INTRODUCTION
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Human beings have always tried to express their inner feelings, desires and life through the medium of art. They have tried to depict self-creation and leave behind some testimony of their existence. The form of writing autobiography records the life history of human beings. The act of writing an autobiography is a discovery, a creation and an imitation of the self. James Olney has emphasized a shift in the autobiographical writings in the modern times from bios, the life of the writer, to autos, the self.

Traditionally, the work of Indian women writers has been undervalued due to patriarchal assumptions about the superior worth of male experience. One factor contributing to this prejudice is the fact that most of these women write about the enclosed domestic space, and women’s perceptions of their experience within it. Consequently, it is assumed that their work will automatically rank below the woks of male writers who deal with ‘weightier’ themes. Additionally, Indian, and by extension Pakistani, women writers in English are victims of a second prejudice vis-à-vis their regional counterparts. Since proficiency in English is available only to writers of the intellectual, affluent, educated classes, a frequent judgment is made that the writers, and their works, belonging to a high social strata, are cut off from the reality of actual harsh life. The most of their writing depicts the psychological suffering of the frustrated housewife, this subject matter often being considered superficial compared to the depiction of the repressed and oppressed lives of women of the lower classes that we find in regional authors writing in Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Malayalam, Urdu, Tamil, Telgu, and other regional languages.

The volume of South Asian literature written in English is smaller, and spans a smaller range of time, having only commenced with the spread of the English language and education. But in the last two decades there has been an astonishing flowering of South Asian women’s writing in English, the literature of this period being published both in India and elsewhere.

The image of women in South Asian literature has undergone a change during the last four decades. Women writers have moved away from traditional portrayals of enduring, self-sacrificing women towards conflicted female characters searching for identity, no longer characterized and defined simply in terms of their victim status. In contrast to the earlier fiction, female characters from the 1980s onwards assert
themselves and defy marriage and an important consequence of post-colonialism has been the acknowledgement and reappearance of women’s experience often being concealed from the histories of colonial societies. Many of the fixed representatives of non-western women have been powerfully rejected in a plethora of contemporary writings; most of them in their different ways refute imaginings deeply. As Nabaneeta Dev Sen points out in her article “Women and Literary Imagination”, writers like Jean Rhys, Anita Desai, Buchi Emecheta, Olive Senior, Nadine Gordimer, Grace Nichols and Arundhati Roy have placed women at the centre of history, as markers and agents of history, not mute witnesses to it.

The gender issue is also observed through autobiography. Autobiography reveals gaps, and not only gaps in time and space or between the individual or the social, but also a widening divergence between the manner and the matter of its discourse. That is, autobiography reveals the impossibility of its own dream: what begins on the presumption of self-knowledge ends in the creation of a fiction that covers over the premises of its construction. (Shari Benstock, 1988: 11)

Writing autobiography gives the writer the opportunity to explore his/her history from personal perspective, relative to the political happenings of the times, local happenings, community events, academic experiences, and other occurrences that somehow impinge on his or her life and to revisit those times from a “removed” perspective. Autobiography can also be a means to share one’s history and culture with others. The production of autobiography opens avenues for individuals to examine how the things their parents taught them, their formal education, and cultural and life experiences all impact who they are and how they perceive, react to, and interact with others. The sharing of insights gained from writing autobiography allows others to have a better understanding of the writer. Autobiography is, in fact, a valuable tool of education.

There is a change in global societal views of women. “...women are beginning to experience the documentation of their lives as an important way to utilize their experiences and knowledge, for the expansion of their knowledge of self and others (Davies, 1999). The present study has aimed at exploring how South Asian women have tried to redefine their selves through the writing of autobiography.
The present researcher has explored South Asian women's experiences and knowledge in general and those of Kamala Das, Indira Goswami, Tehmina Durrani and Salma Ahmed in particular.

The present study has examined the following four autobiographies in English:

1. *My Story* (1976) by Kamala Das


The hypothesis of the present study is as follows:

The selected women writers of the Indian subcontinent depict the suffering, struggle, tolerance, socio-economic oppression of women and present the reactionary attitude of women developed in response to the repressive strategies adopted by men and inflicted upon women.

A number of research scholars have studied only Indian autobiographies critically, but separately. This is the first attempt of its kind to examine a few female representative autobiographies from South Asian Literature in which women have tried to redefine their selves through the writing of autobiography.