"To understand oneself,
is the classic form of consolation;
to elude oneself,
is the romantic."

George Santayana

Winds of Doctrine
INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research is binary. It attempts a comparative analysis of three autobiographies, written by the distinguished women writers - Amrita Pritam, Kamala Das and Jean Rhys, on one hand, and on the other, it probes deeper into the two concerned areas of critical inquest: one, being formal, functional and structural discussion of the literary form 'autobiography' and the second is essence and existence, making and shaping of women's writings as observed specifically in these selective autobiographies.

The object of elective 'autobiography' as the subject of the present study is to keep pace with the growing rise, interest and popularity the form has achieved. Its aim is also to relate the backdrop of the form to female psyche, with special references to women who are creative writers. The researcher claims no complete expertise to defend or offend any previous or contemporary exploration upon the topic. Nor does the study propose to challenge any literary, theoretical, structural or intellectual directions or disputes concerning the topic.

The study is only an effort to know and locate certain plausible principles to relate different autobiographies. It endeavours to discern and point out similarities and differences among the three women in the context of their texts. One may find it difficult to agree or disagree with the inferences collected and the conclusions arrived, by the researcher but those are substantiated with appropriate quotations, arguments and statements to compensate for certain inevitable complications in and about the form 'autobiography'.

Autobiography can be viewed properly as the outcome of 'New-consciousness' in literature, 'self-consciousness' in life and 'gender-consciousness' for women in society. This project is confined to the critical investigation of three selected women writers as autobiographers. The scheme of this study is simplistic in appearance and intense in vision while it moves ahead through impressions, observations and inferences of the three texts as well as their creators. The complexities regarding generic and semantic structure of the text are referred, discussed and simplified as per convenience and suitability of the chosen writers.

There are six chapters planned according to the necessity of working on specified aspects rather than generalized width of the project. The first chapter begins with observations on autobiography as a literary genre. The discussion of generic aspects includes its position, identification, kinship with other adjacent forms and the
structural analysis of elements, motives, types, principles and limitations. This beginning constitutes the essential intensified focus of the study to channelize it further.

The second chapter deals with the form in a historical perspective following the discussion of gender-consciousness and women's position as writers as well as autobiographers. It moves ahead to concentrate on the question of women's autobiographies and feminist perceptions. It forms a part of the whole project which is not feminist in its outlook. The real direction of the study is towards the reflection of womanhood, women writers' perceptions and their gender-consciousness affecting their writings. The end of the chapter attempts a quick look at previous autobiographies in the manner of survey to connect the first two chapters to the next parts designed. The purpose of initial generalization in these two chapters is to unify the scattered impressions about various intricate units of the genre and its gender-association in modern perspectives.

The third chapter pays special attention to the first text adopted for the analytical focus, The Revenue Stamp by Amrita Pritam. Introducing the writer formally, the chapter begins to perceive the private self, the socio-cultural ethos, the shades of self-revelation in an account of childhood and youth, love, marriage and children and other aspects. The formal and functional trial is made by looking into the reflection of womanhood, perceptions as poet, language and style and the final glance at limitations of the writer. In conclusion of the chapter, the possible inferences and interpretations are reviewed in particular.

The fourth chapter shifts the focal point to the second text, My Story by Kamala Das. The process of the writer's becoming is perceived with the detailed study of her self-presentation, her portrayal of involvement within and without marriage, her memories of girlhood and quest for love, the orientation of her mind, spirit of protest, isolation, nostalgia and creativity, her agony as woman and the social set up around her. The findings about her final balance through the prolonged conflicts are put in conclusion of the chapter updating the analysis with her present identity as Kamala Suraiya.

The fifth chapter moves on to the third text, Smile Please by Jean Rhys. It examines the text, keeping in mind the design of previous two texts analysed, the author's early memories of childhood, youth and maturity. It views Rhys' life-story in a slightly different manner since her autobiography is incomplete. The novels of
Rhys, being transparently autobiographical, are taken into consideration to compensate for the lack of completeness of the text. Her biography also is considered as a source to view her life and vision. Rhys' search for identity, her conflicts and isolation, her ironic existence and her disillusionments in agonizing human relations are the aspects discussed.

The sixth chapter, apparently of conclusion, actually compares and contrasts the trilogy by way of finding out similarities and dissimilarities. It specifies and generalizes at once, on the basis of inferred observations and conclusions about women's autobiographies. To make the study a full-fledged report, it reaches out to the problems and limitations, possibility of solutions and suggestions along with critical commentaries. The final chapter also aims at achieving the finality of so-far-studied aspects by ending it with necessary clarifications, impressions and remarks. The end of the project is made elaborate to encourage appraisals and further endeavors in the same line of women writers.

The interdisciplinary nature of this project may appear obvious to those who combine autobiography with other forms of writing and overlook the individuality of it. Some even find it natural to place the genre in history, biography or poetry. The researcher has no objection to such views but expects to create space for the view followed here. It is also necessary to mention here that the 'feminist' point-of-view is not preferred by this project although it studies women's autobiographies. Apart from a small unit on feminist perspective in general and casual references wherever required, feminism is given no place herein for two basic reasons: one, it would obviously occupy the whole space of discussion about the topic and the project would find itself reduced to only a feminist vision of the chosen books; second, it would unnecessarily theorize the interpretations that are studied as critical or analytical rather than classified or compartmentalized into a single perspective. Feminist standpoint may restrict the vision of the researcher and may offer one-sided result. For the fear of colouring the interpretations, it is necessary to avoid feminism from the main focus, although it is not possible to escape it completely, the topic being women writers. Wherever essential, it is regarded as one of the possible viewpoints for an appropriate understanding of the theme.

Finally, there already have been a number of critical volumes on the subject of autobiography and yet another attempt appears an overdo. It is essential to mention, that the adequate rethinking has been done as to its utility, and the justification drawn