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’ into ‘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 20th 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.........