



## **CHAPTER – II**

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## **1. The Nature and Scope of Autobiography**

It is difficult to classify autobiographies with reference to motives, as motives are always mixed. The classification of autobiographies as subjective and objective ones on the basis of the two types of experience is to make a very broad classification, which can hardly be of any help in a conclusive discussion. Truly speaking, a good autobiography is neither wholly objective nor wholly subjective. It is best to classify an autobiography according to the mission or calling of the individual writer. Just as a man is recognized by his ways, that is, what he does and how he behaves in society, that is, by social function to which his biological functions are subordinated. The reduction of man to a mere tool or mission is not an advisable way of dealing with humans. But the classification of autobiographies according to mission or function has an advantage. The nature of experience of the writer having the same profession and calling, to a great extent, is similar and comparable ; hence the division of autobiographies into categories on this basis seems much more practical. Religion, politics and literary activity constitute three major missions of humanity and they provide themes for most autobiographic writing as well.

Imagination plays a vital role in creative literature. It is with the help of imagination that a short story, a poem or a novel may be written. But autobiographies deal with a truthful record of the course of the author's life. Thus the aim of an autobiography is to give the truth about oneself. Autobiography is "Literature of personal revelation."<sup>1</sup> The main interest of autobiographies lies in conscious or unconscious self - portrayal by the

author. Writing autobiography is an art – a fact that has been universally acknowledged.

In an autobiography a great emphasis is laid on introspection, or on the significance of the author's life against a wider background. Nehru writes : "Essentially an autobiography is a personal document and therefore, it reflects personal views and reactions. But the person who wrote it became merged, to a large extent, in the larger movement and therefore represents, in a large measure, the feelings of many others."<sup>2</sup> The writer, besides giving an account of his external life, by and large in a chronological order, also gives an account of his inner life, that is, the sensations, ideas and emotions that keep floating not only through his conscious self, but also through the subconscious one.

Normally, autobiographies are likely to be sketchy and slipshod, but they can be written seriously, systematically and artistically. Northrop Frye points out that writing of autobiographies involves artistic selection and concentration. He writes : " Autobiography is another form which merges with the novel by a series of insensible gradations. Most autobiographies are inspired by a creative and therefore fictional impulse to select only those events and experiences in the writers' life that go to build up an integrated pattern."<sup>3</sup>

An autobiographer records his own experiences as a participant in the events of life, whereas a 'memoir' writer records his experiences as an observer of other people and events happening around him. Both external and internal life should find literary expression and this needs not only a command over the language, but also an artistic self-control, and consequent shifting and ordering of material – everything which is extraneous, which does not have a bearing on the formation of the

writer's personality is to be painstakingly shifted. Digressions and anecdotes, though they impart richness and variety, are to be reduced to the minimum.

Since autobiography cannot be 'finished', the life or the progress through life that any such text purports to present can only be one that is in-the-making and therefore a fragment of a life. Moreover, what is portrayed "is not simply the narrative of the voyage, but also the voyage itself."<sup>4</sup> Often enough, that the journey of a self through time is more central to autobiographies than is the self who is making the journey, for the voyage determines in a large measure the self that the voyager will become. Nirad Chaudhuri argues : " For a very simple reason an autobiography cannot have the same definite and logical ending as it is always possible to give to a biography. Thus, most autobiographies are brought to a close by their authors at points arbitrarily chosen by themselves."<sup>5</sup> The biographer closes the history of the protagonist after his death. An autobiographer cannot go on narrating the events of his life till the end of his life. He chooses a point especially when he has reached the height or when he has got his personality well-framed. Each and every autobiographer chooses a definite point. Gandhiji stopped writing his autobiography after the 1920's, because after that period his life became public and his each and every event was being observed by the congress workers.

In autobiography, as in other good art forms, shifting and ordering of material is unavoidable. If a work is to have a literary value, the writer of an autobiography must, above all, be truthful. There should be no exaggeration and no concealment of truth. The author must purposefully avoid the temptation towards self-glorification. The influences – social,

cultural, literary, political and others – which have gone into the making of his personality must be fully brought out without any exaggeration or under statement. As an author is a product of his surroundings and circumstances, he has to take into account all situations while writing about his environment. If the situations and circumstances have made him go astray, and he could not avoid doing so, the autobiographer should not hesitate to depict them. He must not hide his weaknesses. The account of his growth and maturity must go hand in hand with the narration of the story of his external life with all its joys and sorrows. Darrel Mansel states : “ The autobiographer, like every other relater of events..... is engaged in a process of purposeful selection.”<sup>6</sup> Autobiographies, as is the case with novels, involve selection and integration of personal experiences. The selection of experiences or events to be included in an autobiographical text, and sometimes, more important, those to be omitted, is a difficult task. The self that the author is revealing is part of the autobiographer’s self–creation, or self re–creation.

What the autobiographer perceives or wishes and what his or her identity may be at the moment of writing shadows what he or she was. In an effort to deal with the past, Barret Mandel is of the view : “ The autobiographer discloses the truth of his or her being in the present.”<sup>7</sup> Autobiography is an effort to recapture the past. Autobiography is, James Olney stated : “ A monument of the self as it is becoming.”<sup>8</sup> Autobiography is also a self – portrait, a deliberately drawn image of the self, a fragment of the self that the autobiographer wishes others to see and himself begins to know. If all of us create a face to meet the faces that we meet, autobiographers create the selves that the faces reflect. They involve some degree of masking and performing; they assume

guises and poses; they dress themselves up or down. And these very maskings, these autobiographical self-creations, are part of the artfulness of the autobiographical endeavor. It is in the context of its selectivity and shaping and, most notably, of self creation that, as Burton Pike observes : “All autobiography is fiction.”<sup>9</sup> The Autobiographer himself being a unique self and at the same time a representative of his world.

Autobiography is an art that combines in itself the elements of both literature and history. It not only presents before us an image of the autobiographer's self but it also presents a creative history of the period through which he or she has lived. Autobiography, by its very nature, brings to us an increased awareness of the nature of the author's self and the human condition. Autobiography appeals to the reader, because it helps him find an order and a meaning in life which is not always found in experience itself. A genuine autobiography is both an essay in truth and the story of an experiment in being and becoming. So, it combines in itself the most significant features of philosophy, psychology and history. Thus the aim of autobiography succinctly, is to present the truth about oneself. It may be the truth about one's moral, spiritual and religious beliefs, or the truth of worldly or material achievements, or the truth of one's professional life. It may also reveal one's outlook. An autobiography may also contain comments on crucial incidents and personages that one has come across.

Thus, the text is written by the narrator about his own self, and the subject as actor becomes the object. M.H.Abram's opinion about autobiography is worth quoting. He writes : “Autobiography is a biography written by the subject about himself.”<sup>10</sup> Over the years, autobiography has seen a transition from subject to object. Now, away

from the 'great man' view of autobiography, the emphasis on the static subject of the autobiography has evolved into a greater emphasis on the reconstruction of life. In a memoir emphasis would not be on the author's developing self, but on the people he had known and the events he had witnessed. Memoir would be different from the private diary or journal, they are the day-to-day record of the events in a man's life and may be written for his own use and pleasure, where the thought of publication is less.

According to Avrom Fleishman, the study of any autobiography must be at least as open to novelty as are autobiographers themselves, they constantly deal with new forms, new modes, new media in which to make a work of art somehow in proper proportion with themselves.

Gandhiji and St. Augustine share certain things. Both of them were very frank in so far as their life was concerned. St. Augustine is often called the founder of western confessional writing. In *Young India* of 16-02-1922, Gandhiji writes : "Confession of error is like a broom that sweeps away dirt and leaves the surface cleaner than before."<sup>11</sup> Gandhiji's autobiography is nothing if not a clean confession of his errors. Gandhiji writes in his autobiography : "A clean confession combined with a promise never to commit the sin again, when offered before one who has the right to receive it, is the purest type of repentance."<sup>12</sup>

Myth makes truth, in historical as well as in literary autobiography. Writing autobiography demands a trying out or sounding out of identities and roles. An understanding of how the autobiographical text comes into being through an ongoing interplay of dialogue reveals it as a social

discourse. It is, in a sense, 'a dialogue with self.' Autobiography as a narrative involves not only a dialogue with the self but also a dialogue about the self in relation to others. A particular cultural landscape distinguishes autobiography. It is a dialogic form of speaking. The element of performance pervades the text as writers voice themselves into being by speaking and perceiving themselves from varied perspectives.

Writing is, indeed, a process of self-alteration ; living belongs to the past and writing belongs to the present. Avrom Fleishman declares : "When everyone understands this as clearly as I do, everyone will write. Life will be literaturized. Half of humanity will be dedicated and studying what the other half will have noted down.....The events themselves are inevitably transformed from what they were ( not necessarily important) to what has been made into literature."<sup>13</sup> The autobiographer presents his life vividly ; otherwise the events become recoverable only by the act of apparent death known as biography. The new status of human existence under the rapidly changing series of scenes and events of autobiography is given in the formula, 'Life will be literaturized'. The transformation of personal life provides also for an ongoing activity under the new conditions of existence: "Each one will read himself."<sup>14</sup>

An autobiography by the very logic of its being is a fragmentary work. The most widely held view is the literalist or purist position, which maintains that an autobiography is a self-written biography designed to impart verifiable information about the historical subject. The classic statement of this position is given in a dialogue from *Don Quixote* : "If you want to know anything about my life, know that I am Gine's de Pasamonte whose life story has been written down by these fingers that



you see here ..... what I would tell you is that it deals with facts, and facts are so interesting and amusing that no lies could equal them”.

“And what is the title of the book ?”

Asked Don Quixote.

“The life of Gine’s de Pasamonte”.

“Is it finished ?”

How could it be finished,” said Gine’s, “ When my life is not finished as yet?”<sup>15</sup> A more profound undercutting of the not consciously laid logical claim to autobiographical truth lies in the closing joke. The claim of completely rendering the facts of an ongoing life gives every meaning to autobiography as an element of fiction.

The common sense notion that autobiographies ought to be veracious is usually accompanied by a grudging recognition that self-dramatization, special pleading or some other rhetorical motive makes them anything but strictly true.

The strongest case for autobiography is truth. The autobiographer tells the truth as far as he can see it and reports his experience from the point of view of an insider. Explaining the nature of truth as he understands it, Gandhiji says : “ My uniform experience has convinced me that there is no other God than Truth.... Therefore, I have often said, truth is God.”<sup>16</sup> According to Gandhiji truth is God’s attribute. Man knows relative truth only, he is a finite being, and cannot know absolute truth. He devoted himself to truth, and he said that, he had no God to serve, but truth. The Autobiographer’s intention is to set down nothing that is not literally and factually true and never to falsify his facts for fictional purpose. Avrom Fleishman is of the opinion : “ The autobiographer wishes to be understood as truthful and strives to sound as truthful as possible .....

The self is not a thing, but a meaning embodied in a conscious life.”<sup>17</sup> He further observes that this is a species of writing where authorial intention is rarely unchanging or univocal.

The intention to tell the truth about oneself, like other imaginative writings, is a fictional premise which may result in a highly rewarding experience in constructions of the self. An autobiographical truth is nothing but a kind of aesthetic burden of self-portraiture. The autobiographer gives an order to the facts of history, which is not inherent in them. This is necessarily of his own devising and, therefore, we shall have a reflection of the autobiographer that is more profoundly informative than the data that he manipulates.

Asking the meaning of autobiography is like asking the meaning of any other work of art. Meaningfulness in autobiography tends to adapt a view of personal identity, one’s inner standing. The life, represented in autobiography, is something not established but is presented as a process. There must be in it a sense of discovery, and where this is wanting, the autobiography appears as an exposition of something pre - determined from the outset.

Closely associated with the quest for meaning, an autobiography seeks the meaning of life. In this way, whatever is depicted in an autobiography is a life, the shaping forces of life, of a personality. Avrom Fleishman records: “If we cannot say that a life story is a representation of a life, lacking a consensus on what life is, we may still retain the term by building on its common usage. Many autobiographies employ the genitive form in their titles – *The Life of.... by Himself*, or just *My life* – but go on to propose the existence of another entity in their

claim to tell the story of that life.”<sup>18</sup> ‘Life’ and ‘story of a life’ have got equivalent meanings in their literary reference. Autobiography constitutes life. But it is the creation of a new being. In the shaping of the personality of the autobiographer culture and social structure play an important role. All autobiographers are usually engaged in concrete, mutually shaped enactments in a complex dialogue with others as well as with their own already acquired internalized roles. One simultaneously becomes, and influences others to become a union of persons by ‘trying on’, selecting and habituating oneself to roles. In this actively seeking, evaluative, and self-defensive process of being and becoming, no one identity or ‘Voice’ can be duplicated exactly.

It is the existence of such a project that matters, and not an ultimately impossible sincerity. What is essential is a sincere project. The paradox in an autobiography is that an autobiographer must carry out this project of impossible sincerity using the tools which are not very different from those of fiction. “What distinguishes autobiography from the novel is not an unattainable historical exactitude, but only the sincere project of recapturing and understanding one’s own life.”<sup>19</sup> He must know that there is a fundamental difference between autobiography and fiction; yet to tell the truth about himself, he should use the acknowledged novelistic techniques of his time. The autobiographer purports to play the role of a truth teller. But he is more of a fictionist than a historian.

The author engaged in the task of writing about his life becomes the circumference of the autobiography’s reference. The text presents an authentic picture of the writer who holds the pen. Jean Starobinski is of the opinion : “The distinction among the autobiographer’s self-referential pronouns – not only in the special case of autobiography in the third

person but even among the usages of a first person narrative are correlated with his dual role as a narrator and subject matter of the work.”<sup>20</sup> The autobiographer may be an observer but when he turns to autobiographical writing, he shifts from a direct re-enactment (including acts of speech) to the language of review, revision and representation. Autobiographers accumulate their interweaving of the strands of their lives in a web of evolved selfhood. An autobiographical narrative generates a self or a personal myth. Narrations are important in autobiographical texts; their implications go well beyond the received idea that autobiographies contain narratives - the telling of a story of change over time.

Narcissism is a sort of self-inquiry under the descriptive necessity of self-deconstruction. In “*Of Grammatology*,” Derrida argues: “writing by its very nature not only places but displaces its subject, for the marks in the text are always the signs of his absence rather than his presence..... the autobiographer’s own activity is deconstruction practised upon the self because the subject is himself.”<sup>21</sup> The paradox, in other words, is that it is at once a re-construction and de – construction of a person’s life by himself.

In the act of writing an autobiography there is an inescapable alteration. Autobiography is the drive to exist in a medium. The move to write oneself down as a text combines the impulse to confirm the self as it is. Each autobiographical utterance treats the author in his own prose, marking his passage into a form that both surrenders him to death and preserves his name, acts and words. This transformation of the self is given in the form of a text, the autobiographer’s self-destruction is nothing but his self-creation.

It is generally agreed that autobiographies relate the self to larger constructs such as history, society, or philosophy. In the formation of a personal myth out of a train of metaphors, the autobiographer embellishes his condition, extends himself beyond his written self. The act of self-writing is nothing but a series of human events. To tell the story of one's life may seem as unmediated an action as a writer can perform. The need to shape a story will lead the writer to story types. What we know and what we tell are subject to the convention of literature. The most personal or particular events are presented only in a representational mode as in fiction. The autobiographer's plots are nothing but the various accumulated cultural entities.

How is an autobiography written ? And what does it contain ? What should an autobiography normally contain ?

1. It should be written in prose.
2. The autobiographer should be the protagonist (Hero of the work).
3. The autobiography should be a truthful record of the life of the individual.
4. The autobiography should be a living representation of the entire personality of the writer.
5. The truthful records in the autobiography make it necessary for the autobiography to be free and frank in the autobiographer's assertions and statements.
6. The autobiographer should also be frankly objective in dealing with contemporary society in his autobiography. Besides giving a true picture of his own life, he should also give a true picture of the other *dramatis personae* in the life – drama of the writer.

However, eminent such figures may be, they should remain subsidiary to the autobiographer.

7. The Autobiography should not merely become a glorification of the self.
8. It may be written in a different style such as the one used in writing a diary, novel or story.

It is generally said that a majority of the autobiographers have written their autobiographies, when they have spent half of their life. While presenting the life story, the richness of experiences also counts. Autobiographies are usually not written by young people because they don't have many experiences to record.

The purpose of writing an autobiography may be summed up as follows :

Man has a natural instinct to have a peep into the past. In everybody's life, joys and sorrows are common. Some unforeseen events do take place. Autobiographies are written in order to record the good and bad experiences, and to peep into the past, and to share one's private experiences.

1. The Autobiographer's motive is to uphold his principles and justify the works he has done.
2. To admit the faults (confession).
3. To remember the sweet and unpleasant memories of the past :  
To forget the bad experiences. To present life in a colourful yet realistic way.
4. To see life from one's own angle and to give it an order.

Autobiographies are not meant for entertainment. They are not written for other's satisfaction. Autobiographies serve a special function in the sense they give readers certain things which may not be had from other forms of literature. We may take the heroes of autobiographies as our role models. Fictional heroes, however charming, appealing and moving they may be, will not impress us the way the heroes of autobiographies do. The reason is quite obvious. The heroes of autobiographies will be life - like in the sense they live and die like all of us. Yet, they are uncommon because, they do what we don't or cannot. Celebrated personalities alone write autobiographies. In this sense the reading of an autobiography will be more fruitful.

An autobiographer will also get aesthetic pleasure in the same way as a creative writer does. Writing an autobiography will be very gratifying, in the sense that the autobiographer will be pleased as much as any creative writer when he composes a work of art.

## 2. The concept of Autobiography

Sincerity is the foundation of all true literature. Without sincerity no vital work in literature is possible. An autobiography is the reflection of the inner life of the author. No writer is an isolated personality. In autobiography personal genius is exposed. The beauty of the autobiography lies in the life depicted.

Man is a social being. Besides an earthly life, he also has a psychological life. Without hesitation he has started to record his joys, sorrows, good and bad experiences in a very prompt way. And this in turn led to autobiography writing.

Literature is a medium through which man exposes and expresses his public and private experiences. Through this he tries to record everything. So he depends, for recording his experiences, on different forms of literature such as, poetry, short story, essay, novel, criticism, biography, autobiography etc.

What is an autobiography? The Universal Dictionary of the English Language defines it as the "Art and practice of writing a narrative of one's own life."<sup>22</sup> The genre of autobiography admits the presence of a writer who writes his own life, which forms the context of his work. Further, the thematic re-creation in the autobiography is qualified by a principle of limit within which the autobiographer has to work. The principle of limit demanded by the genre expects the autobiographer to pay homage to the spirit of truth in his recollection of the past that he rebuilds.



A comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language defines the word autobiography as “Compounded of auto and biography ; this was first used by the English poet and prose writer Robert Southey (1774-1843) in 1809,”<sup>23</sup> with reference to the autobiography of the Portuguese painter Francisco Vieira. The usage of the word autobiography in the sense in which it is used today is credited to “Carlyle (1831).”<sup>24</sup>

The origin of an autobiography springs from the individual’s life. In 1683, Dryden, for the first time, coined the word Biography. So, biography is the record of a particular man’s life written by others whereas autobiography is the story of a man’s life and achievements written by himself. Autobiography embodies in itself three principal aspects. They are : history, individual, and literature. This means that an autobiography should be a truthful record of the life of an individual. Like other branches of literature the reading of an autobiography should also be an engaging and pleasing activity.

History is the past record of a race or a society. And the historical events are presented in a truthful way. But an autobiography will be based on an individual’s inner and outer life experiences. And it records the events right from birth to the stage of fame. Diary and memoir record day-to-day events, experiences and loud thinkings. All these lead to the writing of an autobiography. Diary and memoir are written just to derive pleasure. Gandhiji had his own reasons to write an autobiography. Gandhiji writes: “Writing an autobiography is a practice peculiar to the west.”<sup>25</sup> The place of origin of the autobiography is the west. It is a western concept. The main reason for the development of this genre in Europe is one of the Christian concepts of confession.

The origin of autobiography is traced back to Augustine, who is often called the founder of Western confessional writing. For many centuries autobiography alone remained as a document of first-hand and first-rate psychological importance. As recorded in the Encyclopedia Britannica, The first famous autobiography in European literature is *Confessions* (345-430) of St. Augustine (q.v) written to show how he discovered the truth of Catholic religion.

From the confessions of a saint we get a comfortable notion of autobiography as a form of guilt - ridden self-exposure. So, the aim of all autobiographies is to expose the self without any hesitation. Confession is an integral part of an autobiography, and it can be said that it is the heart and soul of autobiography. Gandhiji has something to say about it. He says: "A man who has broken with the past feels a different man. He will not feel it a shame to confess his past wrongs, for the simple reason that these wrongs do not touch him at all."<sup>26</sup> An autobiographer should not become his own enemy. If he does, it will be like a patient concealing a disease from the doctor. He should expose everything to the reader, as confession is the backbone of autobiography.

What connects classical literature and Christian literature is Augustine's self-writing. "Augustine's work gained such immense repute that many other autobiographers emulated it"<sup>27</sup> Augustine's work became a model for imitating to write autobiographies. It is indeed this self-conscious projection into the text of the speaking self in dialogue with others, and with parts of the surrounding culture that separates the autobiographer's voice from the ways writers usually represent and present themselves in other genres of non - fiction. This happens because

the autobiographer's voice is engaged in the creation of itself as both subject and object through courage, creating a self which lives beyond the personal landscape, who now lives in history's flow even as the self-making and word-making process continues.

In writing an autobiography, the author holds a converse with himself to re-construct and to mediate a present identity from the memories recalled. Through the past voices the author creates himself. By making himself public, the author engages in an important exchange of knowledge. According to *A Guide to English Literature*, the word autobiography came into English at the very end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries the writing of the story of one's own life became a common literary activity. In the modern period, writing about one's own life has become a common trend, and these writings are termed as literature.

An ideal autobiography should embody a spirit of likelihood that is truth in which the autobiographical information supplied by the writer and concrete biographical details should take the place of each other. The spirit of likelihood not only means the truthful recollection of fact, episode, details or other believable, i. e., real and practical aspects of the autobiographer's life, but it also has to fulfill livelihood in recreating the principles and spirit of life that governed the pure direction of life that is described in words. Achala Desai writes : "However, M.K.Gandhi's *My Experiments with Truth*" and St. Augustine's "*Confessions*" qualify as autobiography even though they do not make a one-to-one description of all events of their lives."<sup>28</sup> These autobiographies fulfill a higher condition of probability. The events of the writers' lives are depicted in a realistic way. Therefore, these kinds of artistic works are called

autobiographies. The author reconstructs his life on the foundation of truth. It is clear that autobiography will automatically consider germinal experience which lays stress on the spirit of the autobiographer's life.

An ideal autobiography, therefore, is an earnest attempt or effort to do or accomplish a desired end. When the autobiographer obtains the source from the happenings and experiences of his own life he makes an effort to transmit in a spirit of likelihood the meaning of that life. Autobiography is the story of the life of the autobiographer as protagonist. The author enjoys poetic licence, but he has to be very clear and careful in depicting every detail. The protagonist's development period of life, a concrete pursuit of goal are easily identified by the author's narrative. In the autobiography, the reader identifies himself with the autobiographer. The author tells the story. In an autobiography, the reader-writer distance is bridged up.

### 3 Rise and growth of Autobiography as a Literary genre

Autobiography is always defined in English classrooms simply as a work of literature based on the author's life. No form of composition is of more abiding interest than that in which a man narrates his own history, unlocks his heart and takes the public into confidence by laying bare his motive of life. To know one's self is the first and the last step on the road to wisdom. Autobiography besides telling the story of the protagonist, provides the readers with a vista of the social issues of the related age. A successful coming – of - age story depicts the protagonist who is initiated into adulthood through knowledge, experience and understanding. In this process, the protagonist destroys any possible false sense of security, and experiences a loss of innocence. It so happens because the author uses his or her own name as the main character. The autobiographer uses the first person narration simply to serve as a vehicle for telling the story.

The study of autobiography is connected to an author's quest for voice. Autobiography allows writers to define themselves as individuals, as distinct from those images that are fostered by society or by cultural stereotypes. The autobiographical genre achieves a greater agency by creating its own rules and standards than they would if they simply surrendered to the strictures of autobiography proper. "Autobiography today has become a major subject of research and debate, and a site for raising several questions about the construction of the self and its technologies, the nature of the subject, the nature of language, the relationship between the reader and the writer, their relationship with time, and the way autobiography helps the reader's own self-knowledge of man and the world in general."<sup>29</sup> In the modern period,

autobiographies form major projects of research. Autobiographies provide the readers also with a chance to peep into their selves, and the outer world in general.

For most writers autobiography is a one-shot deal. Autobiography means there will be no last words and autobiography is a genre of last words, last words until the author's life reaches its own limit. K.Satchidanandan observes again : "Undoubtedly this genre of literature is one that most immediately and deeply engages our interest..... while confessions, journals, memoirs, meditations and self-portraits are often recognized as different forms of autobiography."<sup>30</sup> Autobiography as a form of literature creates an interest in the readers to know about other persons' lives. Confessions, memoirs, are different forms of autobiography.

Suspension of disbelief is necessary to enjoy fiction. Fiction and autobiography use the same technique. The reader suspends disbelief and promises to accept the author's work as truth; once the trust is broken, the border becomes obscure and autobiography becomes fiction. The autobiographer must create a willing suspension of disbelief for the events and incidents which form his plot. A convincing probability, as we know, is to be preferred to an impossible probability.

In recent years autobiography has begun to attract the attention of critics. The major studies in autobiography as a literary genre in English are 1. Anna Robson Burn's : *The Autobiography, A Critical and Comparative Study* 2. Wayne Shumaker's : *English Autobiography : Its Emergence, Materials and Form*. 3. John Morris's : *Version of the Self*. 4. Ray Pascal's : *Design and Truth in Autobiography* 5. George Misch's :

*A History of Autobiography in Antiquity* 6. James Olney's : *Metaphors of Self* etc.,

In the modern world, of course, notions of truth are problematic, complicated, and circumscribed by context. The truths of history and the truths of fiction become the perspectives of history and of fiction. The genres of literary non-fiction and autobiography intersect in an attempt to present perspectives of a truth by infusing the writing with the writer.

Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, St. Augustine's '*Confessions*' had no rival in its own kind. John Bunyan's – '*Grace Abounding*' may be a possible exception. Casanova was the first autobiographer who told whatever he wanted and much. It was his misfortune that he had nothing more to tell. For an age which had forgotten Augustine and did not know Casanova, Rousseau's *Confessions* (1782) was a sort of new revelation. Rousseau was a kind of person whose interest was entirely rooted in his own mind, heart and soul ; it was he who gave future autobiographers a fresh impetus for self-examination. After Rousseau's, many autobiographies were written. The tendency is as old as Dante's *Vita Nuova*.

Since Rousseau, many writers have attempted to write autobiography, some of the important autobiographers are : Benjamin Franklin, Sir Walter Scott, Tolstoi, Dostoevski, J.S.Mill, Herbert Spencer, John Ruskin and others.

According to Mundra, writing of autobiographies began very late in the history of English literature. Autobiographies gained prominence in England in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century autobiographies came to be considered under the branch of literature. David Hume,

Benjamin Franklin and Edward Gibbon stand as prominent autobiographers of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries autobiography became a major form of literature, and gained first rate importance. Some important modern autobiographers are Viscount Morley, Viscount Haldane, Lord Asquith, W.H. Davies, R.L.Stevenson, and E.V.Lucas.

Modern autobiography need not necessarily be of great men. The greatness of the autobiography depends upon the literary skill which the autobiographer brings to the writing of his autobiography. Modern autobiography is becoming more and more literary in form and structure. The ever mysterious mind of man is the principal element of creation.



## **4. Autobiography : Indian and Western**

### **INDIAN**

The writing of autobiographies in Indian English is due to the impact of Western education in India. The term Indo-Anglian is used to denote the original literary creation in English by Indians. Bhalachandra Nemade says : "The writer of this 'English' species of Indian literary production is one who is Indian by birth or association and who, for a variety of reasons best known to himself, writes not in his mother tongue, but in English."<sup>31</sup> Indo-Anglian writing is, indeed, a unique phenomenon in world literature. Quite a large number of Indians who are educated in English are using English as a medium of their creative writing and they have chosen to express their experiences in this language. This has produced a body of literature known as Indo-Anglian literature.

The autobiographies which are written by Indo-Anglian writers are sufficiently large in number. British rule and the introduction of English education created an interest in intellectuals, especially the Bengalis, to produce a number of autobiographies in English.

Ancient Indians had a strong inclination for examining their own mental and emotional process and their thoughts were governed by a spirit of renunciation, self-effacement, and a merging in the absolute rather than by one of self-expression. The inscriptions which are found on rocks and stone pillars of Emperor Ashoka (273-232 BC) promote dharma, and they express his social concern, and constitute a kind of

autobiographical record of his life. Similar concerns are expressed as personal distress in the mystic poetry of the twelfth century Shaivaite poets of Karnataka. The period of the rise and growth of Indo-Anglian autobiography corresponds with one of the most dynamic periods in the history of India. K.Satchidanandan holds :“The idea of self-knowledge (atma-jnana) is central to Indian metaphysics, an idea that comes up again and again in the Upanishads, in Buddhism, in Tamil Saivism, in Bhakti and Sufi poetry, Vivekananda, Sri.Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi, though they often differ in their understanding of transcendence as also of the relationship between the self and the other, self and the world, and self and the cosmic self.”<sup>32</sup> The growth and practice of autobiographical writing may be viewed as one of the typical manifestations of the spirit of the modern age.

According to the Encyclopedia of Post - Colonial Literature in English, Muslim invasion and the Muslim rulers, their inordinate interest in leaving behind records of their rule for succeeding generation posterity produced a number of autobiographical writings. The most significant among them is Amir Khasran's (1250-1325) *Gharratul Kamal* and *Tuhfatus Sighar*. Babar (1483-1530), king of Kabul, is considered the 'Prince of Autobiographers' because of his *Babar-nama*, while Jahangir (1569-1627), emperor of Hindustan, achieved self glorification through his memoirs *Tuzuk-I-Jahangiri*.

With the introduction of English education in India at the beginning of the nineteenth century, a favourable climate was created for the growth of Indo-Anglian Autobiography. The western concept of the worth of the individual, of men and the primacy of conscience and reason, entered into the Indian consciousness. Political ideas like personal liberty and the rule

of law, which were implicit in all English literature, stimulated the educated Indian mind. Similarly, science, which involved the acceptance of reason and experiment as the tests of truth, was introduced in the Indian curriculum as an integral part of western education.

Autobiography as we know is the gift of western education to India. The first piece of autobiographical writing which we come across in Indian English is that of Raja Rammohan Roy's short autobiographical sketch (1833). The first extensive autobiography is by Lutufullah, a tutor in Persian, Arabic and Hindustani to British officers. It is partly a travel diary and partly autobiography. From the above points it becomes clear that Indo-Anglian Autobiography has taken rapid strides forward from its humble beginnings. Beginning as a mere trickle in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, it turned into a rivulet by the first quarter of the twentieth and by the fifties and sixties into a fast flowing river.

India's struggle for freedom drew some of its best intellectuals into public life and encouraged autobiographies with a pronounced political perspective, such as Lala Lajpat Rai's - *The Story of My Deportation* (1908), and Surendranath Banerjee's - *A Nation in the Making* (1925). Jawaharlal Nehru's *An Autobiography* came up in 1936. It is one of the best autobiographies written by an Indian. He has said that in order to occupy himself with a task and to while away the long solitude of gaol life and to clarify himself he wrote his autobiography. Subhash Chandra Bose's ; *An Indian Pilgrim* (1948), is a surprising title for a fiery patriot who aligned himself with Hitler and Mussolini against the British during the second world war. M.K.Gandhi's ; *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (Vol.I, 1927, Vol.II, 1929), may be compared to St.Augustine's *Confessions*.

Gandhi's *Satyana Prayogo* (1927), is the most outstanding example of an Indian spiritual autobiography, which is comparable with the *Confessions* of St. Augustine. Gandhi in his autobiography pours scorn on his own Mahatma image and breaks it to pieces, without any intention of self-dramatization. He claimed that his life consisted of nothing but those experiments with truth.

The spectacular growth of Indo - Anglian autobiography is inextricably bound up with the social, political, literary and religious forces operating in the modern native tradition of life-writing, in the same way as Indo-Anglian fiction is a branch of Indian fiction rather than English fiction.

As mentioned in the Indian Literature Encyclopedia, Dhan Gopal Mukherji's *Caste and Outcasts* (1923) is a highly nostalgic account of his boyhood and youth ; and Mulk Raj Anand's *Apology for Heroism* (1946) offers a more objective analysis, and it serves as a valuable aid for the understanding of his fiction. K. Subba Rao's ; *Revived Memories* (1933), is also one of the earliest autobiographies by a journalist. The period after Independence witnessed a fast changing scenario and there emerged a large number of autobiographies. Self projection characterizes Nirad C. Chaudhuri's *Autobiography of An Unknown Indian* (1951).

M.A. Malik's *An Indian Outcaste; The Autobiography of an Untouchable* (1951), is the first autobiography of an untouchable. Among the major autobiographies by administrators, diplomats, and civil servants some important ones are Mirza Ismail's *My Public Life* (1954), Prakash Tandon's *Punjabi Century* (1961), and *Beyond Punjab* (1971) ; and Karan Singh's *Heir Apparent* (1982). The important autobiographies of eminent jurists are, *The Story of My Life* (1959) by

M.R.Jayakar, *Looking Back* (1963) by M.C.Manajan, and *Roses in December* (1973) by M.C.Chagla.

Autobiographies by Indian women are marked by the desire to establish self-identity, to enjoy the fruits of freedom and the pleasures of life, and a longing for spiritual health and peace. The earliest example of an autobiography written by a woman is *The Autobiography of an Indian Princess* (1921), authored by Sunita Devi. Cornelia Sorabji's *India Calling* (1935) is a beautiful story of India's first woman lawyer. Vijayalaxmi Pandit and Krishna Hutheesing, Jawaharlal Nehrus' sisters, have also written their autobiographies; *Pandit's, So I Became a Minister* (1936), *Prison Days* (1945), and *The Scope of Happiness* (1979), and Hutheesing's *With No Regrets* (1944), and *We Nehrus* (1968). Nayantara Sahgal's autobiographical volumes are: *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (1954), and *From Fear Set Free* (1962). Kamla Das's; *My Story* (1976) is also one of the important autobiographies.

Many Indian writers have published autobiographies. Some of them are: Santha Rama Rao's *Gifts of Passage* (1961), Ved Mehta's *Face to Face* (1963), Sashi Brata's *My God Died Young* (1967), Dom Morris's *My Son's Father* (1968)), Ravi Shankar's, *My Music, My Life* (1968), D.C.Pavate's *Memories of an Educational Administrator* (1964), and R.K.Narayan's *My Days* (1974). To state that Indian autobiography has come of age may not be a tall claim, although no one has enriched the genre as much as Jawaharlal Nehru. The Indo-Anglian autobiography shall last as long as the English language does. Its permanence is assured in the history of English literature.

## WESTERN

Autobiography is a form of literature which records the life of an individual by himself. One's personal matters become the subject of an autobiography. Nearest to this form are the diary, journal, memoir and travelogue. Though these do not contain the full autobiographical elements, they contain many matters which reflect the life of their authors. But they should be presented in an artistic way, to be considered part of literature.

1. Michael Montaigne's *Essays*
2. Pepys's *Diary* (1633-1703)
3. Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817)
4. Wordsworth's *Prelude or Growth of a Poet's Mind* (1805)
5. Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916)

All these in a wider sense are autobiographies. Any piece of literature in the world in one way or other usually contains, to some extent, personal matters from the life of the writer. But they may be said to be 'autobiographical' Lamb's 'Dream Children', but they can't be termed as autobiographies.

'Memoir, which is a written account of a person's experience or reminiscences is of French derivation. "The Memoir, originates largely in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, owes much to the practice of extensive letter writing which then developed."<sup>33</sup> The objective memoir and the subjective confessions came together in the confessions of the French – Swiss – Jean Jacques Rousseau and it paved the way for English autobiographies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

'Memoir' is the nearest form to autobiography. The Memoirs, which are found in the West, tell the history of the world. No man is better qualified to write his life than himself. But the question is, memory may be sometimes unreliable. A few can recall clear details of their early life and are therefore not dependent on other people's impressions which, of necessity, may be equally unreliable. Moreover, everyone tends to remember what he wants to remember. Upto the 18<sup>th</sup> century, autobiography existed in the form of memoir. It did not develop as a distinct literary form because of the very few important facts that were presented through reminiscences in a Memoir.

But autobiography has been customarily looked upon as a branch of the wider literary genre of Biography, even though an author writing an account of his or her own life clearly stands in a relation of greater intimacy with the subject matter than a biographer commissioned to write the life of someone previously little known or unknown to him or her. The autobiographer has the capacity, and in the modern age, an obligation to bring out facts concerning himself or herself that no biographer could expect to discover.

"The evolution of autobiography has been towards an ever-greater confidentiality, with the consequence that modern readers demand revelation of the author's inner life and an ever-increasing candor, these now being seen as the specific inducement of the genre."<sup>34</sup> Compared with the diary or journal, an autobiography is reflective and it is written after the events, an exercise in recall. Autobiography can be based on written records made at the time of those events. Autobiography may be broadly distinguished from memoirs as being more concerned with the private, emotional and intellectual life of the author, rather than with his

or her public activities. Many autobiographies which have been written in the past fifty or sixty years were written by famous public figures, athletes, actors and politicians who are conspicuously free from any revelatory engagement with the subject's developing self.

Autobiography deals with the private and public life of the author and a great emphasis is laid on the author's developing self. In fact, any writer of any merit is simultaneously subjective and objective. He is subjectively engrossed in his work and the quality and intensity of his personal vision will be dictated in a subjective way. But he is involved in a paradoxical activity; an intellectually creative balancing act in which invention and judgement co-ordinate to achieve and preserve equilibrium.

**Historical development :** The German scholar George Misch traces the origins of autobiography back even beyond the literature of Greece and Rome to commemorative practices in ancient Egypt, where the tombs of dead rulers were furnished with brief accounts of the achievements of their reign. These accounts might be written in the first person, as if they were autobiographical ; their form was purely conventional and they were composed after the rulers' death. Such inscriptions introduced, at the outset, a principal motive in the writing of autobiography, which is to achieve a certain immortality by leaving a permanent and flattering trace of a particular life.

For many years St. Augustine's *Confessions* alone remained a document of first hand importance. This design has been repeated in many later autobiographies. J. A.Cuddon states : "The first autobiography of any note was St. Augustine's *Confessions* of the 4<sup>th</sup> century : an intensely



personal account of spiritual experience and an extraordinary instance of deep psychological self-analysis of a kind that has become commonplace only in modern time.”<sup>35</sup> It offered a picture of self – analysis, which is found commonly in modern autobiographies. Gandhiji’s autobiography may be compared with St Augustine’s in many respects. During the Renaissance period autobiography came at last into its own form. Two great poets had paved the way for it. Dante Alighieri in the *Vita Nuova* (1295), and Petrarch in *The Secret* (1358). Thus, autobiographies written in ancient times are but a few examples of deliberate autobiography. In the strictest sense of the term, there was no autobiography before the Christian era, the earliest being *Confessions* of St. Augustine. Its modern counterpart is cardinal John Henry Newman’s : *Apologia Pro vita Sua*.

In the Seventeenth century a more complex, spiritual motive was introduced into the genre, and it became more and more the practice to keep a diary or a journal and to write down memoirs and then autobiographical narrative became common. According to J.A. Cuddon, Thomas Bodley’s brief account of his own life was published in 1647. Margaret Cavendish’s *True Relation of My Birth, Breeding and life* (1656), John Bunyan’s *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), were the first of their kind. During the same period Evelyn (1620-1706), and Pepys (1633-1703), compiled their famous diaries. Sir Thomas Browne’s *Religio Medici* (1642), was a highly self - revealing form of autobiography.

Several other such works of great merit appeared during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Colley Cibber’s *Apology for the life of Colley Cibber* (1740) is believed to

have been the first theatrical autobiography. Wordsworth's : *The Prelude* was completed in 1805, and it was published posthumously in 1850.

Among the 19th century's important autobiographies are Leigh Hunt's *Autobiography* (1850), Cardinal Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua* (1864), John Stuart Mill's *Autobiography* (1873). Carlyle's *Reminiscences* (1881), Trollope's *Autobiography* (1883), Darwin's *Life and letters of Charles Darwin* (1887), George Moore's : *Confessions of a Young Man* (1888), Stendhal's *Journal* (1888), Herbert Spencer's *Autobiography* (1904). Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis* (1905), Edmund Gosse's *Father and Son* (1907) and W.H. Davies's *The autobiography of a Super – Tramp* (1908), stand prominent.

The first World War produced a number of very fine autobiographical specimens. Some of them are Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (1930), H.G.Wells's *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934), J.M. Barrier's *The Greenwood Hat* (1937), G.B. Shaw's *Sixteen Self-sketches* (1948), and Sir Osbert Sitwell's *Left Hand Right Hand* (1944-50). This last is in five volumes. This is one of the longest autobiographies ever written. Winston Churchill's *My Early Life* (1930), Virginia Woolf's *Writer's Diary* (1954), Benito Mussolini's *My Autobiography* (1928) and Adolf Hitler's - *Mein Kampf* (1933) are other autobiographies that belong to the same period.

It is observed that since Augustines work '*Confession*' upto the second World War and even later on, almost everyone who has achieved some distinction in life - and many who did not, have written an account of

their lives, especially politicians, statesmen and high ranking members of the services.

The great influence on the writing of autobiography in the twentieth century has been the development of psychoanalysis and the theories of Sigmund Freud concerning the influence of early experience on human lives. Authors and readers alike have come to expect in autobiography a greater concentration between childhood and the prime of life of the autobiographer. The modern autobiographer is often likely to start writing with a more consciously exploratory frame of mind than would have been the case a hundred years ago, in the hope of being surprised and enlightened by recollection.

The writing of autobiography has assumed a more or less curative therapeutic role in the life of the autobiographer, closer to the role it has always had in the lives of those who liked to read autobiographies of others. Autobiography exists less to roll back into focus certain moments of the past as they were experienced at the time than to communicate to us the autobiographer's present and thus there is a constantly shifting perspective on his or her past. The approximation to the forms and devices of fiction, which autobiography can never avoid, does not mean that those who read autobiographies must become skeptical about their claims to being always true; of course, everything that they contain is autobiographical, whether or not it corresponds with the historical facts. In autobiography, the contemporary world is recast. Though essentially representations of individual personalities, autobiographies are bound always to be representatives of their period too. The author always participates in his contemporary world.

An autobiography isn't just hard – it is heart. – Heart and Soul. The modes and meanings of representation lie deep inside the metaphorical body of language that the writer must inscribe in order to produce the text that represents himself. The voice of the autobiographer mingles with the multiple voices of contemporary culture. The autobiographer purposefully creates a representation of his life and times, impulsively thwarts his own demise and frees his soul from extinction. Death generates an incontestable writing among all who live and breathe the air of individuality. The end is regarded as the truth of the beginning. Everything in an autobiographer's life will have meant something.

The author of an autobiography, beyond all images, follows unceasingly the call of his own being. The multi task of autobiography persists, against the grievous ultimatum of life on earth, the rush to self-define. There are no agreed norms for a genre of autobiography. The canons of a standard of truth (or even of purported truth), of a quest for meaning are important.

When we say that an autobiography presents the figure of a man, in all his lineaments, we will be dwelling on a mental image of him along with the image he has conveyed. There is something personal. Augustine's autobiography has been taken as the paradigm in so many accounts of later self-writing. The '*Confessions*' became a model for the western autobiography because Augustine knew how to model his life on the lives of Adam and Jesus.

Autobiography interprets real life to confirm current psychological or sociological theories. In this case the writer may begin to see his life through the coloured mask of his acquired interpretations. Autobiography is a point of view on the writer's past life. An awareness

of the nature of self - identity is essential to the full autobiographic art. The autobiographer is the artificer of the great moment that the writer thinks he has seen it as such, otherwise there would be no justification for his undertaking to write his own biography.

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