2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter reviews the writings on the women autobiographies by the scholars and the different aspects they have observed in their critical studies of the individual writers, especially from the feminist literary point of view. The most important study of the South Asian Studies like Taslima Nasrin’s ‘Amar Meyebela’, ShobhaNarayan’s ‘Monsoon Diary: A Memoir with Recipes’, 2003 and Nayantara Sahagal’s Prison and Chocolate Cake, 1954.

Normally, an autobiography as a genre of literature deals with writer’s past experiences of own life. At the same time, reflect certain historical references for the researcher put forth, either to study and evaluate them in new perspectives or by comparing these writers with their contemporaries. The study undertaken here, shows that there are very few women writers who, have written their memoirs in Indian English literature. However, it is an attempt to access from the Indo-Asian literature to prove the point of feministic approaches in general.

In an autobiography, the writer must not give an account of his external life and chronological order of events as happened in his/her life. However, it should reflect the inner life and emotions of the writer of conscious and unconscious mind. He should combined external and internal life in literary expression with artistic control of views.

He should include those events may be social, religious, political or economic during his/her era objectively and provide historical references. An autobiography or memoir has different connotations such as Diary or Letter Writing. The autobiography, the memoir, diary and letter, constitute what is termed literature of self-revelation.

The ever-changing reality of life inevitably reflects itself in literature. The position of women in society is no exception to this phenomenon. The status of women all over the world particularly in India has been undergoing a rapid change in recent times. Women are at the centre point of culture, but they are tied with emotional walls of the family relationships. The Indian Writers have voiced their feelings through their sensibilities, their awareness about feminine problems. Kamala Das, the noted poet and writer of English fiction, in her memoir
writes, ‘Often I had toyed with the idea of drowning myself to get rid of my loneliness, which is not unique in any way, is natural to all. I have wanted to find rest in the sea and an escape from involvement’”.6

The present study undertaken by the researcher is about feminist sensibility in the autobiographies of the five Indian women writers. The purpose of this study is to find out the effect and impact of feminist movement in India. The feminist thought and the feminist movement in the west have had some influence on the women’s movement in developing countries like India.

The awareness of the self and the ultimate refuge in the self are incredible experiences in the women’s literature in India. The awareness of the self is nothing but the awakening of women’s consciousness. Elaine Showalter, noted feminist herself has expressed how crucial this awakening is to feminism. When she says, “how much easier, have less lonely, it is not to be awaken, yet we cannot ourselves to go back to sleep”.7

**Leena Chandorkar (2002)** presents comparative studies of women’s autobiographies in her book, ‘Me, Myself, the study of six women’s autobiography’. This study is different in many respects, as it is related to women writers of East and west together. There are three American women writers and remaining three from Indian literature. This is supposed to be the first attempt of its kind of cross-cultural examinations. It involves American and Marathi autobiographies by using the feminist literary approach. This book broke new ground in the area of autobiography-studies. This book was aim at people who are interested in autobiography-studies and women’s studies. Since, the approach used is feminist and the study is comparative in nature, the subject of book has international appeal.

**Barat Urbasi (2003)** in her studies, she has stated that Taslima Nasrin is the most controversial south Asian writer living in exile from Bangladesh. Bangladesh has banned her novel Lajja. It is a coincidence that Nasrin and Salman Rushdie both are exile writers belonging to Asian continent. They are living in the west for shelter and are facing death threats or fatwa from their fundamentalist’s people. Nasrin prefers to call herself as asocial artist and not a writer. She is
perhaps the only writer from the south Asian literature, who has expressed her views unambiguously or unequal gender relationships in society.

**S.C.Sharma, Shweta Bakshi. (2003)** The writers express in the present study, the life style of an American culture, as fast food is the daily component of their diet. Shobha Narayan’s Memoir Monsoon Diary is a nostalgic ride to the past. Narayan as a food writer has often remarked that food and culture has a linked. As Narayan writes, “The first foods that I ate were rice and ghee. I know this because my mother told me so. Further, she adds that smell can carry a memory and certain foods can compress the memory of an entire childhood into them.”

As a very young child, Narayan went with her mother to her Nallama’s house just so that her mother could deliver her brother. That little while turned into four years all of which, Narayan remembers fondly, “In the morning, I would sit in my grandmother’s warm kitchen nursing a cup of owaltime and watching her combines spices and vegetables with dazzling a plumb”

**Kashmiri Anjum Zamarud Habib’s Prisoner no 100 (2010)** narrates her experiences of Tihar jail in the present autobiography. She has revealed harsh confessions about her jail term and life as a prisoner. She writes, “In the DCP’s room, one of the officers, said to me,” Begum Sahiba you are a leader of Khawateen Martza. We will strip you, take your pictures, print posters and put them all over the country. You will not be able to step out again”. She further narrates, “in all the long months that I served my jailed term, I waited and hoped that perhaps my comrades and well-wisher’s from the Hurriyat would visit me. It could be just a coincidence that they made every possible effort to get our male colleague released but, left me to rot in jail”.

Anjum Zamarud Habib’s Prisoner No 100 is a searching account of life, as a Kashmiri woman’s inmate in Tihar jail. Prisoner no 100 clearly hints that memoir is on the way, as she argues, “prisoner’s not a story, it happened to me. I was a political prisoner and I was treated like a common criminal. It is my moral duty to say that my rights were violated”.

A Sister Jesme (2011) state in her autobiography, ‘Amen- the Autobiography of a Nun’, presents the true picture of her experiences as a nun. She states, “The day for confession arrives, and many of us are upset. When I asked why they continue for confession programme? Are you not aware of the fact that the priest has been kissing each of them?”

Noted psychoanalyst Ashok Nagpal
observes,” Memoirs are an attempt to re-stage with dialogue as in a theatre scene, to look at what is not easy to look at in us”.

Memoirs are a more intuitive way to address those people who did or received something wrong. As Rajan Sengupta, editor, Penguin India, puts it: “incounting a narrative of a life, as you would want to be seen by others”.15

Now, the reviews of the five women writers under the study: they are Amrita Pritam, Kamala Das, Shobha De, Laxmi Bai Tilak and Urmila Pawar. These women writers have feminist approach in their memoirs. Let us discuss the memoir of Amrita Pritam’s The Revenue Stamp.

**Amrita Pritam’s The Revenue Stamp (2006)**

Amrita Pritam is anoted poet and a novelist. She has produced over 100 books, of poetry, fiction, biographies, essays, a collection of Punjabi folk songs and an autobiography. These are translated into several Indian and foreign languages.

In 1935, Amrita got married to Pritam Singh, son of a leading hosiery merchant of Lahore’s Antalkali Bazaar. In 1960, Amrita left her husband for poet Sahir Ludhianvi. The story of her love life of Sahir remained incomplete and Amrita found solace in the companionship of the renowned artist and writer Imroz. She spent the last forty years of her life with Imroz. Their life together is also the subject of a book, Amrita Imroz, a love story.

L. U. Menon (1989) has made a comparative study of Amrita Pritam’s, ‘The Revenue stamp’ and Kamala Das’s ‘My Story’. Shri Menon observes, “Both Amrita Pritam and Kamala Das have unconventional ways of thinking and have therefore become quite controversial. They do not confront to the established norms of the society they defy them. They have revolted against the traditional man-woman relationship. Their attitude to sex is different from the puritanical attitude of their contemporaries. They challenge all the taboos. They disapprove of the conventional marriage of girls at an early age and the wide age gap between husband and wife”.

Mothushi Chkravarti (1995) observes, “Hypocrisy and paradox co-exist in the Indian socio-religious context of which the women as a class, has been victims. Autobiographies by Indian women, including kamala Das’s ‘My Story’, are expository of peculiar apartheid committed on
Regarding the language of the autobiography, Anees Jung writes, in her article, ‘Living Legend: Amrita Pritam’, “There is no harking to childhood that was denied, a youth that was disturbed or living that was filled with tribulations. When Amrita Pritam talks about her life, it acquires the force and majesty of a waterfall, still in the beginning, full in the end in between fragmented by the fury of speeds and boulders.” Her narration is very transparent in autobiography, revealing her convictions more than her conditions in life.

Kamala Das’s My Story (1974)
The noted poet of Malayalam literature has made shocking confessions in the present autobiography. She has given a true account of her childhood days to her illness in the present memoir. There are references of her extramarital affairs and marital dissatisfaction throughout her life.

Simon De Beauvoir (1976) cites that, women used to attract others with clothes. Kamala Das as Narcissist also opines the same situation in her life in the following lines from her autobiography as a sad sacrifice, “I have stretched my two dimensional nudity on sheets of weeklies, monthlies, quarterlies, a sad sacrifice.”

T. Sai Chandra Mouli, (2010) observes that stories are works of art. He admits that publication of ‘My Story’, Kamala Das’s much talked about autobiography is controversial. People began to treat her art, as life and to see her life in whatever, she wrote. She too has to suffer in silence and in imposed solitude. Yet, she thought fearlessly, more so when she wrote as an Indian English fiction writer.

Ronald Brothers, (2010) have their observations about Kamala Das and her writing style. In their article they have written, “Linguistically, the author is never more than the instance. Kamala Das, the person or her personality is not reflecting in her writings. What we get is true feminine sensibility, feminine spirit and the desperation of feminine sensibility for its expression in the language, which is not hers.”
Anees Jung, (2010) makes her analysis of the Kamala Das in her autobiography about the use of figures of speech. She states that, “Archetypes are expressive of the fact that, she is not at ease while expressing her genuine feelings and emotions. It does not means, that she is not sincere towards her sensibility”.

Hongsha Phomrong (2010) Kamala Das in her book My Story,” her true selfhood is not reflected. She insists on being herself in the midst of all kinds of measures mounted on her. Her story shows, how her urge for identity and liberation finds its fruition and fulfilment in her creative writings”.

Neeraj Kumar, (2009) according to him,”Selective Memory’ does not depict the continuous chronological flow like an autobiography. Here, Shobha omits, sums up, and comments about the large chunks of her life. Her readers are awestruck with her narrative technique. A temporality is characteristic of both autobiography as well as memoir. The autobiography is written with her conscious approach”.

S. Y. Thakore, (2011) is of the opinion that,”De’s life story definitely has an autobiographical charm. She has a wonderful My Story in selecting and weaving a chain of such events that have shaped her mind and influenced her character. The real charm of an autobiography consists in the image of self emerges through it. The depiction of the self is at the centre in autobiography. It is clear that, too many events and characters down the charm of the self in autobiography. Selective Memory is a record of her achievements, her views on life, society and human relationships but it is not a full circle to her life. This fractured selfhood emerges at the end when she does not find her own words to express and quotes from Frank Sinatra’s song, ’I did it my way’.

Maya Pandit (2007) states that ‘Dalit literature and women’s autobiography is represented by Daya Pawar through her autobiography Baluta. She is the leading person for the Dalit literature influencing many women writers like Urmila Pawar and Baby Kamble. There are autobiographies of Urmila Pawar and Baby Kamble as ‘Aaydan’ and ‘Prisons We Broke’. Both of them have highlighted the problems of oppression and exploitation of Dalit women’.
Sharmila Rege, (2009) states in her study about Pawar’s autobiography ‘Aaydan’ that, ‘Dalits or untouchables make up India’s poorest class, forbidden from performing anything but the most undesirable and unsanitary duties. For years, Dalits were racially inferior and polluted and forced to live in isolated communities. In this frank and intimate memoir, Pawar not only shares her tireless efforts to surmount hideous personal tragedy but also conveys the excitement of an awakening, consciousness during a time of profound political and social change’.26

Rani Rajbil (2009) states in her study of dalit literature and forms an opinion that, “Dalit authors are able to show not only the hostile circumstances in which, Dalit’s live but also their struggle for emancipation from caste. Religion has played a decisive part in the writings of Dalit authors. Urmila Pawar’s Aaydan is another memoir of Dalit exploitation and show in details how they are tortured. There are valuable references of the struggle of three generations of social history. The writings have something of an attraction for Dalit modernity”.27

Baisnee, Valerie, (1974) has cited in her article, ‘Gender Resistance’, “The Weave of My Life’ is the memoir of an untouchable caste woman in India. She is an excellent story- teller, woven skilfully her stories alive. She gives details of what daily village life was like in the time of her grandmother andin her childhood. She also talked about how things have changed for Dalit’s during their lifetime. She gives some information about Hinduism and Buddhism and the political movements that change the life”.28

Sundaram L. V. (2007) states, “The heroic struggle of Laxmibai from the ‘Sketches of Memory’, reminds us of caste barriers of the time frame. These norms are violations of human dignity themselves. Thanks for the wonderful introduction which reveals the historical background of her time”.29

Meera Bai Ranade (2007) cited that “Laxmibai’s spirit of confidence, sense of self and strength of will were far ahead of her times. Her memoir displays her phenomenal growth from illiterate child bride to renowned poet, writer, orator, and social reformer. In women’s education...
with a distinct identity that was at the same time entitled with and separate from that of her husband the famous Marathi revolutionary poet and christenconvert, Narayan Wamanrao Tilak”.30

Vishwas Yashwanat Ghaskardi (2008) states “Laxmi Bai Tilak’s autobiography Smruti Chitre dwells on the season of patriarchy and ritualism of her era and her resolve to follow her conscience. However, Laxmibai has no formal education but through Tilak’s encouragement, she learned to read and write Marathi, mastering the language to the extent at later stage writing her autobiography ‘Smruti Chitre’.”31