INTRODUCTION

Being a woman, the state of women in general, the intricacies of man woman relationship, their association with the society, and their idea of an ideal womanhood has interested me in a profound manner. Numerous scholars have devoted their lives to study gender discrimination. In the process they have brought to light several aspects that were doomed in the darkness ever since civilization came into being. A thorough study of various schools of thoughts only perplexes the mind. So wide is the spectrum of the study that the different viewpoints appear convincing at different times. While these various studies are conflicting and contradictory on one hand, they complement one another at the same stage on the other.

The principle objective of the present research is to focus on the implications of gender on the autobiography writing. To bring this to light, the investigator has chosen four autobiographies by woman who belong to diverse socio cultural milieu. Autobiography is the art of ‘self-life-writing’ and gender identity plays a crucial role in defining one’s life story.

The investigator proposes to analyse the following autobiographies.

- *Daughter of the East* by Benazir Bhutto.
- *I, Phoolan Devi* by Phoolan Devi.
- *Blackberry winter: my early years* by Margaret Mead.
- *The Spirit’s Pilgrimage* by Madeleine Slade.

In their own respective fields they all have faced gender discrimination and it reflects in their autobiographies. But after all the emotional, physical and social struggle, they all come out as winners.

**RATIONALE OF THE PRESENT STUDY**

Gender and literature are very closely related to each other in the sense that neither can be conceived apart from the society and culture. Sex is a biological term whereas gender is more of socio-cultural expression. No wonder literature offers the best possibility to understand the implications of gender. Autobiography as literary form, reflects the impact of one’s gender identity on one’s writing.
The present study has the following objectives:

- To explain the difference between the mistaken terms: Sex and Gender.
- To discuss the politics of gender in literature.
- To focus on the implications of gender on autobiography writing.
- To bring out the socio-cultural issues related to women as described in their autobiographies.
- To discuss the role of gender on writing style and content.
- To develop a better understanding of gender specific world culture.
- **STATEMENT OF THE INVESTIGATION:**

  “Implications of Gender: A study of Autobiographies by women from diverse socio-cultural Milieu”

**DEFINITION OF TERMS:**

- **Implications:** In the present study the term ‘Implications’ indicates the impact, or effect, or consequences of gender on women’s autobiography.
- **Gender:** It is better understood in contrast with 'sex' which is merely physical term whereas gender is a 'socio-cultural' term.
- **Diverse:** This term explains the range and span of the different societies and cultures.
- **Milieu:** This term includes the socio-cultural 'background' of the chosen autobiographies.

**RELEVANCE OF THE PRESENT STUDY:**

A majority of research studies, have focused on male theory and style of autobiography writing. It is firmly believed that autobiography, like other literacy forms, is possessed only by men. Women are not allowed to enter the field of autobiography. The present study explores the implications of gender on this literary form. It also suggests that theory of male autobiography cannot be
applied to female autobiographies. They have their own unique style which can not be ignored. The difference should be accepted and acknowledged.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PRESENT WORK:**

The present research work will surely open new avenues in the field of gender studies. It will also explore the unexplored areas of female psyche in general. Moreover it brings out the fact that gender is not ‘natural’, it is ‘given’ and therefore it can be overlooked or redefined.

**RESEARCH DESIGN AND SCHEME OF CHAPTERIZATION:**

In order to meet the demands of the research area under consideration the following format of chapterization has been followed. The first chapter discusses the difference between ‘Sex’ and ‘Gender’. Sex is a biological term whereas Gender is a socio-cultural term. It also includes the politics of gender in literature. How gender affects writings of men and women. The second chapter focuses on the history of autobiography as a form as well as the theory of autobiography. This chapter focuses on the role of gender in autobiography as a literary genre. The third chapter indicates the non-individualistic attitude of women autobiographers. It also highlights their urge to remain connected. The fourth chapter Suggests that women’s autobiographies are ‘Men Centric’ and women always remain in the periphery. The fifth chapter Indicates that women autobiographers prefer to give all sorts of personal details, including their physical sufferings. It is about women autobiographers' inclination on giving personal details and avoiding history of their times. The sixth chapter suggests that depictions in women's autobiographies are very often fragmented, irregular and have self-sustained unity rather than connecting chapters. The seventh and final chapter concludes that gender affects the autobiography writing of women. They do write different from men and therefore male critical theories cannot be applied to their writings. Their works should be seen in a different light and therefore acknowledged accordingly.
1.1 **Sex and gender.**

We are born with a sex that remains unchanged throughout our lives; but we know about gender as a part of learning to live in a family and society. And as a part of how we see ourselves.

From cradle to grave we are a part of society. We interact through different associations and institutions, which mould our personalities. Admittedly role of the sexes and all the sex related function are greatly influenced by cultural factors. Biology makes human beings male and female culture makes them men and women.

Over the years a lot of feminist have put in efforts in explaining the difference between the sex and gender in order to portray the position of women in the society.

According to Simone d' Beauvoir one is not born but rather becomes a woman.

1.2 **History of women is the history of gender:**

Gender is a linguistic marker for women. This indicates that what has happened to gender, has happened to women. It is believed that women signify feminism at one level or the other.

The history of gender is actually like the history of women. Gender simply another word for women. This means that gender leads more directly to women than to men. (Walum: 57)

It is believed that men and women are not taken as equal in any culture of the world.

1.3 **Fight over Fundamentals:**
Normally in every culture and society, a boy is told right from his childhood that he is different and superior to the half of the lot- girls. This wrong perception has given birth to what is known as 'patriarchy' as Ruthven explains" a system which enables men to dominate women in all social relations".

It’s the patriarchy that has tagged women as inferior to men from biological reasons. Biology is destiny and women are destined to be weaker than men. According to freud and lacan anatomy is destiny. For women ‘biology becomes destiny and anatomy her fate.'

1.4 Gender and Literature

Gender and literature are closely related to each other in the sense that neither can be conceived apart from society and culture. Literature exposes the politics of gender. A Crucial question that demands our attention is how has woman been portrayed in literature.

The depiction of women in literature has been in accordance with the social status enjoyed by women. All over the world woman have always enjoyed secondary status vis-à-vis man.

The images of women in literature have been of the slaves who could be easily sold or bought by men who were their masters.

Two modes of feminist criticism

According to show alter, there are two distinct modes of feminist critics:

- Woman as reader
- Woman as writer

Showalter puts stress on the importance of feminist reading as method of articulating the feminist experience. There are several ways of reading a text and one of them is gender based. The second mode of feminist criticism is the study women as writers. Thus women’s ability cannot be judged by applying male critical theory to their work because male critical theory is a concept of creativity, literary history or literary interpretation based entirely on male experience and put forward as universal.
CHAPTER II

2.1 THE ROLE OF GENDER IN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The previous chapter discussed an overview of how gender influences literature in general. This chapter suggests that one’s gender identity has a telling effect on his/her life. It can be safely derived that autobiography is one of those forms that exposed gender discrimination clearly. Since Autobiography is the art of ‘Self-Life-Writing’ and the gender identity plays a crucial role in defining one’s life.

2.2 HISTORY

The tradition of autobiography writing has been with us since 4th Century B.C. Plato wrote Seventh Epistle. It is known as his letter. Montaigne in the latter half of the 16th Century wrote Essay. The genre existed in its loose form, towards the end of the 18th Century the word ‘Autobiography’ was coined. It is made up of three Greek elements “Auto (Self) bio (Life) Graphy (Writing)”. The first autobiography the autobiography of a Dissenting Minister was written in 1834 by W.P.Scargill. Two major works before world war are George Mitch’s History of Autobiography in Antiquity (1907) and Anna Burr’s Autobiography a Critical and Comparative Study (1909)

2.3 MEN’S MONOPOLY

Since men established the tradition of autobiography writing not many important women autobiographies are known to have existed before World War I.

Women writers did express their feelings but, it was mainly in the form of diaries, memories or journals such as Agrippina’s 'memoirs' and Teresia Constantia Philip’s 'Life' (1562-65). Before 1965, only white powerful rich man was eligible for writing autobiography. During Seventies women stepped into the field of autobiography writing.
CHAPTER III
NON-INDIVIDUALISTIC SENSE OF SELF

3.1 Consciousness of self

Gusdorf’s concept of autobiography is deeply rooted in individualistic self. An autobiography is the celebration of self. It is based on a model of the self that he identifies and endemically western and individualistic.

The classic critics of autobiography dismiss all the marginal writers like Jews, Dalit’s and women’s; as “Consciousness of self” never existed for them in any society worldwide. Women feel alive only when they are living for or with others.

3.2 Bhutto

Bhutto feels connected to her entire family. Her bonding with her father, mother, sister and brother is amazing. She further writes about her husband and children. She feels herself complete only when she is connected. She was very close to her father but her mother was her role model. She performs all the duties of a good daughter, sister, wife and mother. At times she feels that her children are neglected.

3.3 Phoolan

Phoolan was very much attached to her family. She has written about her mother, father, sisters. She was connected not only to the family but also to her soil, the entire village, when she got enough food to eat, she thought of her sisters. She wishes she could save it for them. She is also close to her cows and goats.

3.4 Mead

Mead got married thrice and shared friendly relations with all her husbands. She maintained balance between her profession and personal life. As an anthropologist, her prime concern was to outline the proper training of children. Her role models were her mother and grandmother. Women always love to talk about their children. She always wanted to have children and grandchildren.

3.5 Slade
Madeleine slade associates with her mother and her nurse Bertha. Her special pal was her grandfather. She was very much fond of her toys too. She talks about her mother’s family which was unusual and unconventional where as her father’s family was conventional. Later she got herself connected to Mahatma Gandhi till the end of her life. She could not overcome the shock of Mahatma Gandhi’s Death. She not only feels connected to the people around her but also to the nature. She had a strong intimacy with trees and plants.


**CHAPTER IV**

**MEN-CENTRIC WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES**

**4.1 Men at the center**

Since Autobiography is the art of self-life—writing, the self has to be at the center. But in women’s autobiographies ‘He’ is always at the center and she remains in the periphery. According to Benstock, the self that would reside at the center of the text is de-centered and often absent altogether in women’s autobiographies.

**4.2 Bhutto**

Her Autobiography begins with her father’s assassination. She was under the influence of her father throughout her life. Almost in all the chapters she mentions her father. His views on education and politics had very strong impact on her life. She followed his footsteps in the field of politics. She admits the fact that she could not overcome the shock of her father’s death. She could feel the presence of Mr. Bhutto even after his assassination. She also talks about her brothers, her bonding with them. Her brother shah’s death. Though, she has given less details about her husband, she mentions how he proposed her and how he won her heart.

**4.3 Phoolan**

Being a Bandit Queen, she was always surrounded by men throughout her life. She herself was more like a man. She had a great bonding with her father. She has written about her father. She has written about her husband puttilal and his tyranny. She has criticized her cousins, the Thakurs, the upper cast men. She was the only women in her entire group. She had immense hatred for men. And therefore she took revenge on them for all the injustice she had faced. But in the process, her autobiography revolves round the men around her.

**4.4 Mead**

Unlike other women autobiographers Mead was more dominant than her brother Richard. She recalls that she was both physically and mentally stronger than her brother. He was not a perfect brother. She was always longing for an
older brother who would protect her. She then talks about her father and how he failed to inspire her. She got married thrice so naturally she writes about them all. Moreover she was very much influenced by her professor.

4.5 SLADE

Slade is known as Gandhiji’s disciple. She was a British woman who left her country to follow Gandhiji’s principles. No wonder her autobiography revolves round the life and death of Mahatma Gandhi. She changed her entire lifestyle for him, her food, dressing, culture, habits etc. Her autobiography is her tribute to her 'Bapu'. In the beginning she writes about her grandfather who was her best friend. Then she had couple of men in her life. But the biggest and strongest influence was ‘Bapu’. She continued following his principles even after his assassination.

C H A P T E R: V

HER STORY RATHER THAN HISTORY

5.1 Her story

Women autobiographers usually prefer to give all sorts of personal details. They focus more on their domestic details, family difficulties, close friends and especially people that influenced them. Very often they give detailed information of their physical and mental sufferings.

5.2 Bhutto

She discussed her physical diffucilities of length. Be it her ears or her pregnancy, she loved to give the description of all her pains. She also mentioned the mental trauma she faced after the death of her father and brother. She had to pass through a lot of torture as a mother, when she had to leave her children behind to perform her duties. She gave the details of how her husband proposed her. About her marriage. Like any other women she too indulged in the feminine
talks about jewellery and dresses. Thus she did not refrain from giving all sorts of personal details in her autobiography.

5.3 Phoolan

She has given the full account of her sufferings in her autobiography since her life was full sufferings and revenge, her autobiography presents a lot of things which are ‘too personal’. She was having a painful boil when she was a child. She was married to a 35 years old man at the age of 11. She was raped by her husband first and by several upper cast man after the death of her second husband Vikram Mallah. She was exploited by different men at different stages of her life. Thus her life story is full of physical and mental sufferings.

5.4 Mead

She has written about her difficulties in child bearing. She had several miscarriages. She also talks about her three marriages and divorce. She prefers to give more space to the birth of her daughter in her autobiography and gives a passing reference to World War II. Mead skips twenty years of her active professional life between the birth of her daughter and granddaughter.

5.5 Slade

She has written about her interest in music in general and Bethoven in particular. She gives the details of her father country home which was spread in twenty Acers of land, collection of shrubs and trees, fine horses, five jersey cows, chicken house and pigsties. She also discusses her toys – Nippy and Squilly. She loves to talk about the affairs of others. She recalled Bapu’s youngest son Devdas and Rajaji’s daughter Lakshmi were deeply in love with each other while great political drama was in progress
CHAPTER VI
DEPICTIONS: FRAGMENTED, IRREGULAR AND CONFUSED

6.1 depictions

Women’s autobiographies are very often fragmented. It is believe that irregularity rather than orderliness informs the self-portrait by women. The narratives of their lives are often not chronological and progressive but disconnected fragmentary or organized into self-sustained unity. They very often suffer from lack of clarity.

6.2 Bhutto

Her autobiography is not written in linear pattern. It starts with her father’s assassination. And then her years of detention. She then moved to her student life. Then again she prefers to discuss the coup against her father and his planned murder. Her brother’s death, her marriage and her victory as a first woman prime minister are the other important events which are discussed in bits and pieces. She has a lot of unpleasant memories and she has put them all in her autobiography.

6.3 Phoolan

Very unusual thing about phoolan’s autobiography is that she has not given titles to any of the chapters. She herself admits that she was illiterate. She could not read or write but it is her story. Though it is written in linear pattern, it is in bits and pieces. Phoolan till the end of her autobiography has very frequently mentioned a lot of bitter experiences. She wants a better destiny in her next birth.

6.4 Mead

Though mead tries to strike a balance between her professional and personal life, one third of the autobiography is dedicated to her professional life and two third is about her personal life. Mead always tried to stay away from all kinds of unpleasant memories. Consciously she wanted to erase all misfortunes from her mind.

6.5 Slade
Slade’s autobiography lacks the chronology and progressive narration. It is more like isolated incidents rather than connecting chapters. Instead of following the linear pattern she developed circles. She lacked clarity as she was highly dependent on Gandhiji. She too gave an account of unpleasant events of her life. She always felt dissatisfied and disappointed for not having been able to reach up to Bapu’s expectations.
7.1 Different from men's autobiographies

Since autobiography is a story of person’s life, both etymologically and in practice, male Critical theories are not applicable to women’s autobiographies. Women have to perform multiple roles as mother, daughter, sister, wife etc. and therefore their writings are different from that of men.

7.2 Implications of Gender

Gender definitely has a very strong impact on one’s life and thus on the depiction of life. It is believed that what is written is whether consciously or not written by the whole person. If a writer is born and brought up as a woman her gender identity cannot be detached from her personality.

7.3 Dissimilarities and similarities in chosen autobiographies

All the four chosen autobiographies belong to different nationalities, caste, religion and social background. The only common element is their ‘Gender’. Being a woman played a very important role in their up-bringing, their psyche and their expression. They all have certain striking similarities in their autobiographies. They have dissimilarities too in some aspects. After all the discussion the best option available is Woolf’s concept of androgyny. She strongly felt that a creative mind should not be gender specific or gender biased, it has to be either woman-manly or man-womanly.
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