CHAPTER I

Introduction

The desire to express oneself and the urge to reveal the world within has universal connotations and can be found from the beginning of human civilization. Man has always made an effort to express his inner feelings, his desire and his life, through the medium of art. Since he has multidimensional capacities, he has used countless ways and means to depict his inner urges. In this peripatetic, ever-changing modern life he has always wished to leave some testimony of his existence.

The conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual life and the wonder at the mystery of his destiny is the outcome of a specific civilization. History has proved that the individual does not oppose himself to all others; he does not feel himself to exist outside of others, and still less against others, but very much with others in an interdependent existence that asserts its rhythms everywhere in the community.¹

Human lives are thus so thoroughly entangled that “each of them has its centre everywhere and its circumference nowhere.”² In such a state of utter cohesiveness, isolation becomes impossible. Each individual appears as the possessor of a role already performed by
his/her ancestors to be again performed by descendants. Thus the community retains a conscious self-identity in spite of the constant renewal of individuals who constitute it.

The Copernican Revolution has whetted the curiosity of the individual about himself, by unravelling the mystery of his own being. Humanity that had previously allied its development to the great cosmic cycles found itself engaged in an autonomous adventure. Man became a responsible agent, "gatherer of men, of lands, of power, maker of kingdoms or of empires, inventor of laws or of wisdom." He added consciousness to nature, leaving there the signs of his presence. In fact, Man became aware of the possibility of making sense out of his life and a desire to endure in the memory of his fellow beings. The manifestation of this desire heralded the birth of Biography, which enabled famous men, heroes and princes, to acquire literary immortality. Biography, which gradually emerged as an established literary genre, could provide only an exterior representation of a person, "reviewed and corrected by the demands of propaganda and by the general sense of the age." It is true that a historian finds himself at a greater social distance from his model consciously performing a public and official function, analogous to an artist who sculpts and paints the likeness of a man of eminence. In such a cultural context, the appearance of Autobiography implies a new spiritual revolution – the artist and the model coincide, the historian
tackles himself as the object. A new social area with readjusted values came into play, where the significance of individuality became particularly dear to man.

Autobiography, a complex genre of writing is intrinsically European in origin and concept. Considered in a broad sense as individuals writing about themselves, it dates back several thousands of years. However, in a narrow and strict sense, as a serious and truthful study of the self, it goes back no further than the eighteenth century. The practice of writing about one’s life rather than achievements was begun by the early converts to Christianity, the pioneering work being St. Augustine’s *Confessions* (AD 398-400). It was in fact preceded by a number of similar works, which had a common structure due to the novelty of its content. Christianity had a terrible impact on these writers who had undergone dramatic transformations. Their transition from ignorance to truth, from a fallen state to one of grace and from a life of sin to virtue, brought about a metamorphosis which they unfolded in coherent stories taking the form of passionate and emotionally charged confessions suffused with the spirit of self-discovery and self-pity. In course of time, however, once Christianity became an established religion and lost its earlier novelty, confessional writing underwent drastic changes taking a more reflective and detached stance. The late Middle ages especially the Renaissance witnessed the burgeoning of
secularly oriented and non-confessional accounts of life. Memoirs, chronicles, journals and other forms of writing became popular paving the way for autobiography in the modern and narrow sense. Towards the end of the eighteenth century the Greek elements ‘auto-bio-graphy’ meaning self-life-writing, replaced all other terms like Confessions, Memoirs etc.

Discussing the origin and development of autobiography, Bhikhu Parekh in his seminal essay “Indianisation of Autobiography” (1989) states that it was in Germany, in the year 1796 that the term ‘Autobiography’ was first used. Commenting on the new kind of writing that was beginning to appear, Parekh affirms that Herder distinguished between confession and Lebensbeschreibungen (life-stories). This distinction aimed at contrasting the new and autonomous form of writing with its predecessor. Herder further insisted that autobiographies or life stories should be written only by ‘remarkable men’. In 1796, on the suggestion of Herder, Seybald published a collection of writings under the title Selbstbiographieen Berühmter Männer (self-biographies of famous men). Linda Anderson while tracing the historical evolution of autobiography opines that autobiography travelled from Germany to Britain where Robert Southey first used the term in 1809. Reviewing contemporary Portuguese literature he referred to a book by a Portuguese painter Francisco Vieura
as a ‘very amusing and unique specimen’ of autobiography, an unusual form of writing, which is explicit in the coinage of the hyphenated word auto-biography. However, Anderson records that there is evidence of slightly earlier usage at the end of the eighteenth century, in a review attributed to William Taylor, of Isaac D’Israeli’s Miscellanies, where he reflects whether autobiography, though ‘pedantic’, might not have been a better term than the hybrid word self-biography employed by D’Israeli. Over the years, autobiography developed into a unique and autonomous genre of writing, governed by its own distinct requirements. It provided a detailed account of the author’s life similar to biography, but at the same time portrayed a privileged form of self-understanding.

Any literary form presupposes certain cultural conditions for its emergence and acquisition of a firm structure to make it socially acceptable. Autobiography was also no exception to this. In his “Indianisation of Autobiography”, Bhikhu Parekh illustrates certain cultural conditions, which led to the emergence of autobiography as a genre. Autobiography, being the story of a unique self, accepts a culture in which individuality is valued and cultivated. One man’s life becomes significantly different from another’s only in a society which encourages individuals to make their own choice and fashion their lives as they please. Parekh further states that autobiography rests on the assumption that the self is a product of its past choice and decisions, that it has a
history and it is only intelligible in historical terms. Being a reflective personal history, where the author seeks to understand himself in terms of his gradual development in time, autobiography is possible only in a society with a well-developed historical manner of thinking.

Self-portraiture has fascinated man for centuries. This need of man has manifested itself over the years in a variety of literary forms each with a unique and distinct perspective like Diaries, Memoirs, Journals, Reminiscences, Scrapbooks and the like. A Diary has a subjective orientation as it deals with the day-to-day record of a person's life. James Boswell considers it "an 'aide memoir', to be turned to retrospectively when remembrance has faded." But it was also justified as registering freshness and authenticity of impression, which might be lost in subsequent retelling as perceived in an autobiography. The advantage of this characteristic quality is that nothing gets left out and the disadvantage lies in the over-abundance of such jottings and their lack of arrangement. The mode of presentation of a diarist, which is characterized by momentariness, uncertainties and false starts, differs from that of an autobiographer. One lives from moment to moment, while the other builds up life looking back from a certain point of time.

Memoirs, Confessions and Reminiscences, like autobiography are based on personal experiences. They are so closely similar that it is sometimes difficult to draw a line of separation. But there is a general
difference in emphasis. A memoir differs from autobiography in its focus as it concentrates on recording public events laying little stress on the self. The illumination of the self is but incidental in a memoir, where the searchlight is focused on the public life of the individual. In this respect the memoirist does not resort to introspection.

A chronicle or memoir is primarily written for others, but an autobiography is written both for oneself and others. It is a constant pursuit of self-understanding by means of a silent and continuous dialogue with oneself. An autobiographer shares his thoughts about himself with others, with the motive of exposing his life both to himself and to them. Hence, autobiography assumes commonly shared meanings and values as well as a unique and individual definition and articulation of them. In truth, an autobiography must hold the self and the society together seeing each in relation to the other.

A mention may be made here of Scrapbooks: books constructed of the scraps of lives, multi-layered experiences, mostly in the form of books of newspaper clippings, of embroidery samples and of collected skeleton leaves. There are of course photograph albums and autograph collections too. These records, like diaries, go beyond the limits of autobiography. When taken as a form of autobiography, a scrapbook also transgresses the boundaries of language and artefact.
The abundant work on the subject over the last two decades makes it problematic to accept the dictionary definition of autobiography as the "history of a person's life written or told by that person." The very elusiveness of the form has become the common thread of much current work on the subject. "The more the genre gets written about," writes William C. Spengemann at the beginning of his own effort to restore a coherent historical view, "the less agreement there seems to be on what it properly includes." It has been called variously, "the unruly genre", the 'restless genre', the most elusive of literary documents" and the like. Theoretical effort to redefine the concept itself is evident when Northrop Frye classifies "autobiography as the subdivision of the novel" or when Barrett J. Mandel calls autobiography, "literature with a difference", or when Paul De Man argues that autobiography is "not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading." Jerome Buckley in his study, The Turning Key: Autobiography and the Subjective Impulse (1984) avers, the ideal autobiography... describes a voyage of self-discovery, a life-journey confused by frequent misdirections and even crisis of identity but reaching at last a sense of perspective and integration. It traces through the alert awakened memory continuity from early childhood to maturity or even to old age.... And as a work of literature it achieves a satisfying wholeness.

Currently the most promising alternative has been to abandon formal definitions altogether and to recast autobiography not as a form
but as an ‘act’. Elizabeth Bruss in her landmark study *Autobiographical Acts* (1976) uses the term ‘genre’ to describe autobiography. However, she considers it as the ‘pirate’ of literary genres as it often raids the other genres to fulfil itself. Analyzing four different autobiographies from four different centuries, she enumerates in each a radically different act with its own particular set of intentions and its own formal improvisations. Her approach has mainly concentrated on the Speech-Act-Theory by which she could substantiate how the communicative unit not only states but also performs.

It was only in the 1930s with the publication of a large number of autobiographies that there was a revival of interest in the critical analysis of autobiography. The reasons why critics did not deal with autobiography initially are manifold. It has always been a paradoxical fact that an autobiography is something less than literature and also something more than literature. Since the function of criticism is to judge, judging an autobiography to be ‘bad’ is very nearly the same as judging a life to be bad. Another reason for the neglect of autobiography as a subject of literary study is that a work of art should have wholeness, harmony and radiance, but an autobiography cannot have wholeness because by definition, the end of the story cannot be told. Since the ‘bios’ is incomplete, autobiography is open ended and incomplete. The third reason for the dearth of critical literature on autobiography is
because autobiography is a self-reflective, self-critical act and the criticism is very often found within the text itself.

The chief criticism directed against autobiography is that it tries to substitute the completely formed for something which is in the process of being formed. The narrator finds himself being caught in the motif of the narrative, which joins his past to the future. The past events, which were probably meaningless or had multiple meanings at the time of occurrence, acquire a new meaning. This demand for meaning makes him choose the details of his past life in a 'presupposedly' intelligible manner. In this context one can even say that autobiography is a revised and corrected version of the writer's life. Therefore an autobiography cannot be a pure and simple record of existence, "an account book or a logbook; on such and such a day and such an hour, I went to such and such a place." A record of this kind, no matter how meticulously exact, would be no more than a caricature of life.

The first important published critical work on autobiography is The History of Autobiography in Antiquity (1907) by George Misch, in which he traced the growth of the concept of individuality from the self-representations of Egyptian inscriptions through Greek love lyrics and Roman orations. This was followed by Anna Robeson Barr's The Autobiography: A Critical Comparative Study (1909), which concentrated, on French memoirs and British Quaker journals of the
seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In 1954, Wayne Shumaker had published his *English Autobiography: It's Emergence, Materials and Forms* which, though intelligent and penetrating, was restricted in scope and diffuse in its treatment. However, it was in 1956 with the publication of Gusdorf's outstanding work *Conditions et limits de l' autobiographie* that all questions and concerns — philosophical, psychological, literary and more generally humanistic — were first clearly laid out and given comprehensive and brilliant consideration. In his view, autobiography occupies a central place as the key to comprehend the curve of every sort of cultural manifestation and the very shape and essence of human culture itself. In the same year that Gusdorf's work appeared, H. N. Wethered published a little book called *The Curious Art of Autobiography* (1956). A much more important work, of course, was Roy Pascal's *Design and Truth in Autobiography* (1960) which interrogates whether in discovering or imposing a design, the autobiographer is not playing fast and loose with truth. James Olney's *Metaphors of Self: The Meaning of Autobiography* published in 1971 would well be considered a landmark in the critical study of autobiography.

Earlier, a number of writers had attempted to establish the moment when a modern autobiographical consciousness and self-consciousness began to insinuate itself into culture and creative art and
began to make its presence felt in literature. In his "Autobiography and
the Cultural Moment: Historical and Biographical Introduction", James Olney cites a number of books that focused their attention on this
same historical moment like Every Man a Phoenix: Studies in
Seventeenth Century Autobiography (1958) by Margaret Bottrall; The
Beginnings of Autobiography in England (1959) by James M. Osborn;
Defoe and Spiritual Autobiography (1965) by George A. Starr;
Versions of the Self: Studies in English Autobiography from John
Bunyan to John Stuart Mill, (1966) by John N. Morris; The Eloquent
'I': Style and Self in Seventeenth Century Prose (1968) by John
Webber; British Autobiography in the Seventeenth Century (1969) by
Paul Delaney; L' autobiographie en France, (1971) by Phillip Lejeune
and to a certain extent, two recent books, Imagining a Self:
Patricia Meyer Spacks and Autobiographical Acts: The Changing
Mention has to be made in this context of Karl. J. Weintraub, who in his
work, The Value of the Individual: Self and Circumstance in
Autobiography (1978) offers a comprehensive history of the
emergence and types of autobiography, at the same time analyzing the
historical and cultural conditions under which that emergence became
possible.
Complementary to these works, articles by Barrett J. Mandel, Roger J. Porter, Karl J. Weintraub, Phillip Lejeune and Robert Bell, concern themselves with the emerging self-consciousness of Western man that found literary expression in the early moments of modern autobiography – those moments when secular autobiography was gradually developing out of spiritual autobiography and when autobiography as a literary mode was emerging out of autobiography as a confessional act.

Critics in recent years have considered autobiographical studies as significant for an understanding of Black Studies, American Studies, Women’s Studies, African Studies and so on. They argue that autobiography being the story of an individual offers a privileged access to an experience – the American experience, Black experience, which no other variety of writing can offer. Autobiography can translate in an undeviating and realistic way, the experience and vision of a people, similar to that which is vibrant in the literature of that people. To a great extent autobiography has been able to provide a defining centre for very rich, highly variant heterogeneous literatures. In fact, to understand the American mind in all its complexity one has to only read a variety of American Autobiographies. Since the writers of drama, fiction and poetry have authored most of the autobiographies it serves as a key to understand the other forms of literature. Robert F. Sayre, who brought
out one of the earliest works on autobiography in a literary context — The Examined Self: Benjamin Franklin, Henry Adams, Henry James (1964) highlights the usefulness of autobiography to those who want to sort out the literature included under the umbrella term ‘American Studies.’ In articles like “The Proper Studies”, and “Autobiographies in American Studies”, he clarifies the analogical significance of autobiography in the building of a nation and in the building of character. In all probability the need of the Americans to reach out and claim identification was fulfilled by their autobiographies.

Focusing on Black Studies, one can estimate the boost it has received from autobiographies. Black history was preserved in autobiographies rather than standard literature, because most of the Black writers entered literature through autobiography. In Black Autobiography and the criticism of it we have something akin to a paradigm of the situation of autobiography in general. Most Black Autobiographies protest against cruelty and injustice imposed upon the Blacks, and their personal inability to handle their hatred for the Whites is an oft-recurring theme. In fact, almost all Black self-portraits focus first on the reciprocal relations between the Blacks and the Whites and on the persistence of White superiority.

The feminist movement is yet another sphere where autobiographical writings have played a lead role. Women seem to be
breaking their million-year silence about themselves, "peeling off the false selves and in the process discovering their articulate, outraged self."\textsuperscript{42} Traditionally this genre has been male-oriented. After the 1970s feminism and feminist thought have enhanced women's consciousness and heightened their sense of awareness. There is ample evidence of a challenge to some of the entrenched male beliefs and patriarchal myths in women's literature. The near absence of women's self-representational texts from the critical histories that authorize the autobiography indicates the extent to which this genre is gendered as 'male'.

The publication after the Second World War of two bibliographies of autobiographies, William Mathews' \textit{British Autobiography: An Annotated Bibliography of British Autobiographies Published or Written before 1951} (1955)\textsuperscript{43} and Louis Kaplan's \textit{A Bibliography of American Autobiographies} (1961)\textsuperscript{44} provided valuable source material for many new critical works which investigated the form of the genre but which focused primarily on British and Continental Autobiographies. In neither of these bibliographies is it even noted that there are many important autobiographies by women and only a few are given even passing mention. Of the major studies of the genre, Shumaker's classic \textit{English Autobiography}, Roy Pascal's \textit{Design and Truth} and James Olney's \textit{Metaphors of the Self}, which have already
been mentioned, make marginal or no reference at all to women's autobiography.

Leigh Gilmore in her introduction to Autobiographies: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation (1994) reiterates the age-old convention that autobiography is what men write as it is a "repeated invocation of an ideological formation that comes to seem natural." It relegates what women write to certain homelier and minor traditions. In her study of women's self-representational writing, Gilmore points out that "the dominant form of self-representational writing, historically variable and generically dynamic as it may be, seems to omit them not simply by oversight or accident." In fact, the very form of identity and authority it inscribes seems off limits, as the dominant representations of identity and authority have always been masculine. The contractual dispute between gender and genre, which seems to define legitimacy within autobiography's nexus of identity and representations, had prompted male artists to question women's identity and its representation.

The analysis of autobiographies for the understanding of feminine consciousness will be of considerable significance for persons seriously interested in Women's Studies. It is natural that women reveal their inner urges, private fears, secret hopes and instinctive reactions in the narration of their own life stories. Even though the genre imposes
certain restrictions on the writers and the mode of confession varies
from writer to writer, the medium does bring out the inner personality of
the writer.

The predominant attitude of most critics towards women’s lives is
that they are ‘insignificant’. Montague Atheran’s remark on Kate
Millet’s *Flying* well exemplifies this attitude.

.... A book? No. It is the personal outpouring of a disturbed
lady... albeit genius ...whose eclectic life is of more interest to
her than to the reader. There is no story line, no plot, no
continuity. Her writing is a frantic stringing together of words
without any thought for the ordinary arrangement of noun and
verb. It is hard reading... it is utter confusion.47

More significant are discrepancies between the critical canon and
women’s autobiographies on matters relating to their form and content.
Not only are women’s life studies excluded from the characteristics of
the autobiographical genre but an altogether different criteria needs to be
drawn to evaluate women’s autobiographies since it may constitute at
least an autobiographical tradition different from the male traditions, if
not a sub-genre.

Although it is problematic to delve into the genesis of a female
autobiographical tradition, feminist scholars of the last decade have
attempted to delineate a tradition of women’s autobiography. Beginning
with Mary Mason’s *The Other Voice* (1980)48 and continuing with
Estelle C. Jelinek’s *The Tradition Of Women’s Autobiography,*
(1986),49 Sidonie Smith’s *A Poetics of Women’s Autobiography*

An attempt at comparing male and female autobiographies adequately confirms that male autobiography not only focuses on its author but also reveals his connectedness to the rest of the society and its representativeness of his times. Since male autobiographies concentrate on chronicling the progress of the authors' professional or intellectual lives and very little on their personal lives, they can be read as contemporary history. On the other hand women's autobiographies rarely mirror History. Affairs of the world or even their career are rather remote and domestic details, family difficulties, friends and people who influenced them are concentrated on. Even in autobiographies by women whose professional work is their claim to fame, we find very often such details are omitted. References to their careers are somewhat oblique, camouflaged behind the personal aspects of their lives. A pioneer in the reform movement for emancipation of women, Elizabeth Cady Stanton confesses in the preface to her autobiography that the story of my private life as the wife of an earnest reformer, as an enthusiastic housekeeper, proud of my skill in every
department of domestic economy, and as the mother of seven children, may amuse and benefit the reader. The incidents of my public career as a leader in the most momentous reform yet launched upon the world - the emancipation of woman - will be found in "The History of Woman Suffrage."\(^54\)

This statement convincingly illustrates for us the consciously self-imposed restrictions on women's autobiographies.

Women's autobiographical writing differs from the male writing essentially in its approach to the subject in question. Male writing focuses on a well-informed, well-integrated, fully developed self. An autobiography is expected to reveal the 'hidden forms of inwardness'. Hence, the question that crops up is whether a woman who is marginalized and is taught from her birth to be controlled and self-effacing can be expected to indulge in the luxury of self-exploration.

According to Meena Sodhi, woman's writing "promises a woman's view of life, woman's experience; in other words, a new element."\(^55\) But it is not possible for men to express life in any other way than as they know it, which again, is according to their own experience. It is a commonly accepted fact that emotions are predominant in a female compared to a male. Hence, a woman due to her greater affectionateness and her greater range and depth of emotional experience is well fitted to give expression to the emotional facts of life. This is well illustrated in autobiographies of the male writers, which do not give a vivid account of their wife or children but
mostly concentrate on their career development and their search for a vocation whereas female autobiographers have almost always discussed their parents, their marriages and their husbands in detail. For the male autobiographers their success and achievements have been more important than their relationships in life. Hence there is bound to be a thematic difference in the writings of the male and the female.

Most autobiographers describe their childhood. The tendency to idealize their lives and to project their universal importance seems to be more prominent in the male tradition. Hence they 'exaggerate', 'mythologize' and 'monumentalise' their boyhood. This is quite contrary to the self-image projected by female-authored autobiographies. A study of the life narratives of women reveals self-consciousness and a need to sift through their lives for explanation and understanding. Very often women seem to be resorting to understatement, or humour to camouflage their feelings of discrimination in their girlhood. Childhood accounts of most women lack that nostalgia which is very common in men’s accounts, perhaps because it is usually the savagery of girlhood that is most remembered.

A woman’s life, both in the East and the West, is made up of multiple selves that not only overlap but also override and contradict each other. She occupies a number of positions and enters into various relations from which she has to gather bits and pieces of her own self.
There is a continuously shifting feminist consciousness. The outward structure of this may have the semblance of a unified whole but it contains gaps and blanks.

The subject of a feminist autobiography is ever in the making and is marked by a continued deferment of any final identity. A woman in her autobiography tries to define herself from at least three different positions which are relevant to her existence: *The social self or the external self*, through which she relates herself to the society at large and as an individual working in a certain capacity or for a certain social cause. *The familial self* in which she is inextricably bound to her parents, siblings, husband, children and others associated with her. She looks at herself from an outsider's point of view. This self occupies a major part of her life. And *The private self*, which forms the centre of her individual existence. Very often she fails to recognize and explore this self, which is possible only on self-realization. Grasping this self, understanding it and evaluating it are of utmost importance, but it is also the most difficult outcome of autobiographical writing.

Critics often agree on a characteristic autobiographical feature, that autobiographers consciously shape the events of their life into a coherent whole by means of a chronological linear narrative. As a matter of fact, one finds this harmony and orderliness in the life narratives of men, which testify their faith in the self-images. On the other hand,
irregularity rather than orderliness prevails in the self-portraits of women. The life narratives of women are often not chronological and progressive but fragmentary and disjointed. As Estelle C. Jelinek puts it, the multidimensionality of women's socially conditioned roles seems to have established a pattern of diffusion and diversity when they write their autobiographies as well, and so by established critical standards, their life studies are excluded from the genre and cast into the 'non-artistic' categories of memoirs, reminiscences and other disjunctive forms.\(^{56}\)

Georges Gusdorf, in *Conditions and Limits of Autobiography* states that autobiography is a mirror in which the individual reflects his own image. According to him, the autobiographical self is the "self opposed to all others... a highly individualistic self with a very tall ego."\(^{57}\) However, scholars of women's autobiography have problematised the Gusdorfsian 'individualistic' model contending that the concept of isolate selfhood is inapplicable to women, because of their "fluid ego boundaries" which has obscured the presence and significance of women's autobiographies in literary tradition.

In *Women's Consciousness, Man's World* (1973), Sheila Rowbotham elaborates that a woman cannot experience herself as a unique entity because she is constantly aware of herself being defined as 'Woman', who belongs to a group where identity is defined by the dominant male culture.\(^ {58}\) This sense of collective identity of women is not just negative; it can also be a source of strength and transformation. Rowbotham strongly argues that a cultural representation of women
leads not only to women's alienation but also to the potential for a new consciousness of self. Women can alienate themselves from cultural representation by developing dual consciousness – the self as culturally defined and the self as different from cultural prescription.

But always we were split in two, straddling silence, not sure where we would begin to find ourselves or one another. From this division, our material dislocation, came the experience of one part of ourselves as strange, foreign and cut off from the other which we encountered as tongue-tied paralysis about our own identity... the manner in which we knew ourselves was at variance with ourselves as an historical being - woman.59

While Rowbotham’s focus is on ideology and institutions, Nancy Chodorow, the feminist critic, stresses the psychology of gender socialization within the family. Both critics agree on the inapplicability of isolate selfhood to women. Chodorow argues that “the basic feminine sense of the self is connected to the world, the basic masculine self is separate.”60 Masculine personality according to Chodorow is defined more in terms of denial of relation and connection whereas feminine personality includes a fundamental definition of self in relationship.

Following a general psychoanalytic approach Chodorow suggests that the reason for the different sense of self in men and women is the importance of mother-child relationships. Girls tend to retain their primary attachment to their mothers quite unlike boys and mothers tend to experience their daughters as more continuous with themselves. Hence girls remain a part of the dyadic mother-child relationship itself,
continuing to involve themselves in issues of merging and separation.

Thus according to Chodorow the mother-daughter relationship remains central to the ongoing process of female individuation.

Through self-narratives, women tend to project an identity that is neither purely individualistic, nor purely collective. As Susan Stanford Friedman points out the self created in a woman’s text is neither an ‘isolate being’,

nor is the self a false image of alienation... instead the self constructed in a woman’s autobiographical writing is often based in, but not limited to, a group consciousness – an awareness of the meaning of the cultural category WOMAN for the patterns of women’s individual destiny.61

Rowbotham’s conceptualization of collective alienation, consciousness and formation of new identities through language and image, provides a richly suggestive framework for approaching the individual life stories of women. So does Chodorow’s model of female individuation with its emphasis on women’s relational sense of self, and the ongoing influence of the mother-daughter relationship. These together offer a basis for exploring the self as women have constituted it in their writings. Rowbotham’s ideological focus on collective consciousness and Chodorow’s psychoanalytical focus on relational gender identity proposed for women’s selfhood are not equally relevant for all autobiographies. But they provide illuminating perspectives on both
The objective of this study would be to see if autobiographies authored by women could be examined in a new and different perspective. While emphasising the influence of mother-daughter relationship for female individuation, the study would also explore how relational identity in women can be viewed as their strength.

Chapter I gives a general introduction to the study of autobiography and critical literature available on the subject. It attempts to trace the genesis and growth of autobiography in general and women's autobiography in particular, highlighting the differences in form and content between male and female authored autobiographies. This chapter throws light on the various forms of self-representation as well. A mention of how autobiography helps in understanding other areas of study such as American Studies, Black Studies, and Women's Studies has been made.

Chapter II traces the various trajectories of self, self as a metaphor and how autobiography is considered as a metaphor of the self. An attempt at a study of the psycho-sociological concept of self is made with emphasis on isolate and relational identity. The chapter sets out the objectives of this study of various women's autobiographies from different cultures with a psychological perspective.
Chapter III is a study of the life narratives of three Indian women autobiographers: Kamala Das, Amrita Pritam and Meena Alexander in the light of Object Relations Theory. The concept of mother-daughter relationship and relational identity in women is discussed through an analysis of these autobiographies. The lack of a strong bond between the mother and the daughter and its consequences in the life of a female has been examined in detail in this chapter.

Chapter IV examines an Arab woman’s autobiography, Nadia, Captive of Hope, a Persian self-narrative, The Autobiography of HIH Princess Soraya, and also an Afro-American Black autobiography, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. The three autobiographies are discussed in the light of the mother-daughter relationships. The chapter intends to highlight that in spite of a relational identity a woman has the capacity to carve a space for herself and this empowers her.

Chapter V is a discussion of Western women autobiographers. I have taken up for study Under My Skin, the autobiography of Doris Lessing, Agatha Christie’s An Autobiography and Patty Duke’s autobiography, Call Me Anna. The concept of Western selfhood and a brief historical survey of British and American autobiography are attempted. The chapter also focuses on the dyadic relationship examined in the earlier chapters besides the concept of identity and self-formation in a Western society.
The concluding chapter is a comparative study of the commonalities and disparities in the texts analysed and thus draws the various strands of argument together. It also states how women's autobiographies deviate from the traditional norms and challenge the concepts of self-hood and identity.
NOTES


2 Gusdorf, 29-30.

3 Gusdorf, 31.

4 Gusdorf, 31.


8 Anderson, 7.

9 Parekh, 275.


11 Random House Webster’s College Dictionary.


16 Elizabeth Bruss, 172.


46 Gilmore, xi.


55 Sodhi, 82.

56 Jelinek, 17.

57 Gusdorf, 83.


59 Rowbotham, 31.


