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This research project attempts to study the autobiographies of women writers with a special focus on Amrita Pritam, Kamala Das and Jean Rhys. It is a comparative analysis of their autobiographies, respectively *The Revenue Stamp*, *My Story*, and *Smile Please*. The intention to choose such a topic is to clarify the prejudices and complexities about autobiography on one hand and to justify the ways of creative women towards life and society on the other. The present work is thus rooted in multiple shades of analysis. It studies autobiography in general as well as specific examples. It talks about women writer's autobiographies in general and selected texts in particular. It analyses the problems of women while creating self-narratives and it explains the minute factors and features, involved in the process of writing autobiography, the act of publishing it and the tale of facing its effect and criticism. The project, thus involves a great deal of concentration and care in its observations.

Amrita Pritam, Kamala Das and Jean Rhys happen to come from different locations, geographically and culturally. Amrita Pritam a North-Indian optimist, is a fine comparison for Kamala Das a South-Indian extremist. Both of them, being Indian women represent Eastern sensibility while Jean Rhys being a Caribbean, stands for the Western observations on life. Apart from their socio-cultural ethos, the thinking and behavioural pattern of these women is different although they can be grouped together in terms of some co-incidental affinities. The genuine purpose of the study is beyond the compare and contrast method, i.e. to form some plausible principles and notions about women writers as autobiographers. The comparison only becomes a medium to arrive at such a set of principles.

Autobiography is the articulation of one's vision of life. It is the narrative presentation of an individual's life-experience. It comes very closer to the reality of experience by way of authentic perceptions, truthfully organized and expressed by the autobiographer. Viewed as a literary text, autobiography has different dimensions, generic, linguistic, critical and theoretical. Its profound connection with subjectivity, truth, self, individuality and identity, makes it an intense, interesting but structurally complex work of art.

Unlike other literary forms, autobiography entertains obscurity, complexity and multiplicity of elements, so much so that one finds it almost impossible to
scientifically affirm any theory about it. Being a self-oriented form of writing, its vision holds potential psychological features and specifies the art of personalizing in literary expression.

Autobiography as a piece of literature, happens to be very analogous to diary, memoir, letters, biography and autobiographical writings in general. It is only in the critical vision and theoretical outlook, that one can distinguish autobiography from the other personalized writings, by way of observing minute features of it. A novel or a poem can be autobiographical in its elements, but not exactly autobiography in its theoretical implications. In generically formed conditions and views of the life-narrative as autobiography, however, can be studied in detail with the multi-faceted discussions. Autobiography as the element or content of a writing is not the direct concern of critics who perceive autobiography as a distinct literary genre with its own characteristic features.

In studying autobiography, one has to hold in view that the person is still there beyond autobiography. It may offer the truth but the truth is not only that which it offers. It may render the history and the experience of one's life but not the whole of it. It might reflect the self-image of the author but not the complete self. There is many a slip between the glass of autobiography and the lips of the writer, to put it figuratively.

For varied reasons, women write autobiographies and diaries, offering their willy-nilly performance, secret or risky statements of confession and unusual or different predicaments in life. Among women, creative writers are considered to be the 'fallen angles' having rebelled against the male-god in several roles as father, husband, brother, or any other like those. Women writers who write their autobiographies are condemned and admired, examined and appreciated, ignored and attacked, even promoted and silenced by the duplicacy of the apparently sophisticated social masters of literary world. Diminished by their male-oriented backdrop and outraged by their sense of revolt, women writers, however, accept the ordeal by the fire of self-narration fearlessly and do survive all such ordeals, with positive or negative outcome. The genesis of their profound conflicts lie in the collective consciousness of their viewers and in their own unique consciousness of themselves as independent individuals. Their identity is thwarted by the crowd they are lost in and their self-esteem is at stake in their isolation and estrangement from the rest.
Women writers, however, venture upon the terrain of self-exploring voyages through autobiography. By such a venture, they violate the ritualistic set-patterns of feminine culture in the world of male monarchy. Apart from defying the conservative codes of female entity and her conduct, they cross the barriers of patriarchy in linguistic and metaphorically functional manner, of self-expression.

Amrita Pritam’s autobiography *The Revenue Stamp* is striking for three major implications. First and foremost, it uncovers the truth of feminine dreams of love and passion, positively and transparently. Second, it views the author as poet first and then a woman, but a woman-in-love. And third, it records authentic self-analysis of an individual placed in chaotic and conflicting set-up of religious, national and personal emotional crisis. *The Revenue Stamp* is the stamp of Amrita Pritam’s signature on the large revenue of her creative contribution to this chaotic world. It is her vision of growing self and maturing mind through a series of minor and major phases of life. The greatness of Amrita Pritam is in the endless efforts she has put in, to cherish and intensify her creative abilities. The revenue is thus her creativity and the stamp is her self.

Kamala Das, the devotee of love-god with almost satanic spirit of active enthusiasm has written *My Story* to shoot the never-ending disputes about whether this is really her story or not and, if it really is, how far it is a story? The major trend of Kamala Das’s writings is raising questions and leaving those without any possibilities of answer. She seems to enjoy the creation of stunning reactions and people react, stunned, to her creations, as the sign of successful sensibility she possesses. Das powerfully exemplifies the extreme form of transparency and honesty so much so that her fluctuations of ideas and perceptions appear too quick to be appreciated by the contemporary readers. Yet she is the most popular poet because of her never-failing sexist stance in the outspoken renderings of relationships, that the readers do value and find outstanding. *My Story* as a woman’s dialogue with her past self, stripteases the socio-cultural finery of pseudo-moral system.

Jean Rhys, the wanderer in quest of placement, identity and secure existence, is the author of *Smile, Please*. Haunted by melancholy and sense of loss, Rhys endured a long history of transitory compromises and fruitless relationships throughout her life. Agonized by isolation and terrorized by her illusory fears, she needed the voice ‘Smile, Please’ and yet, when the photographer wished her to smile, she could not. From that stage of her girlish bewilderment to the last stage of her life,
in her early eighties, Rhys found it very difficult to offer the smile of fulfilment in the world of agonies. Smile that recognizes the happiness as a plausible destination, was always a strange word, for her, bringing back that lack of fulfilment and happiness which it claimed to identify. Rhys’s autobiography is incomplete, incidentally but her biography helps one to supplement the impressions about her in full-fledged vision. Even her novels, partially autobiographical, can be used to confirm her life-story, through the plight of her heroines.

Comparing different women writers with different creative sensibilities, one finds some plausible principles about women writers as autobiographers, and some critical notions about their flaws in technical sense or limitations, inherent and externally imposed. Those principles and notions can be seen one by one:

1) Principles:

i) Women writers in general, write autobiographies motivated by some quest, leaving them restless. In particular, Amrita Pritam wrote *The Revenue Stamp* in her quest for truth as a voyage by a poet, with inner consciousness from one reality to another. Kamala Das wrote *My Story* due to her quest for love, bringing out the suffering of woman in the world of lust and power, and pseudo-moral codes of existence. Jean Rhys wrote her *Smile Please* promoted by her quest for identity since ‘what people said’ about her was not her genuine identity. She wanted to share the truth of her identified self in autobiography.

ii) Women writers write their self-narratives exploring their self-respect, dependent on some ‘other’, probably male agent, in their vision of life. In specific instances, Amrita Pritam’s autobiography moves around her father, Sahir; Imroz and Sajjad for self-evaluation. Kamala Das’ story revolves round her husband and lovers to reach the confessional self-estimate she thought of offering before death. Jean Rhys’s autobiography vaguely outlines the husband, the lover and her biography proves that her life was actually depressed by those males including Ford.

iii) Women writers do not generally pay much attention to the minor members of their familial backdrop, as siblings, children or aunts and uncles, unless they have some association with those, in their memory. In case of these three writers, Amrita traces back the link of her mind to her aunt; Kamala does it to her aunt, uncle and also her brother; Jean Rhys recalls her nurse,
her aunt and her vague memory of a brother. In these women’s autobiographies their isolation begins in childhood or teenage and finds no female or male companion to share it. Kamala mentions some of her teenage friends but not very intimate ones.

iv) Women writers find their delicate minds estranged from mother or father or both the parents and suffer a sense of loss, lack of warmth throughout their life, which they depict in their autobiographies. In the autobiographies of these women, Amrita lost her mother and suffered a sense of rejection by her father. Kamala suffered a distance with her mother and could not intimate herself with the father. Jean Rhys too suffered a fear of outraged mother and sense of neglect from father. The childhood agony of lack of parental tenderness left these women haunted by a search for belonging and protection.

v) Husbands play generally a negative or indifferent role in the making of women writers’ careers as poets or novelists. Among these women, Amrita Pritam’s husband, Pritam Singh had indifferent role and her inlaws never supported her careerist approach. Kamala Das’s husband Madhav Das, as her story records, played a negative role by ignoring her emotional needs and as she tells, he tried to promote her writings, in late age probably, when he wanted the money it brought in. The husbands of Jean Rhys were too self-occupied to promote her for becoming a novelist. Although the second of those, Leslie Smith, being an editor himself, appeared to motivate her to some extent. It is a different truth, however, that these women determinantly became writers.

2) Notions:

These notions are not generalized. They are the outcome of comparing these three women’s autobiographies, and may or may not be applicable to other women writers:

i) A woman writes autobiography to find fulfilment like Amrita Pritam.

ii) A woman writes life-story to earn money, as did Kamala Das.

iii) A woman writes her life-history to locate her true order of life as Rhys.

iv) A woman searches for truth but without disillusionment as Amrita.

v) A woman finds love but not ever-lasting and true, as Kamala.

vi) A woman settles as a writer but is lost in crowd as Rhys.
vii) A woman writer pursues harmony in love outside marriage like Amrita.
viii) A woman writer seeks love in and out of marriage like Kamala.
ix) A woman writer finds love only in marriage as Jean Rhys.
x) These three women writers expose the failure of marriage.
xii) These women are apt models for a woman who wishes to survive and preserve her creativity in the world of ‘contemporaries’, ‘categorisers’ and critics.
xi) These women have proved their courage, integrity and balance despite all crucial life-experiences and criticism.

xiii) These women writers have voiced the prohibited issues and have violated the established system in breaking the silence against injustice, hypocrisy and discriminations.

xiv) These women have widened the boundaries of woman’s thinking by setting the spirit of revolt as admirable part of character.

xv) These women have invested their life in fruitful art of writing and have worked out successfully.

Thus, the study forms some principles and notions on the basis of so-far-studied observations, in these autobiographies. The study is pursued and complete with the hope of clarifying its objectives, inferences and critical and aesthetic remarks. These women writers have been capable of vast contribution while this project could make use of very little share of their contribution. Aware of its worth and limitations, the researcher hopes to continue and compensate further by extending the study in the same line.