ABSTRACT

Autobiography as a genre highlights the traditional binary opposition of truth of one’s own life, or essentially, othering oneself in the name of truth. Autobiographies by Maya Angelou, Doris Lessing and Kamala Das introduce stirring narratives of self-discovery that authorize new subjects which claim kinship in a literature of possibility. Women’s autobiography asserts that women are fluid, simultaneously employing various identities. Woman cannot experience herself as an absolutely isolate self, a unique entity as her social acculturation constantly makes her aware of. She is being defined as a woman, a member of a group whose identity has hardly been defined by the dominant male culture. It is the socialization of female which conditions her as a woman. The present study focuses on the similar themes – race, sex and self – reflected in the autobiographies of Maya Angelou, Doris Lessing and Kamala Das. Despite diverse social, economic, racial and cultural positionalities, a kind of universal female collectivity exists in the works of Angelou, Lessing and Das.

Chapter I Introduction provides a general study on Autobiography as a genre and in particular the growth of women’s autobiographies. The main body of the same chapter attempts closer reading on the contributions of Angelou’s six autobiographical volumes, I Know Why the Caged bird Sings, (1970) Gather Together in my Name (1974) Singin’ Swingin’ and Gettin’ Merry like Christmas (1976), The Heart of a Woman (1981), All
"God’s Children Need Travelling Shoes" (1986), and "A Song Flung up to Heaven." (2002), Lessing ‘s "Under My Skin Volume one of my Autobiography, to 1949" (1994) and "Walking in the Shade 1949 to 1962" (1997) and Das’s "My Story" This analytical work then endeavours to present the common themes in the selected autobiographies and show the author’s responses to these themes.

Chapter II Racial Voices examines the racial exploitation in the lives of Angelou, Lessing and Das. Angelou’s six autobiographical narratives describe the evolution of personal consciousness where in Angelou raises to become a voice of universal consciousness for African-American people. Doris Lessing who was brough up in Southern Rhodesia, also witnesses the effects of colonization. As the child of white settlers, her very presence in the bush is result of colonial conquest, as Lessing well knows. This chapter also throws light on racism associated with the British domination in India and its consequences for a sensitive being like Kamala Das coupled with the oppressive climate of Nalapat House.

Chapter III Feminist Overtones gives a brief introduction on feminism and further examines sexual oppression in these autobiographies. All are concerned with the fact that the social and cultural construction of gender marginalization and exclusion of women. The stories of Angelou, Lessing and Das shape their female identity in such a way that the self, however invented, is a witness against racism, sexism and classism.
Chapter IV Rainbow of Voices probes into the ‘Self’ in the autobiographies of these three writers in which their subjectivity is formed. This chapter looks from different angles of how women position themselves with and against others. It also deals with these authors seeing themselves through mothers, through culture and community in framing their autobiographical subjects.

Chapter V Female Poetics looks into the forms and narrative patterns followed by these writers in their autobiographies. Also, the author has two resources for achieving her persuasive ends: style and narrative. Thus this chapter sees style as the act of the individual and defines it as the fashion in which each autobiographer satisfies certain conditions of the genre. Narrative is an important individual act intrinsic to the genre. Narratives provide the authors opportunity to enact the tenets of their ideologies and to demonstrate in their lives the beneficent impact of their causes.

Chapter VI Conclusion sums up the entire work and also discusses the need to evaluate and appreciate the work of women creative writers. It stresses on the recent feminist studies, in fact, the approach to works of women creative writers should be aimed at understanding their feminine sensibility and the development of their personality.