CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

There are four ways to write a woman’s life: the woman herself may tell it, in what she chooses to call an autobiography; she may tell it in what she chooses to call fiction; a biographer, woman or man, may write the woman’s life in what is called a biography; or the woman may write her own life in advance of living it, unconsciously and without recognizing or naming the process. Women of accomplishment, in unconsciously writing their future lived lives, or, more recently, in trying honestly to deal in written form with lived past lives, have had to confront power and control. Because this has been declared unwomanly, and because many women would prefer (or think they would prefer) a world without evident power or control, women have been deprived of the narratives, or the texts, plots, or examples, by which they might assume power over—take control of—their own lives.

(Carolyn G. Heilbrun, Writing a Woman’s Life 11, 16; emphasis added)

Gender has a crucial bearing on the research component of this thesis. The opening line of thought is to explore the female subject/narrator, and the nexus involving female subjectivity, women’s self-writing, and the shape of women’s lives. The present study concentrates mainly on two traditions for narrating women’s lives: Autobiography and Biography. Despite their generic difference, they have certain features in common. Both the genres have narrative conventions, a canon, theory, gatekeepers, and followers. However, to draw the differences is not the primary focus.

The prime focus is to deal with the incongruity between the female life and the generic tradition of auto/biography from a feminist standpoint. In the present study the acronym Auto/biography proposes to discuss both the genres ‘Autobiography’ and ‘Biography’ independently. The slashed term
auto/biography also authorizes an artful construction of self –in-writing, a self which can be as it were looked in the eye. In feminist and cultural political terms: ‘Biographer’s autobiographical self-awareness’, not just sources of fact and information, but rather recognizes their role in the construction of particular views of the ‘self’ they present.

Autobiography as a literary genre is both distinct in its characteristics and almost undefined as a genre. The many paradoxical elements in autobiography, its simultaneous claims to facticity and subjectivity, honesty and pretense, history and fiction, are precisely what make autobiography striking to their writers and exciting to readers. Autobiography is thus strongly connected to women’s writings. Women not only have to confront social constraints in writing, but also the very idea of writing. The question is still one of ‘public’ versus ‘private’ space and the failure of the male mind to understand and accept the term ‘human’ as inclusive of both sexes.

A gendered consciousness is grounded in a cultural reality. So, there is gender blindness, the inability to place oneself in the position of the ‘other’. However, women have always been the objects of description. This position-as-object has been the topic of much feminist scholarship since the 1980s. In autobiography, this issue assumes a special complexity. A woman autobiographer concurrently provides the subjectivity of her work and is the object of description. Thus, critics try and answer a crucial question: that in her ‘self-writing’, how does she avoid the perspectival and representational positions that for centuries froze her into a lifeless object-state in masculine writings?

Living a life does not automatically prepare one for revealing that life. This task brings distinctive dilemmas. Scholars tend to agree that the facts of a
life-the life as lived- are not directly accessible. Thus, the act of writing a life instructs to invent a plausible account, so all accounts are therefore constructed, and bear an indistinct relation to verifiable events. In essence, women live in the same world in which men live. But their locations, experience and perceptions are different. They are differently located in streams of experience that are structured by class, race, age, and sexuality. Therefore, the focal point is to learn the nature and quality of this difference. As gender locations and culture happen to be different, their writings are all gender governed.

Thus, women’s autobiography as a study definitely gets deeper into the matter of subjectivity; woman’s enacting a narrative, the problematics of self-presentation, and the calculus of even making it published. Further constraints are the institutions of genre and the canon, where evaluation and criticism are joined. On this ground it is even emphasized, that women’s auto/biography is interrelated. The basis is, firstly the human connection that links the ‘autobiographer’, ‘biographer’ and the ‘reader’ (female) on common ground of being a ‘woman’. Then the strength and multiplicity of these connections are revealing something rare: “not that we are the same, not that we are one, but that each of us is all of these”(Judy 6). The examination of women’s auto/biography leads to a method based on intersubjectivity.

The basic urge to read women’s self-writing comes to acquire knowledge about women’s collective situation, daily lives, and consciousness, information which is not to be found in other documents. The dilemma involved in the study of female biography is, that different accounts could relay different truths about the same person/subject. Traditionally autobiography spotlights the subject and presents the reader with a first-person account of her and her concerns.
In biography, the relationship between the subject and the narrator is of paramount importance, but the text conceals the person of the narrator, who does not appear as a separate subjectivity. The established tradition tends to highlight the vital factors, but fail to shed light on all the relationships. As a matter of fact each tradition demonstrates a lack of fit with the texts by or about women. The lack of official notice of women, reflecting the politics of gender, bears on the issue of voice. In the absence of a public reality or history, women’s auto/biographies become their representatives; essential for understanding the subjectivity of a muted social group.

The Acronym Auto/biography:

The most recent term to receive wide use is, “Auto/biography” which in its use of a slash highlights the instability of autobiography as a genre, and expresses a continuum rather than an area of absolute difference between biography and autobiography. As stated by Smith and Watson in Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives(2001)“Auto/biography as a term expresses several things at once, it is a way to talk about biography and autobiography as interrelated genres” (184). As authorized by Marcus in Auto/Biographical Discourses (1994) the acronym also expresses the idea that the generic lines between autobiography and biography are often blurry in practice, and that in fact the generic distinctions are more properly expressed as discursive currents.

Thus, the contracted form auto/biography hints the interrelatedness of autobiographical narrative and biography. Although the slash marks their fluid boundary, they are in several senses different, even opposed, forms. The term auto/biography also designates a mode of the autobiographical that inserts biography/ies within an autobiography, or the converse, a personal narrative
within a biography. Thus related to the epistemological thread runs the twine of “auto/biography”.

According to Liz Stanley, as stated in *The Autobiographical ‘I’* (1992) the term “auto/biography” is a technical and theoretical which indicates an analytical recognition that the supposed binaries of self and other, fact and fiction, past and present, reality and representation, autobiography and biography actually find the way in stories, narratives and other accounts, including those produced by method through surveying, interviewing etc. She further states: ‘I use the term ‘auto/biography’, as a term which refuses any easy distinction between biography and autobiography, instead recognizing their symbiosis; and it also collects into it social science and other apparently ‘objective’ ways of producing and using life histories of different kinds’(127).

Accordingly, in the study of auto/biography, the epistemological, methodological, and feminist interests meet. The key is the argument, the insistence, that ‘writing a life’ in a number of forms—biography, autobiography, editing diaries, fiction, life histories—entails a similar set of problematic solved, or at least approached, in similar ways; and that analytically understanding and appreciating these requires a focus on the ‘how’ of writing rather than the ‘what’ is written.

In general, biography and autobiography are seen as ideological accounts of ‘lives’ which in turn feed back into everyday understandings of how ‘common lives’ and ‘extraordinary lives’ can be recognized. The vast majority of canonical auto/biographies of all kinds contain a limited range of character: a cast of one under the limelight supported by a few bit-part players who come and then typically go in the relative darkness around the star. Biographies are generally less limited in this respect, but even here the subject is always centre
stage, other people always peripheral. Exceptionally reverse to ‘life’ and yet how absolutely central to the auto/biographical project.

Auto/biography has at its heart a project which is concerned with the artful construction of a self-in-writing, a self which can be as it were looked in the eye. As further explained by Liz Stanley the “auto/biography turns on a tripartite pivot: the self who writes constructs a self who was (an other self for biography, a past self for autobiography); but there is also a self who is, outside of the text as it is written, who continues to grow older and to change after it is completed but who is prototypically unmentioned” (132). The argument is based on Roland Barthes’s theory of dislocation or plethora of selves. Instead of the drive to ego-fulfillment which characterizes men’s autobiographies, women’s autobiographies tend to adopt very different structures.

Thus, the running counter to the emphasis on the single essentially ungendered ideal ‘self’ in auto/biography are claims that women’s autobiographies are ‘different’, less ego-focused and more concerned with self located in a network of others’.

Currently as a branch of literary studies auto/biography studies have also developed as an outlook. ‘The International Association of Autobiography and Biography’ was founded in 1999 to provide a regular international forum. In fact there are more than fifteen journals devoted to aspects of autobiography, biography, life writing, and diary writing in at least seven languages, and there are now special series devoted to auto/biography and life writing at many academic presses.

Equally the study of women’s auto/biography was a central case for feminist criticisms during the 1980s, exposing processes of exclusion and
marginalization in the construction of literary canons. Not only were women biographers self evidently outside the ‘Great Men’ tradition with which many auto/biographical critics operated; generic definitions served to exclude forms of ‘life-writing’, often adopted by women and those outside mainstream literary culture. The extensive feminist literature on women’s auto/biography over the last decade or so introduces many writers previously excluded from discussions, while revealing how ‘androcentric’ the auto/biographical tradition and auto/biographical criticism have been.

Separating both the genres, broadly speaking ‘autobiography’ is a personal and private writing. The female subject in autobiography speaks with a first-person voice, when write reflexively, societal images and stereotypes of being a “woman” are present in her wits. She is surrounded by definitions of “who she is”; these cultural prescriptions are conveyed in her private writing. It is a paradox, that in a first person ‘personal and private writing’ the third person representations are not very much absent. Aspects of femaleness that are of use or value to men dominate such metaphors. The imaginative construction of “woman” is distant from the collective experience of women.

The constraints operating on women’s space and women’s voices are reflected in the narratives women create. Any studies of women’s auto/biography impose to explore the nature of the genre and to examine it as a discourse of institutionalized androcentricism. The masculinity of the traditions makes it difficult for the narrative of female experience to find a berth and a reading. As each genre has functioned in the past to disqualify and hence excluded much writing that centers on women’s lives. None of the canons and conventions fit women’s lives; each would need expansion and reformation.
Thus, women’s auto/biographical texts offer the possibility of articulating notions of collective selves which include cultural, socio-political and historical memories. Auto/biographical texts of women represent both the individual and the group and are sites for politicizing the collective self. Moreover, they can be read as acts of cultural intervention. Within the context of this study, cultural space also refers to that branch of cultural studies largely derived from the study of literature which includes biography and autobiography. According to critics, auto/biographical writing by or about women aimed at raising the visibility of the lives and works of women. Auto/biographical texts have been identified as being a pertinent literary genre for a way of reclaiming a sense of cultural identity and as a mode of self-representation.

Hence, the thesis hypothesizes the premise that auto/biographical texts can be viewed as a literary extension and accordingly these literary genres are ideal methods for writing about the life histories and experiences of women.

The present study ‘Personal is Political: A Study of Nehru Women’s Auto/biography’ studies the dynamics of ‘gender’. Gender categorically shapes the auto/biography of a female text at the same time ensign the reading and interpretation of the same. The general focus of the research is to theorize women’s auto/biography and critically analyze the auto/biography of Nehru women. The rationale of the study is to find how literary representations of women are gendered. The primary textual focus is to assess how women’s autobiographies like their real lives, are dictated by gender consciousness.

The objective of the study is to re-read Nehru women’s autobiographies, from various perspectives among which gyno- criticism is one of the parameters. The consecutive textual focus of the study is an examination of the biographies of Indira Nehru Gandhi portrayed by four different biographers.
The present study also examines the nature and scope of ‘New Biography’ as a genre.

Categorized under women’s writing, the present study attempts to analyze the notions of *personal is political*, concentrating on the autobiographies of Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Nayantara Sahgal and Krishna Hutheesing, as well as the biographies of Indira Nehru Gandhi portrayed by four different biographers namely Katherine Frank, Pupul Jayakar, Dom Moreas and Inder Malhotra. The universal factor of the study is to analyze and interpret female experience and female subjectivity as embodied in the auto/biographies of Nehru Women.

**Writing Auto/Biographies : Reminiscences and Reflections**

Right from the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, women in ancient India became a major issue of debate for not only historians, but the policy makers and national thinkers. The question of women was preset to that of ancient India, which kept on taking new contours in different times. History will not speak about women. It will make women speak of it; that is the history we are unaware of. Is there a better definition for the history of women than this? From the earliest times, historical documents have been unjust in recording women’s history, owing to the domination of men. The feminist questioned this invisibility of this prototype and set out to rewrite history a new.

Gerda Lerner, an American pioneer in the field of women’s history, stated in *The Majority Finds its Past* (1979) “women have always been making history, living it and shaping it” (127). Her words became a manifesto. What emerged was a new way of thinking about gender. Instead of accepting feminine identity as natural and essential, historians and other social scientists treated it as constructed. The feminist movement, which started in the eighties,
developed a specific form for women’s history, began rewriting in an alternative method, made gender difference a key to the analysis of social relation.

Stimulated directly or indirectly by the women’s movement, historians have not only documented the lives of women in various countries and periods, but they have charted the changes in the economic, social, educational and political positions of women as well. As the field of women’s history took shape in the 1970’s and early 1980’s, the aversion to biography as a historical genre and to the study of women who did not fit notions of contemporary feminism kept many biographers underground.

Gerda Lerner’s warning as stated in “Placing Women in History: a 1975 Perspective” that “the history of notable women is the history of exceptional, even deviant woman, and does not describe the experience and history of the mass of women” (357) illustrates the generally accepted caution. Some feminist historians, however, ignored this warning, though many worked in the shadows. In the last few years or so in India, corresponding with an upswing in both the popularity and acceptability of biography, women have published first-rate biographies, providing models and suggesting new directions.

The invisibility of women’s history doesn’t mean the absence of women’s history. An extraordinary number of autobiographies were written in the second half of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century. Many of these texts are personal testimony of the new sense of worth these women experienced as ‘individuals’. Autobiographies and memoirs of Pandit Ramabai, Cornelia Sorabji, give a glimpse of the many faceted struggles involved. Theirs were records of the politically significant struggle of women caught between the public gestures of the new westernized men they were married to, and the personal lives that were bound anew into private spheres. The extracts from the
biographies of Binodini Das and Hamsa Wadkar show their struggles to make a living and survive in the male world of theatre and cinema. Muktabai, Tarabai Shinde and Rokeya Hussian added new dimensions to the sculpting of new woman.

Nevertheless, multiple biographies are written about the same person. For instance, several biographies have been written about Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay, despite the fact that she wrote her own autobiography titled *Inner Recesses, Outer Spaces* (1986). However, Reena Nanda’s valuable political biography of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay falls silent when it comes to the personal facets of Kamaladevi’s life. A biography of any political figure needs to balance equally the personal and political. Therefore one needs to read this biography with Kamaladevi’s autobiography, aptly titled *Inner Recesses, Outer Spaces*. In such cases the sub-text becomes as significant as the visible text.

There are numerous volumes of short biographical sketches of other Indian women - *Great Women of India, Eminent Women of India, Women Pioneers in the Indian Renaissance*, and many more. In India, biographies of Sarojini Naidu, Vijaylakshmi Pandit, and the multiple biographies of Indira Gandhi occupy the spectrum to some degree. There is no reason why women’s biographies should be written only by women, but often this is so. This may be because women find the lives of other women interesting and can empathies with them.

Scholars are of the opinion that as a cultural category, biography as a form reveals insights not just into the experience and attitudes of the individual directly concerned, but also of the wider society, or social segment, of which they are part. This is of particular value in seeking to understand and analyze
groups that are socially marginalized, such as “women”. Biographies of women render ‘voice’ to the voiceless and as approaches to break the silences imposed by society and history.

Hence, a study of women’s biographies becomes extremely important, as a process to recover or retrieve women’s history. They also provide an entry point into the social history of the period seen from the women’s perspective. Biographies could bring out women’s real worlds and their real experiences and aspirations. They show how the efforts, struggles, achievements and failures of these women have shaped the world that they have inherited. Whereas biographies can be about eminent women, they can also be about women who have been marginalized and whose lives and work need to be known.

In autobiographies, men and women tell their stories; in biographies, the authors tell the stories of their subjects. For the historians, these are windows, entry points into the social and political history of the period. The present study understands that men and women occasionally do make events, and influence the course of the history, just as events make men and women.

India has a long and strong tradition of oral history, but a much weaker and more discontinuous tradition of written history. The result is that in much of the kind of biographies, the content is weak, due to lack of proper documentation. And, then the assemblage themselves of such biographies provide the opportunity of opening new windows on the history of the times.

For some, biography becomes a way of illuminating history. In most biographies, history is sketched into the background. For case in point the Nehru family men and women, to write about them it is necessary to understand the events of the period and the individuals, because politics was central to
them; politics amalgamated into their lives. All of them were not working in a political void. To a certain extent they were shaping events as much as events were shaping them. The need was to explain the logic and the working of their decisions. In such an approach, a biography is a study of time not just a person. Sometimes it is a period, not a person that is unknown.

However, to look for one general argument is impossible, instead outlining a cluster of issues will help to explore the complex of reasons that might determine the commissioning or writing of biographies as well as those behind nurturing and shaping the writings of autobiographies.

It hardly needs to be stressed that a biography is neither a mere exercise in literature nor a branch of history. Biography is a part of literature as it is part of history, if only it is based on well-ascertained data and presented in an objective manner, as far as practicable. Biography is as much a part of literature, as it is of history - it is literature in so far as it recreates the life of the person it is concerned with; it is history when it purveys details of his life. The genesis of biography is as old as that of history.

Both ‘History’ and ‘Biography’ theorize a dialectical relationship between life (as information) and art (as an expression of subjectivity). Both have a ‘truth’ claim and are represented as forms of narratives. Yet, there are some apparently contrastive ways in which one might be juxtaposed against the other. For the sake of argument, if we are to ‘recall’ some of the characteristics features of history we would perhaps expect a coherent, continuous narrative, with casual and other links, offering ‘epochal truths’, written with objectivity and sufficient analysis, thereby enabling us to produce some wide-ranging image of the past.
Above all, even a complex history should yield points of significance that would enable us to understand and interpret in its light events, movements, and large sections of time. Biographies, of course, have an important though not exclusive role in the construction of the kind of history evoked in the literal sense. But, as an unwritten rule, is not the biography composed around the life of a ‘man’ or a ‘woman’ of some significance? And, the investment of significance is precisely the point where the discipline of history is provoked into internal conflict.

Few scholars also hold a view that biography as history can truly make a signal contribution to the story of the nation. It has been pointed out that biography can easily slip into hagiography. But biography and hagiography, if the facts are stated, at least some picture will emerge of the person’s life and, more importantly, of the times.

Nevertheless, a biography is written about or around a person, and is obliged to privilege the experiential, the particular, and the expression of the ‘self’ in everyday practice. The coherence of the biography is believed to lie in the specific mode of representing the ‘experiencing consciousness’ in relation to a larger historical frame or, a resemblance of one.

Then the question takes place to what extent is the writing of biographies an indigenous literary tradition in India? In the Indian Scenario Harshacharita of Banabhatta, written in the first quarter of the seventh century is regarded as the earliest biographies in Indian history. The medieval period in the north India witnessed the arrival of a tradition of writing biographies in Persian. Writing biographies was definitely part of Mughal literary traditions. The most striking biography written in the peninsular India was Madhura vijayam written by Ganga Devi during the fifteenth century, the Saluva phase of the Vijaynagar era.
It is to be noted at the outset that these texts do not fit into the western model of biography. Another thread of inquiry often encountered is why do biographies in the Indian context end up hagiographies? Ramachandra Guha looks at this aspect vital as he writes in an article titled “Lives in Need of Authors: Why South Asians Don’t Write Good Biographies” (2002) that: “we know how to burn our dead with reverence…but not to evaluate, judge or honour them….This is a world governed by deference, not discrimination.” (32). Thus, Guha locates the problem of impoverished biographies in the obsession with idolization and iconisation that characterizes most biographies and biographers.

Political profiles and biographies are very much a part of the imperial art of history-writing. A biography of any political figure needs to balance equally the personal and the political. One could ask: are silences in political biographies another indication of the tendency among Indian biographers to express only that which is laudable and looks good in print, leaving out all grey areas of their subjects’ lives?

These traditions, however, followed the path of tribute and portrayed the British rulers and administrators in the most admirable light. Philip Woodruff’s *Men who Ruled India* is a classic example case in point. Even biographies of imperial administrators came to be written by eminent Indian scholars. S.Gopal’s biographies of Lord Ripon and Lord Irwin could be taken as illustrative of this kind of writing. Political biographies also began to document the lives of leaders in the Indian freedom movement. B. R. Nanda’s biography of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was a significant marker states the critics when published in 1957.
In the essay “Lives in Needs of Authors” (2002) Ramachandra Guha trying to answer this very question quotes from Ranjit Hoskote’s poem *Questions for a Biographer* which informs the role of a true biographer: “How to phrase what must be told, /how force the seals, twist back the locks, /burgle the cabinet of the soul? /How to rifle his cupboard of masks/and then to squeeze into the damp/between costume and true colours?” (33).

Critics declare that not many Indian biographers would meet the standards set by Hoskote. Nor would many match Lytton Strachey’s consistent debunking of Victorian heroes in his *Eminent Victorians*. Thus most Indian biographers, on the other hand, practiced either silence of an indistinguishable mumble when it came to the grey, shadowy parts of their subjects’ persona or past history. However, an exception, Sarvepalli Gopal’s three-volume of Nehru endeavors an intellectually honest representation of Nehru.

In a statement, all the biographies India produced are extremely valuable in looking at the interface between history of the eventful years preceding freedom, the early decades of governance of independent India and the political and personal profiles of powerful and highly controversial individuals of the time. All are telling testimony to the interweaving of history and individual life histories.

As discussed earlier a biography is written about or around a person, and is obliged to privilege the experiential, the particular, and the expression of the ‘self’ in everyday practice. The coherence of the biography is believed to lie in the specific mode of representing the experiencing consciousnesses in relation to a larger historical frame or, a semblance of one. On the other hand Autobiography is an act of self-presentation. It is a performance in which candour is fused with deception, and display alternates with concealment. As
stated by Bhiku Parekh in *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi’s Political Discourse* (1999), Autobiography could be defined as “a history of a life recollected, interpreted and reflected upon from the clam vantage points of the present.”(275) It can be seen as a genre that narrativies ‘self – realization’; this ‘self’ being the representation of a unique self characterized by being historical, meditative and reflective. Such a genre fails to exist in Indian history well until the very fag end of the nineteenth century; if not actually at the beginning of the twentieth century. This is, however, a debatable position. For the only reason that the theory demands an ‘I’ as a pre-requisite to write an autobiography. The genre of autobiography is well developed in the western context with clear sub-generic distinctions drawn between autobiography, memoirs and reminiscence. In the Indian scenario, autobiography writing, was certainly being inspired from outside, was an appropriation of the genre, it would be insignificant to make these sub-genres distinctions in the Indian context. Still memoirs, anecdotes, reminiscences and reflections often parade themselves as autobiographies on the Indian scene.

Autobiography, as Bhikhu Parekh has suggested, presupposes not only a unique self narrating itself but also a “constituency interested in reading” such narratives. (*Colonialism* 280) This point hints at the widening of the reading and writing world amongst Indian specially during the second world war period, as novel was domesticated and the essay became a recognized popular form and the modern short story was born, becoming rather quickly the dominant genre in the popular periodicals press all over the country. By the 1930s, both Gandhi’s and Nehru’s autobiographies were available as models. The conclusion drawn was that given this reluctance to talk about one’s own self and one’s exploits, if one may use this word, recording the transformation of one’s times thus becomes the justification for attempting an autobiography. The intent and result is the capturing of a lost world in words.
The classic definition of autobiography in the West is the unfolding narrative of a unique, unified and transcendent self realizing and representing itself. Nevertheless the dyad ‘those days/ these days’ are most often the structuring principle of an Indian narrative. This aspect is indicated rather it is marked by a heightened self-consciousness. As a result the details depicted are contrasted, either explicitly or implicitly, with the changed present. In some autobiographies the inherent trait is an explicit documentary aspect to it and secondly that the autobiographical genre gets domesticated through such a strategy. Sudhir Kakar classifies an Indian autobiography and states:

….in the essentially western – inspired genre of autobiography, Indian writings often tend to have a curiously flat quality as far as the scrutiny of the life in terms of a ruthless examination of motives and feelings are concerned….with rare exceptions, Indian autobiographies are evocations of places and accounts of careers, records of events from which the self has been excised. (4)

Autobiography is of course a quintessentially modern genre. Mattison Mines asserts “most of these expressions of individualism and individuality are missing from the India’s cultural assemblage prior to the nineteenth century and the advent of photography” (3). Judith Walsh is even more specific and emphatic when she asserts ‘[the] genre of autobiography was a relatively late arrival on the Indian scene’ (ix). Sudhir Kakar, who has done much work on ‘the Indian self’, describes autobiography as an “essentially western-inspired genre” (4). Mahatma Gandhi, in his autobiography titled My Experiments with Truth, remarks, “writing an autobiography is a practice peculiar to the West. I know of nobody in the East having written one, except amongst those who have come under western influence”. (xiii)

Undoubtedly the modern genre of autobiography is closely tied to notions of individuality and the expression of the self, and it is a matter of fact that the
genre of autobiography emerged in India only during the colonial times. Conventionally, social scientists have explained the lack of autobiographies to individualism being absent in Indian social life due to the predominance of collective identities—of religion, caste, kin and family—which smothered individualism.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, as few Indian women learnt to read and write, they started writing about themselves as well as noting down their experiences and responses to the changing social and political environment. Writing about one’s self is a conscious act as it represents the subject’s desire to express and thus record feelings and emotions, as well as events. Why did they write about themselves? Maybe it satisfied a basic urge for self-expression. The point of view of these women was sometimes quite different from that of men and they often did not share the ideas some men and women held about them. They were dismayed at the unjust social order which denied them, as women, many things.

By and large Indian women autobiographers excise their ‘real’ self, so they appropriated the genre of autobiography to write the history of the social and political transformation that they had experienced in their own lifetime. Hence, an uncertainty brings to the forefront a question Is the art of writing autobiography totally unknown to the Indian cultural ethos? The fact is that self-reflexive writing in the autobiographical mode has long been a part of Indian literary tradition. One such writing that comes to mind is the autobiography of the fourteenth-century Maharashtrian woman saint Bahina Bai.

However, women’s autobiography in India is largely defined with reference to the traditional patriarchal set up in which it grew. Hence the consciousness enshrined therein often strikes a familiar chord among women elsewhere.
occupied with the definition of the “I”. Far from being a well defined, isolated “I”, women’s autobiography springs from an awareness of a collective identity. A woman does not write her autobiography as an isolated being, but carries a whole tradition of women’s writing within her. She sees herself as an extension of the collective consciousness of women’s subculture. It is noted that women’s identity is relational and their identity boundaries are very fluid compared to men’s. These facts of their gender identity influence the genre a great deal, in both form and content, making women’s autobiography discontinuous in form and personal in content. A deep sense of being discriminated against looms large over most of these autobiographies.

As stated earlier, the very first autobiography written by an Indian woman is that of the Marathi saint-poet Bahina Bai. Quoted in Ranjana Harish’s *Indian Women’s Autobiographies*, Bahina Bai’s autobiography is originally written around 1700, it gives expression to her sense of sorrow:

Possessing a woman’s body, and myself being subjected to others, I was not able to carry out my desire to discard all worldly things….The Vedas cry aloud, and the Puranas shout that no good comes of a woman… I wonder what sin I committed in a former birth that in this birth I should be so separated from God. I am born with a human body, but in the form of a woman (4).

Indian women’s autobiographies are filled with real life incidents which may be true of any Indian woman’s life. Many narrate the unpleasant way they were received into the world. Writing in the early 1900s, Dhanvanti Rama Rau in *An Inheritance* (1978) tells us of how the dai assisting in the delivery used to charge less for a girl child’s birth, while Urmila Haksar in *The Future that Was* ( 1972) tells us how her nani “never could forgive me for my sex”(6). The birth of Indira Gandhi too was no exception as it is reported in *The Scope of Happiness* (1979) by Vijayalakshmi Pandit : “Mother had not said a son is born
but ‘it’ has been born, in the traditional way she could not bring herself to announce the birth of a daughter” (34).

These women writing autobiographies reveal the discrimination, deprivation and marginality of existence coupled with training to cultivate tolerance, meekness and suppression of self to please others. Maharani Brinda’s *The Story of an Indian Princess* (1953) gives vent to the frustration and claustrophobia of woman’s existence. However, Durgabai Deshmukh’s *Chintaman and I* (1980) and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay’s *Inner Recesses and Outer Spaces* (1986) testify the influence of their mothers and grandmothers who were the early feminists.

Among these biographies and autobiographies discussed here, Nehru women’s auto/biographies enjoy significant space in the literary history of India. The focal point of the present study is, therefore, Nehru women’s auto/biographies as the representative genres of Indian literary tradition. The present study of Nehru women’s auto/biography has an important political agenda too. In the ongoing analysis, two salient facts emerge. First, to activate any kind of political change, articulation of oppression is a precondition. Secondly, a collective testimony is one of the best means of achieving this. The auto/biographical project therefore is not an individual one. If what is personal remains individual and does not lead to a collective, not much gain is to be expected. On the other hand, if the political agenda becomes inclusive and brings under its compass not only the full-fledged feminists but also the different women’s perspectives, it will then pave the way for the politics of women’s liberation.
Each text taken up for the study records a resistance and is radical in some way. Thus, the impact such works has opened up a whole new area for research.

Women auto/biographies are becoming increasingly important as sources of self-perception as well as providing insights into gender relations, social structures, political and social changes and so on. Private and personal writings often become the medium through which women’s consciousness expresses itself. They not only document events but record feelings and attitudes. A close reading of these texts helps in reconstruction of femininity as seen from the point of view of the subject and the narrator.

By studying the status of women in literature and the works of women authors, feminist critics have unveiled some of the biases at work in traditional approaches to literature. Feminists question the learning imparted by traditional humanism which states that, as human beings, we all share basic universal values, and that, although women’s and men’s experience of the world may be different, we have a common view of experience, a collective understanding of language and literature – in short, that we share an unquestioned common sense. Women’s alienation from the literary canon, according to the critics, is due to the fact that the literary works of male authors reflect chiefly a male view of life which is not necessarily women’s experience.

Feminist critics, therefore, view literature as a representational art whose function is to ‘picture’ life, and what is ignored or pushed aside is the part played by language. Consequently, critical approaches influenced by structuralism and deconstruction have challenged the view that language is a stable, predictable medium, and have put into question the notion that writing
merely represents speech, thought or experience. Based on these the feminist critics analyze women’s writings from various perspectives.

**Feminist Consciousness and Literary Studies:**

Moving from Formalism to Marxism and to Structuralism to Psychoanalysis, the type of criticism emerged in 1970’s that became dominant force in western literary studies called Feminism characterized by a global perspective. While Liberal Feminism’s main thrust was on the emphasis of the same educational opportunities and civil rights for women, Marxist Feminism claimed that women’s oppression originated in the introduction of private property and suggested that capitalism itself is the case of women’s oppression.

Radical Feminism argued that it is the patriarchal system that oppressed women, a system characterized by power, dominance, hierarchy and competition, a system that cannot be reformed but only ripped out root and branch. Radical feminists also focused on the biologically origins of woman’s oppression on the ways in which gender (masculinity and femininity) and sexuality have been used to subordinate women to men.

To the Psychoanalyst feminist theory the centrality of sexuality arose out of Freudian theory and theoretical practices as the pre-Oedipal stage and the Oedipus complex. They found the root of women’s oppression embedded deep in her psyche. Juliet Mitchell, a social feminist made clear that woman’s status and function and her interior world (her psyche) must be transformed and emphasized on unity and integration in all respects of women’s lives.

Understanding women not as a single, deterministic category, but rather as a nexus of diverse experience, has led some feminists to advocate and practice personal or auto/biographical criticism. Feminists started questioning
values and ideals represented in the highly acclaimed literary master pieces and the sort of images of womanhood constructed in their work. This enabled them to begin rereading the traditional canon of great literary texts. It was Elaine Showalter who advocated Gynocriticism to deconstruct the sexist bias.

Gynocriticism, a type of feminist criticism focused on literary works written by women devised a special framework within which to examine and evaluate all female authored works. Gynocritics focus on the so-called ‘feminine’ subjects privileged by women authors such as domestic life, intimate experiences and personal family relationships and resisted the predominant ‘patriarchal ideology’.

Feminist critics such as Elaine Showalter paved a way for critiquing women’s writing, not from the traditional male-perspective, but from the alternate female-perspective. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, in her article, “Towards a Feminist Poetics” (1979), Showalter coins the term “Gynocritics” to describe literary criticism based on a feminine perspective. Showalter explains,

In contrast to [an] angry or loving fixation on male literature, the program of Gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adopt male models and theories. Gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture. (131)

She further explains that the goal of Gynocritics is not to erase the differences between male and female writing; rather Gynocritics aims to understand the specificity of women’s writing as a fundamental aspect of
female reality. Showalter’s concept of “feminist-poetics”, in 1979, stimulated the feminist critical thinking about women’s autobiographical writings.

The programme of Gynocritics is to construct a female framework for the analysis of women's literature, to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adapt male models and theories. Elaine Showalter says: “Gynocritics begins at the point when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of the male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture” (“Towards Feminist” 29).

Autobiography was a central case for feminist criticisms in the 1980s, exposing processes of exclusion and marginalization in the construction of literary canons. Not only were women biographers self evidently outside the ‘Great Men’ tradition with which many autobiographical critics operated; generic definitions served to exclude forms of ‘life-writing’, often adopted by women and those outside mainstream literary culture. The extensive feminist literature on women’s auto/biography over the last decade or so introduces many writers previously excluded from discussions, while revealing how ‘androcentric’ the autobiographical tradition and autobiographical criticism have been.

**Origin of ‘New Biography’:**

In the early twentieth century in Britain, the desire of the literary ‘moderns’ to make their absolute difference from their Victorian predecessors finds one expression in the construction of the ‘new biography’.

A failure of Victorian biography, a theme that dominates discussions of the new biography, is shown up here as inadequacy to the felt realities of ‘one’s
own life’, to autobiographical consciousness. Virginia Woolf appears to have coined the term the ‘new biography’ in describing experiments in biography in the 1910s and 1920s—in particular, those of her contemporaries Lytton Strachey and Harold Nicolson. Lytton Strachey introduced a new element of satire in *Eminent Victorian* (1918), an epoch making book, which altered the outlook of a whole generation of English biographers with its ‘debunking’ satirical approach to historical figures. Strachey found biography a depressed industry, as an art, in which the selection and shaping of ‘facts’ is all-important, which had the greater influence by far.

As a result biography is partially figured, in the discourse of ‘the new biography’, as an autobiographical project. The biographer is perceived by a number of critics and practitioners of biography not as a neutral, objective reporter, but as having an active, and, in psychoanalytical terms, even a ‘transferential’ relationship to the biographical subject. In this sense he/she is said to be narrating his/her own story, real or fantasized. The biographer’s awareness of the complexity of the self is often viewed in this period as a consequence of autobiographical self-awareness of the difficulty of knowing and grasping the self.

The early twentieth century explored into biographical text and the birth of new biography as a genre. It cautioned the biographers not to sacrifice truth to illusion. The new biography brings women from the margin of the historical record into history’s mainstream. Therefore there is a stress on women’s auto/biographical works now which focus on the personal as ‘political’ aspects. Feminist literary scholars have proved ‘biography as a masculinity genre’; argued that lived experience of women and men differ and insisted for a scientific interest in biography to lay bare the facts dispassionately, impartially and without a bias. The new biography is here to shatter the myths, ideologies
and traditions that are male dominated through a careful study of research into a woman’s biography.

**New Directions: Auto/biographical Spaces**

As discussed earlier, the autonomy and the separateness of autobiography as a ‘category’ and a ‘genre’ have been in large part maintained by a denial of its relationship to other forms, historical and literary. In the last decade or so, generic and disciplinary borders and boundaries have started to break down. The most interesting auto/biographical theory and practice are being written across traditional conceptual and disciplinary divides.

For many years critics have claimed that autobiography could be recognized for the important area that it is by being sharply demarcated from biography. The Victorians were criticized for defining autobiography as a sub-genre of biography. However, ‘new biography’ in the early part of the century, which linked biography and autobiography, was largely forgotten, or presented as obsolete.

Such a difference of opinion seems apparent when Laura Marcus in *Auto/biographical Discourses* (1994) quotes Wilhelm Dilthey’s terminology stating:

> In a critical and theoretical milieu where the self and its cognates – self-reflection, self-consciousness, self-alienation—were all-important, biography seemed to be largely irrelevant, as if a reflection on another life could have nothing to say about subjectivity or representation of a life in writing. (273)

As a response the impetus has come primarily from feminist critics—that the inadequacy of this conceptual divide has been clearly revealed and far more
stимulating conjunctures occur, showing how autobiography and biography function together. Laura Marcus upholds a feminist standpoint when she states:

Recounting one’s own life almost inevitably entails writing the life of an other or others; writing the life of another must surely entail the biographer’s identifications with his or her subject, whether these are made explicit or not. (Auto/biographical 274).

It is not an overstatement to say that feminist autobiography criticism has had the most impact on the study of auto/biography as a field. Early approaches to the study of autobiography in the United States and France during the 1970s sometimes mentioned texts by women, but as many feminist critics have pointed out, the discourse of representativeness in autobiography criticism was supported by androcentrism in the western world. This discourse meant that critics of autobiography tended to discount autobiographies by women, or they disregarded the importance of gender in the works by women which did get mentioned.

Early feminist scholarship sought to bring women’s writing into the auto/biographical canon. By the late 1980s, scholars were questioning the paradigm of failure and were beginning to develop a poetics of women’s autobiography that principally saw women’s auto/biographical writing as exempt from androcentric assumptions about the development of self in relation to an “other.” Like scholars in other areas of women’s studies, these critics connected androcentrism in culture to androcentrism in discourse, and used aspects of psychoanalysis to explain how women’s rhetoric represents women as selves-in-community.

By the 1990s, feminist critics of auto/biography had turned to other theories of subjectivity to talk about the politics of genre and gender to stress
the importance of the experience of interrelated oppressions based on racial inequality, discrimination based on sexual orientation or, less frequently, discrimination connected to class inequality. These approaches tended to highlight the continuing importance of “experience” as a way to testify to atrocity, while they argued that the genre of autobiography itself was a way to resist oppression through the use of narratives about the self. (Smith and Watson 1992; Friedman 1988; Benstock 1988).

Critics claim the advent of ‘personal criticism’ in a recent development in feminist theory. In Nancy K. Miller’s accounts, it has developed in part out of recent feminist interest in autobiography and a more general feminist concern with the personal. In Miller’s words, as stated in Getting Personal (1991) it “entails an explicitly autobiographical performance within the art of criticism. Indeed, getting personal in criticism typically involves a deliberate move toward self-figuration, although the degree and forms of self-disclosure of course vary widely” (1).

Following Nancy K. Miller’s call in Getting Personal (1991) for an autobiographical personal criticism to critique the fantasy of objectivity found in patriarchal scholarship, Liz Stanley, in The Auto/Biographical ‘I’ (1992), among others, grounds her readings in what she calls an “accountable knowledge” that combines her own experiences as a working class woman with her position as a feminist sociologist (210). Carolyn Steedman in Landscapes for a Good Woman (1986) uses personal experiences to ground her analysis of working class women in a cultural studies context.

Feminist auto/biography studies is still dealing with the problems of its liberal ideological roots, especially in the United States, where the idea that the “real voices” of oppressed women can be heard and “recovered” for the benefit
of those with more privilege has not yet been critiqued in a meticulous way. The term auto/biography is basically a neologism intended to redefine, ‘autobiography’ away from the limits of its component parts, self-life-writing. At the same time term auto/biography indicates the affinities between biography and autobiography as traditionally defined.

Contemporary debates in feminist and post colonist theory have made autobiography a central topic, but today it is now a centre which disperses towards its margins and its boundaries.

**Theoretical Framework and Synopsis:**

Women’s auto/biographies, a recent development in contemporary feminist criticism, are chosen to be read as transparent expression of women’s authentic experience, to the stereotype of mainstream literature, often spoken as male literature. At the same time women’s auto/biographies may possibly expose the double edged nature of the psychic construction of femininity. Therefore, it becomes a vehicle for the expression of the ‘female’ self.

This thesis is an attempt to re-read Nehru women’s auto/biographies from the Gynocentric point of view. The the autobiographical text taken for the study are Krishna Hutheesing’s *With No Regrets*, Vijayalakshmi Pandit’s *The Scope of Happiness* and Nayantara Sahgal’s *Prison and Chocolate Cake* and *From Fear Set Free*. The prime focus is to study Nehru women’s autobiographies projecting an image of private strength and public passivity. And what strategies they adopt as the “self” to be projected is in a double positioning, between public and private, between their own expectations and those of others. Since the ideology of gender makes of woman’s life script a nonstory. This creates a silent space, a gap in patriarchal culture which instead of self-promoting the ‘ideal’ woman is self-effacing. Thus her “natural” story shapes itself not around
the public, heroic life but around the fluid, circumstantial, contingent responsiveness to others. And since, they focus more on private life; they attempt to detach themselves from the public events. This ideology, purely patriarchal, characterizes the life of woman but not autobiography. Actually from that point of view, woman has no “autobiographical self” in the same sense that man does. Again, from that point of view, she has no “public” story to tell.

The thesis examines how the Nehru women developed a dual consciousness, a dual self – a self adhering to the cultural prescription of womanhood and also an inner self which may be quite different. Further, a close examination and association of Nehru women’s autobiography brings forth the control of patriarchal power at three levels– domestication, prescription and expectation. The ultimate resultant is the state of a feminine dilemma of dual self- the dilemma of living with two different, even opposite selves. The nature of public and private selves is for women, in some ways, the reverse of what it is for men. The experience that women share gives to their account of themselves often a characteristic subterranean tone and status. One hears a single note of complaint and feels the bitter tensions of passivity; a social condition, a fate, embodying the concealment rather than absence of force.

This study, thus examines the gender based individuation process of women and how most women solve it in their lives as well as in “life writings” by “underplaying” their inner selves. In other words, they subordinate their inner selves- making them “muted” to borrow a phrase from Showalter – to project an acceptable image of self.

Hence, the present study opens new possibilities to identify the means for “evading an assertive self” in public in favor of a passive, private self, as a
narrative strategy which reflects both a female dilemma and a female solution. As a matter of fact the study of Nehru women autobiographies endorses the multi-dimensionality of women’s socially conditioned roles, a pattern of diffusion and diversity, when they write their autobiographies as well.

Subsequently, this thesis is also an examination of the biographies of Indira Nehru Gandhi portrayed by four different biographers. The study examines the biography on two levels: Firstly, to study ‘New Biography’ as a genre and proposes to place the biography within the cultural context and not a personal portrait of itself. Secondly, the study also proposes to examine within the framework of the Personal is Political, the role and function of an urban Indian woman in a patriarchal society. The textual focus is to study the biographies of Indira Gandhi with a feminist perspective of a resisting reader, and a number of issues are talked about giving substantial evidences from the biographer’s reference.

This study aimed at an exploration of how society view women and what mental conception a creative writer tends to have. Literature is said to be the reflection of society and a biographer plays a major role in the depiction of society in its true sense. A biographer’s impartial laying bare facts as facts, therefore has a tremendous influence in building a positive unbiased image of a woman. A close analysis of her biographies affirms that gender bias brings discrimination even into the lives of educated women belonging to the most privileged families too.

Evidences from Indira Gandhi’s biographies suggest that a strong gender bias pervades in the political arena and even the upper class and the upper caste society does not escape from getting victimized. These attitudinal and hidden
biases against women are powerful forces against efficient women’s participation in politics and nation building.

The purpose is to study the biographies of Indira Gandhi through the concept of *Personal is Political*, is to learn the cultural background, to note the urban Indian women’s passage right into the Indian male world, the political arena of India. In short, the first step is to recognize that “politics” is not the sole preserve of professionals called politicians. The term “politics” in a wider sense means “power” or rather “power relations”. In simple words it means, who does what to whom and in whose interest.

Chapter One, ‘Introduction’, proposes to introduce auto/biography as a modern genre, with special reference to women’s auto/biography. It also aims at defining ‘autobiography’ and ‘biography’ individually at the same time tries to explore the acronym “auto/biography” which hints the interrelatedness of autobiographical narrative and biography. The chapter attempts to provide a brief introduction to the ‘history of women’. Since the earliest times, historical documents have been unjust in recording women’s history, owing to the domination of men. The feminist historians questioned the invisibility of this prototype and set out to rewrite history a new.

The chapter, further, studies the confluence of feminist consciousness and literary studies; and how some feminists advocate and practice personal or auto/biographical criticism. Formulate to understand, ‘woman’ not as a single, deterministic category, but rather as a nexus of diverse experience. Furthermore explains how ‘Feminists’ started questioning values and ideals represented in the highly acclaimed literary master pieces and the sort of images of womanhood constructed in their work. This enabled them to re-read the traditional canon of great literary texts. The argument draws support from
feminist critics of autobiography. It was Elaine Showalter who advocated Gynocriticism to deconstruct the sexist bias.

‘New Directions: Auto/biographical Spaces’, last part of the section introduces the early feminist scholarship sought to bring women’s writing into the auto/biographical canon. Furthermore, it discusses a new interdisciplinary nexus which includes autobiography and biography, at the same time showing how autobiography and biography function together.

Thus, in the introductory section women’s auto/biography as a study definitely gets deeper into the mystery of subjectivity, woman’s enacting a narrative, the problematics of self-presentation, and the calculus of making it published. Further restrictions, the institutions of genre and the canon, where evaluation and gatekeeping are joined, are discussed in detail in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two, ‘Theories of Auto/Biography’, aims to capture the complex interplay of gender related theories of auto/biography as a genre. The central focus here is to locate parameters in the theory of women’s auto/biographies by identifying how critics have read it in relation to dominant auto/biographical theory. In doing so the chapter discusses in detail preoccupations of feminism but also of male theorists of the autobiographical canon at length. The combinations of these different theoretical influences provide an understanding that feminists bring to a concern by way of auto/biography, and are therefore worth closer scrutiny.

This chapter examines some discrepancies between the critical canon and women’s autobiographies from the perspective of content and style, development of the autobiographical self; the hypothesis being the gender-
boundness of the genre. Furthermore the chapter discusses various theoretical points of view, as an attempt to prove that most of the critical theories produced by the male tradition are not applicable to women’s autobiography due to biological, socio-political as well as psycho-analytical reasons; that men and women write their autobiographies differently.

The chapter further concentrates on the development of the tradition of women’s biography within historically and socially specific contexts. An attempt has been here to record the historical consciousness of women’s biography in detail. In view of the fact that life experiences of an individual or individuals are the subject matter of biography. A few landmark feminist scholars and theorist namely Gerda Lerner, Virginia Woolf, Carolyn Steedman Liz Stanley, Kate Millet, Kathleen Barry have been discussed. The chapter also discusses how the ‘new biography’ as a genre is a testimony and an oracle, constructing the ‘white light of fact’ against the colored light of biography revealing that facts are also ‘double faced’ and are open to more than one interpretation. A detailed study of Virginia Woolf and her contemporaries Lytton Strachey and Harold Nicolson is embark on to explore ‘new biography’, bringing the corpse to life.

Chapter Three, ‘Personal is Political: A Theoretical Perspective’ summarizes the theoretical concept of the slogan personal is political. The notion that the personal is political has been central to feminism and over the time has become something of a cliché by now. Yet it is the sheer fecundity of the maxim which has allowed it so broad and popular a usage. The chapter has several major themes that recur with an attempt to articulate that men’s patriarchal power over women is the power relationship in human society. The hypothesis to be established is that power is not confined to the public worlds of
economic and political activity alone, but it characterizes all relationships between sexes; including the most personal.

With reference to the proposed study of Nehru women’s auto/biography, the central point to be discussed in this chapter is the expanded notion of personal politics, i.e.; all relations involving power are political. Furthermore the chapter confers on the public/private distinction in social life and social thought, exploring different dimensions of and approaches to, this grand dichotomy. The caption ‘public/private domain: social/sexual contract’, in the chapter discusses the theories of ‘social’ and ‘sexual’ contract by Rousseau and Pateman respectively. This leads to the key study of the thesis, the concept of patriarchy along with the notion of Personal is Political, as together, these two conceptions have relocated significant political power as well as anticipated a new style of politics.

Gender has a crucial bearing on the research component of this thesis. The chapter further analyzes the concepts of gender. The sub title ‘Paternalistic Dominance: A system of Gender Domination’ discusses the theories of Simone de Beauvoir and other feminist theorists. Thus gender as a tool for analysis encourages an understanding of women’s subordination, oppression and exploitation that distinguish women and men in relation to each other in society. The final section of the chapter concentrates on ground realities of ‘Woman made Woman’ in the Indian set up. The patriarchal practices which reduce women’s status to inferior social beings are further perpetuated by myths and traditions which unfortunately have been embedded in the fabric of every society. The chapter concludes with the revelations of the culture of politics and Indian women in politics. Here, the political form means the realization that personal experiences were part of a richer fabric. Politics in this wider sense
means ‘power’ or rather ‘power relations’: who does what to whom and in whose interests.

Chapter Four, ‘Personal is Political : Nehru Women’s Autobiographies’, is an attempt to study the autobiographies by the Nehru family women, Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Krishna Hutheesing and Nayantara Sahgal. As stated clearly, gyno-criticism is one of the parameters. The focus is to examine predominantly the narrative strategies used, that multiply the voice of the autobiographer, thus resisting the singular “I” upon which the genre has traditionally been based. In commonality these autobiographies emphasize to a lesser extent the public aspects of their lives, the affairs of the world, or even their careers, and concentrate instead on their personal lives – domestic details, family difficulties, close friends and especially people who influenced them.

The study will also look at how these Nehru women as individuals represent themselves and how the slippery nature of memory shapes self-representation. The reasons for deliberate evasion of the real “self” on these women’s part in their self-narratives has been discussed in detail in the current chapter. The implicit details while reading these autobiographies are lack of coherence, deliberate fragmentedness, often appear disjointed, rarely telling anything that represents completion. However, the overriding feature of Nehru women’s autobiographies is their endurance on ‘relationality’.

The study also reflects on the narrative strategies that Nehru women have developed to express “selfhood”. They have taken resort to a form of life-writing which allows them to address their specific needs, and to pursue their respective purposes. But, instead the autobiographies narrate the immediate community, their parents around whom their self identities are constructed and the cultural communities also offer larger and more extensive grounds for
creating identity. It means that they see “ourselves” “through” “others”, “culture” and “community”. The chapter bares three separate sub titles to discuss the narrative strategies assumed to evade the real self.

Chapter Five, ‘Personal is Political : Indira Gandhi’s Biographies’ studies the biographies of Indira Gandhi portrayed by four different biographers, both male and female writers. The study examines the biographies on two levels, firstly, the effort, here is to place the biography within the cultural context and not a personal portrait of itself, reading for gender. Secondly, to examine within the framework of the Personal is Political, the personal struggle of a “woman” Indira Gandhi, her passage of right into the Indian male world, the political arena of Indian nation. The primary texts for the study are the biographies of Indira Gandhi written by Pupul Jayakar’s Indira Gandhi: A Biography (1992), Katherine Frank’s Indira: The Life of Indira Gandhi (2001), and Dom Moraes’s Mrs. Gandhi (1980) and Inder Malhotra’s Indira Gandhi: A Personal and Political Biography (1991). The biographers depict Indira Gandhi, the subject with disparity, encompassing Indira Gandhi’s personal and political life.

Viewing the biographies of Indira Gandhi with a feminist perspective of a resisting reader, a number of issues are discussed about giving substantial evidences from the biographer’s reference. A close reading of the biographies of Indira Nehru Gandhi facilitated the identifying of the oppressive force which constructed a totally different image of the ‘subject’ providing the fact that biographies can also become tools to garb facts into fictions. An ideal purpose is to study the biographies of Indira Gandhi through the concept of Personal is Political and learn the cultural background, to note the urban Indian women’s passage of right into the Indian male world, the political arena of India.
A detailed study of the biographies of Indira Gandhi reflects the whole socio-political context and deems her political representation and participation in Indian politics. This study aimed at an exploration of how society views women and what mental conception of a woman a creative writer tends to have.

It is an attempt to locate the shaping forces that helped Indira Gandhi’s transformation from a shy and frail woman to a powerful politician of international repute. The present study looks at intersection of subjectivities, identities and social processes at the formations of politics during Indira Gandhi’s rule; portrayed by both male and female biographers. It also looks at relations within gender, to understand the contours of male worlds and masculine subjectivities. Another standpoint is to perceive the distinction between feminine and masculine writing in the biographies of Indira Gandhi. To probe in to see the type of powerful self Image Indira Gandhi created for herself, an image that was not stereotyped and unique and hard to emulate. The other interesting line of thought is to see how she was expected to carry on the legacy of patriarchal concept of nation and what was the role played by her ‘gender’ in these politics.

‘Conclusion’, substantiates the hypothesis that gender shapes the auto/biography by/of a female self. Thus understanding women’s experiences, or accounts of them, requires one to read the code of gender. Therefore, the thesis as well, puts forward the premise that auto/biographical texts can be viewed as a literary extension and accordingly these literary genres are ideal methods for writing about the life histories and experiences of women.

Nehru women’s auto/biographies stand as an evidence that though woman’s life-writing does not form a block of national history, in the canonical sense, it surely records the personal, which has a tremendous political relevance
in the context of the national history. *Personal is Political* for almost all the auto/biographical female selves universally, it is more so, in the case of Nehru women, because of their family background. The concluding part of the thesis also indicates possible avenues for further research in the context of this research work.
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