PREFACE

The whole gamut of this thesis is the study of autobiographies of four ladies viz. Protima Bedi: Timepass; Kamala Das: My Story; Tehmina Durrani: My Feudal Lord and Nayantara Sahgal: Prison and Chocolate Cake.

All the women autobiographers belong to the Indian sub-continent – three from India and one (Tehmina Durrani) from Pakistan. The four authors and their corresponding autobiographies are as follows 1. Protima Bedi- Timepass (Penguin India 1999) 2. Kamala Das – My Story, (Sterling India, 1988) 3. Tehmina Durrani- My Feudal Lord (Sterling Delhi, 1991) 4. Nayantara Sahgal Prison and Chocolate Cake (Victor Gollancz, London).

The authors come from different backgrounds. Protima Bedi of Timepass is the wife of matinee idol Kabir Bedi. If she sins she sins in the good company of actresses Zeenat Aman and Parveen Bobby. The latter had replaced her as Kabir’s wife after her divorce from him. She changed her boyfriends – as alleged by her own daughter Pooja Bedi – with a greater frequency than she changed her clothes. Her interests lately were turned to classical dance Odissi and Kathakali. She wrote her autobiography under the title of Timepass – The memoirs of Protima Bedi with Pooja Bedi Ebrahim. Frankness bordering on vulgarism is the hallmark of her memoirs.

Kamala Das, the author of My Story is a versatile genius. The Muses are very generous towards her for she has equal command of both the genres – fiction and verse. But she too is no less frank and forthright about the episodes she met with in life. As if she threw a stone in the still waters of the circle of her relatives. As she puts it, ‘My relatives were embarrassed. I had disgraced my well-known family by telling... that I had fallen in love with a man other than my... husband’. (Preface to My Story).

Her love affairs are no less galore than that of Protima Bedi. But being a poet she camouflages her sex affairs in the poetic rather philosophic turn of
phrases.

The blame also hangs on her that according to her own confessions in the book she “was chronically falling in love with persons of flamboyant nature.” (Preface)

Tehmina Durrani of My Feudal Lord, in her autobiography, tilts more towards feudalism and contemporary politics than her personal life. Though she is subjected to physical and mental torture by her husband Mustafa Khar who was a big gun in Pakistani politics -- governor and Chief Minister of the Pakistani province of the Punjab. Mustafa Khar made her divorce her husband Anees. Then the house of Mustafa Khar, The Feudal Lord turns a concentration camp.

Her husband indulges in open incest – sleeping with Tehmina’s younger sister Adila. It was a classic case of ménage a trois – Tehmina, Adila and Mustafa living under the same roof – a husband with two sisters as his wives.

The book inter alia describes the tumultuous events that led to the dismemberment of Pakistan under Yahya. Bhutto’s rise and fall culminating in his hanging during Zia’s draconian period, Mustafa’s exile in England; Zia’s mysterious death in a plane crash and Benazir’s victory at the hustings.

Despite her holier – than – thou attitude she too changed husbands like pair of clothes. At the latest information she is the wife of Shahbaz Sharif, brother of Nawaz Sharif, the P.M. of Kargil controversy whom General Pervez Musharraf sent in exile.

The last but not the least is the autobiography of Nayantara Sahgal – a descendant of Nehru family. In Prison and the Chocolate Cake, Sahgal sheds light on the politics centered around Anand Bhawan – the cradle of the struggle for freedom where Nehru under his mentor Mahatma Gandhi was groomed to take the reins of governing the country after the British left the country. Gandhiji, the messiah of the masses is portrayed with a nimbus and aura befitting a saint. Gandhi has also been mentioned by Kamala Das in her autobiography. His was a reigning influence not only on Indian politics but on the
social life of that era.

One prominent characteristic of Sahgal’s biography is that it is pure and free from any sexual overtone. As compared with Protima Bedi, Kamala Das and Tehmina Durrani she outstands as a prude. Even a peck by the legendary Hollywood star Danny Kaye was frowned upon.

She visited the famous author Pearl S. Buck of The Good Earth fame. Her description takes the cake. It will be a revelation to most of the Indian readers that her married name was Mrs. Walsh. (Prison and Chocolate Cake P. 153)

The feminist autobiographies targeted as the subject of this thesis is a proof that women have come out of their cocoon to prove themselves no less capable of their male counterpart to express themselves autobiographically.

Apart from the four women here, there has been added, excerpts of the autobiography of one more woman autobiographer Sheila Graham, mistress of celebrated American novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald (with Gerold Frank). The title of their memoirs is Beloved Infidel – the Education of a Woman. (Bantam Books, New York, 1965).