained but readily accepted the lack of mental wavelength and divorced in 1960. Her life-story depicts a towering personality of a woman devoid of ancestral wealth but possessing enormous poetic wealth. Her affairs with Saheer & Imroz were never accepted by the current Punjabi Society. She did not pay heed to acidic criticism of her society and always listened to her inner voice. Stealthily she moved out of her marital life and moved to a two-storeyed apartment of Delhi, along with her son. She never told untruth to her son also. Once, when her son asked her whether he was Saheer uncle’s son, she candidly replied that she wished to be so. Her relationship with Saheer was of a platonic kind. When she found out that

Saheer had another friend, she broke up. For six long months she had a nervous break down. Her Pen, poetry and friends rejuvenated her to life.

Her hunt for true love ended with Imroz with whom she passed her remaining life in a very modest financial condition. Thus, surpassing all social stigmas Amrita lived life on her own terms.

It is evident that Sahgal has given more importance to the social-political & cultural background of her times in her life-story. Pritam's life-story is much more emotional & spiritual. Both the life-stories are narrated in a remarkable manner. However, with Kamala Das, we have a writer expressing the physical instincts of a woman Persona in very bold and assertive manner for the first time in the history of Indian English autobiographies.

With the publication of *My Story* in 1976, Kamala Das has carved a niche in the annals of Indian women autobiographies. Here in she has redefined the male-female relationship. Her life-story not only depicts the story of her life but also of her body. Prof. Meena Sodhi considers it as an account of a woman's life who tries to live traditionally but is forced to break the rules in order to satisfy her inner urges.

Moreover, while searching her body she also searches her inner self. In her case, the physical experience leads her to the spiritual realization. Just like Pritam, married at a very tender age to a man double her age, Kamala was unable to receive the conjugal bliss. However, because of social disapproval she did not take a divorce. Shifting from one Metro to another with an Indian who was a British official, Kamala could not build up a compact relationship. Out of their arid union she became a mother of three sons but her relationship with her hubby never turned out to be intimate.

Without any inhibitions Das has depicted her intimacy towards her Italian lover Carlo. Obviously hers is a bold account of male-female



relationships but gradually she is trapped in her own premises & confesses that her life-story is a kind of fictional construct. Whether factual or fictitious, in Kamala Das we find a woman conscious of her femininity yet determined to vindicate it against male supremacy.

Considering Shobha De's 'Selective Memory' as an explosive autobiography, we feel that hers is a life larger than life.

Born in a middle class Maharashtrian Brahmin family of the magistrate of Satara Rao Saheb in 1948. Shobha De's birth was not much welcomed by the women of the family. Her mother & grandmother expected her to be a second son of the family.

However, her father rejoiced her birth and considered Shobha as the luckiest child of the family. After her birth her father was appointed as a government official in Delhi.

De had a much pampered humpty-dumpty childhood. Later on her father was again transferred to Mumbai. Right from her childhood De and her siblings were supposed to follow several codes of conduct prescribed by her father. In the last few chapters of her life-story, De maintains that 'being economical' was one of the middle class attitudes she had imbibed.

When De had chosen her career in modeling at the age of eighteen, her father did not approve it. Her mother silently supported her. Her life-story perfectly depicts her mental conflict. She pursued her career & did not surrender to her father's wishes. She remained a super model for five years and changed the career when Mr. Nari Hira appointed her as the editor of Stardust. Later on she also started her own magazine celebrity. De has portrayed beautiful pen-pictures of the most of the stars of the film industry. Her tone is simple, straight forward but very effective.

The new Avatar of De as a new woman comes to the fore-front when she has to close her magazine – celebrity. She turns out to be

penny-wise and pound foolish. Her ten years long marriage is also on rocks. Her father does not support her. She has to give salary to other staff-members working for the magazine. At such a time of crisis her cousin supported her and she changed her office into his apartment. Sahgal does not complain but accepts that she had tumbled down in the hole made by her self. Very heroically she encountered her circumstances. Meanwhile she divorced Sudhir without complaining and married the same day to Mr. Dilip De – father of Radhika & Randeep. The, most striking fact about De's life is her role as a mother of six-kids. She turned out to be a mother of not only Aditya, Avantika and the younger two daughters – Arundhati & Anandita but also of Randip & Radhika – kids of Dilip De. She always terms Randip as 'My Son' though she is not a biological mother to him. It is overwhelming to have a look at her family photographs in the chapter entitled 'Naming Names' in her life-story.

In this rapidly developing world where people do not have time to stand and stare & career oriented couples prefer fun-oriented childless lives; De's life with her family is heaven on earth. Her book 'Speed Post' is a luminous record of marvelous tips given to her adolescent kids. Herein we find a new woman mingled with new mother worrying about the character-building of new generation to which her kids belong to.

De has no regrets. She has played all her roles very well. She enjoys each moment of life. In the beginning of her marriage life with Dilip she too had her lot of quarrels & troubles but then she came out as a winner. De firmly believes that one has to work hard to make the relationship last long. As a part & Parcel of Indian middle class she likes to be called a 'married woman' and that's the reason she remarried.

Though the public image of De is that of a high society jinks. She is at bottom a self-made middle class woman with a degree in human psychology & ready to break all the barriers that come her way.

Thus, all the four women writers included in the research work are towering 20<sup>th</sup> century Indian women. Though they revolted at individual levels, basically they are Indian women and proud to be so. Not very welcomed at the time of their births but proved excellent through their deeds they voice the core emotions of all the daughters of India. They have taught India to be proud of her daughters ..... forever.....

# SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

## \* **Primary Sources:**

- 1) Sahgal Nayantara, *Prison and Chocolate Cake*, New Delhi Harper Collins Publishers India, 1954
- 2) Sahgal Nayantara, *From Fear Set Free*, Delhi Hind Pocket Books (pvt.) Ltd., 1962
- 3) Pritam Amrita, *The Revenue Stamp*, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House pvt. Ltd., Third Reprint, 2004.
- 4) Das Kamala, 'My Story', New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1976.
- 5) De Shobha, 'Selective memory: Stories from My Life' New Delhi, Penguin Books, 1998.

## \* **Secondary Sources**

- 1) Dr. Patel Amrita, *A Lover of Light among Luminaries*, Dilipkmar Ray, Published by Dr. Jitendra B. Shah, Director, L. D. Institute of Indology Ahmedabad, Printed by Navbharat Printing Press, L. D. Series, March 2002.
- 2) Bhatnagar Manmohan K., Rajeshwar M, *Indian Writing in English Volume 8*; New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 2000.
- 3) Bhatnagar Manmohan K., Rajeshwar M, *Indian Writing in English Volume 3*, New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 1999.
- 4) Dodia Jaydipsinh K., *The Fiction of Shobha De – Critical Studies*, New Delhi, Prestige Books In Association with Saurashtra University, 2000.
- 5) Tiwari Shubha, *Children & Literature*, New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers & Distributors, 2006.
- 6) Sodhi Meena, *Indian English Writing, The Autobiographical mode*,

- New Delhi, Creative Books, 1999
- 7) Harish Ranjana, *Bhartiya strioni aatmakatha*, (Translated by Bela Thakar, Gurjar Granth Ratna, Ahmedabad, 2004
  - 8) Bhatnagar M.K., *Encyclopaedia of literature in English Vol VI*, New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers, 2001
  - 9) Pandey Mithilesh, *Writing The Female*, New Delhi, Sarup and sons, 2004
  - 10) Nair Jayakrishnan, *Cutting Edges, Biology of experience in the poetry of Kamala Das*, New Delhi, Adhayan Publishers, 2009
  - 11) *Pragati English Journal*, Edited by Pragati Educational Council, Jalandhar, vol. 10, December 2009.
  - 12) Sinroja Ameer, *Studying Autobiographies, a critical study*, Creative Books, New Delhi, 2009.
  - 13) James Olney, *Ed. Autobiography: Essays theoretical & Critical*, Princeton: Princeton university press, 1980
  - 14) Naipaul V.S, *India: A Wounded civilization*, Penguin, 1979.
  - 15) Harish Ranjana, *Indian Women's Autobiographies*, New Delhi, Arnold Publishers, 1994.
  - 16) Kadiya Rasila Chandrakant, *Atmakatha: Swaroop ane Vikas* (with reference to Gujarati autobiography form), Amdavad, Sadbhav Prakashan, 1985.
  - 17) Mishra Shashi Bhushan, *Autobiography in Indian Writing in English*, Delhi, Adhyayan Publisher & Distributors, 2004.
  - 18) Dodiya Jaydipsinh Ed. *Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English* (New Delhi Sarup and Sons Publishers, 2006).
  - 19) \_\_\_\_\_ Ed. *Contemporary Indian Writings in English*. (New Delhi, Atlantic Publishers, 1998).
  - 20) \_\_\_\_\_ Ed. *Perspective on Indian English Fiction* (New Delhi: Sarup and Sons Publishers, 2006.

- 21) Naik, M. K. *A History of Indian English Literature* (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1995)
- 22) Surendran. K. V. *Indian Writing: Critical Prospective*. (New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2000)