

Life-Writing in India: A Study of Men's Autobiographies

- Anupriya Roy Srivastava

Abstract: Among other genres of life-writing, the study of autobiography has been a recent phenomenon. It is basically a study of identity, the self and its exploration. Autobiography as a genre is variously defined by critics owing to its interdisciplinary nature. This paper examines the origin, growth and development of autobiography in India and analyses especially the tradition of writing autobiographies by Indian men. This paper also focuses on the fact that though life-writing as a genre was popularized in the West, but the art of writing autobiography existed in India from times immemorial, has continued to be written by people from various fields and still is in progress creating a tradition of Indian autobiographies.

Keywords: Autobiography, Self, Origin, Life-writing, Men's Studies

The study of life-writing is a recent phenomenon. It includes autobiography, biography, memoir, testimonials, reminiscences, diary-writing, etc. Autobiography as a genre has always been difficult to define as Michael Sprinker (1980) in "Fictions of the Self: The End of Autobiography" argues that autobiography is 'borderless' and therefore 'unstable' and 'unclassifiable' "where concept of the subject, the self and the author collapse into the act of producing a text" (p.342). So, the author himself is the subject, narrator and the protagonist of the story where he analyses the rise and fall of the graph of his life and arrange and rearrange the past experiences of his life and present it before the readers like an open book. In other words, autobiography is the revision of a life lived where one utilizes the resources of the past experiences that are not digested in the metabolism of one's life. Philippe Lejeune (1989), a French theorist in his essay, "The Autobiographical Pact", defines autobiography as "retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality" (p.4). In autobiography the presence of signature holds a prominent place on the part of the author concerning his own existence. Linda Anderson (2001) thus states that "autobiography resituates the writer in his work thus mitigating the dangers of anonymity and alienation of modern authorship" (p.7) by the presence of his signature. This definition supports Philippe Lejeune's "intention to honour the signature" (Anderson, 2001, p.3). Roy Pascal (1960) defines autobiography as the outcome of "the seriousness of the author, the seriousness of his personality and his intention in writing" (p.60). Autobiography may be a form of litany, a confession, an apology, a cathartic act and a collection of anecdotes and gossip or may be a simple space to wash grimy and stained linen in public. Mostly autobiographies are inspiring life-stories for posterity. Autobiography fulfills the curiosity of common multitude, who finds interest in the lives of men, especially of great minds, whom they often idolize.

Autobiography emerged in the West but its flowering is also identified in the East. Roy Pascal (1960) states that “autobiography is essentially European” (p.22), but it influenced Indian minds in the latter half of the reign of the Europeans in India. The Western education had a profound impact on the Indian intellect who with gusto and vigour took to printing their lives either in vernaculars or in English which resulted in a boom in the production of Indian autobiographies especially in the last decade of the 20th century. Though writing of autobiography thrived later in Indian scenario, critics argue that the art of life-writing existed in India from times immemorial but the approach and technique of its manifestation did not essentially comply with the Western conventions. This paper will undertake to examine the origin, growth and development of autobiography in India and will analyse the tradition of writing autobiographies by Indian men as Indian women's autobiographies are out of the scope of this research paper and hence is not discussed here.

The autobiographical impulse among the Indians can be traced back to 'Danastutis' or 'Praises of Shifts' in *Rigveda*. But more remarkable than these verses is 'The Lament of the Gambler' in 'Rigveda', a confession of a sage about how he turned into a gambler. Evidences of autobiographical references of many lives are found in the popular and ancient Pali and Sanskrit narratives, Bhakti songs, Hindu religious scriptures, etc. From 2nd century A.D. onwards many Buddhist pagodas have been discovered whose walls bear the life stories of Lord Buddha, often written in Pali and Sanskrit. Archaeologists have found numerous remnants and relics in which several orally transmitted life stories are engraved. Even researchers dealing with ancient anthropology often delineate that a detailed study of pedigrees and genealogies, and even horoscopes, provide an entire background for the study of ancient self-life-writing in India. The inscriptions engraved on Rock Pillars of Ashoka relating to his life and his conquests and victories are written in first person and obviously bear the testimony to the fact that self-writing was known to ancient India long before the invasion of the colonizers. Sanskrit scholars had seldom written about their lives, except an outline in the prologue of their dramas. Sudraka's life is portrayed by his manager Sutrādharā in the prologue of his play *The Mṛichchakatika* or *Tōy-cart*. Many court-poets and poet-saints have written their lives after some divine messages received in their dreams, continuing their tradition called “Sampradaya”, paying respect and tribute to their Guru and God. A renowned court-poet, Bana Bhatta, wrote a historical romance *Harsa-Charita*, dedicated to his patron king Harsavardhana who ruled in the northern India in 17th century A.D. Only first two chapters and a half of the romance are about Bana Bhatta's life story whereas the rest of the story is about Harsa's life. The writer has used third person singular number throughout the story in order to maintain the uniformity. Srikantha, popularly known as Bhavabhūti (735 A.D.), provided some information about his life in the prologue of his three plays *Maha-vira-charita*, *Malati-Madhava* and *Uttararama-charita*. The other three most notable autobiographical accounts of 10th century A.D. are Rajashekhara's *Karpuramanjari*, Jayantabhatta's *Nyayamanjari* and Dhanapala's *Tilakamanjari*. Bilhana, a court-bard of king Vikramaditya VI of Kalyan, wrote a biography of his patron king *Vikramankadeva*-

Carita in 11th century A.D. in which he talked about his own life in brief. Unlike Bana Bhatta, Bilhana portrayed his life at the end of this biography. In 12th century A.D. another historian, Kalhana, wrote his autobiography *Rajatrangini*, that is claimed by the critics of the genre as the most authentic in the whole of the existing tradition of Sanskrit literary autobiographies. At the end of the 12th century A.D. Sriharsha wrote his autobiography *Nisadhacarita* which deserves mention to any ancient studies of Indian autobiographies. These fragmentary autobiographical accounts are valuable in Indian tradition as no such full length autobiographies are available till the advent of Muslims and Europeans in India. With the arrival of Muslims in India the art of writing autobiography imbibed an invigorating momentum. It was the Muslim rulers and the higher court functionaries who tried their hands in writing their autobiographies rather assigning the task to other learned scholars of their courts and this opened up a new way in the progression of the genre. Amir Khusrau (born in 1254 A.D.) talked about his life in two of his poetical works, *Gharratul Kamal* and *Tuhfatus Sighar*. Sultan Firoz Shah is considered the first Indian who wrote his autobiography *Futuhat-i-Firoz Shahi* as an independent work. This is written in Persian and is a very short account of his reign in Delhi from 1351 to 1388 with a very brief sketch of his conquests and achievements.

After a long gap of 150 years of Firoz Shah's life-story, Zahir-ud-din Mohammad Babur (1483-1530), the first Mughal emperor in India wrote his autobiography *Babur-nama* or *Tuzuki-Baburi* in Chagtai Turki covering only 18 years of his life out of 48 years. It contains his days as a king at Farghana, his times in Kabul, his eradication from his own native land and then his accession in India as the founder of Mughal dynasty. Babur's personal letters and his own diary supplied raw materials for the last part of his autobiography. Therefore it is evident that diary writing was also known in India much before the English arrived. The love and faith of the Mughal emperors towards preserving their lives created havoc in the history of Indian tradition of autobiography writing. Babur's cousin Mirza Muhammed Haider Dughlat (1499-1551) also tried his hand in the art of writing his life in *Tarikh-i-Rashidi*, written in Persian, which bears the scenario of his times and his relations with other emperors and higher officials. Abdul-Qadir Ibn-i-Muluk Shah, popularly known as Al-Badaoni (born in 1540) described in his memoir *Muntakhabu-Tawarikh* a detailed account of first 40 years of king Akbar's reign with a brief sketch of his life. Babur's great-grandson, emperor Jahangir (1569-1627) started writing his memoir *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* in Persian but could continue to write it for the first 17 years of his reign. His sudden illness compelled him to entrust the job to Muhtamad Khan, the notable author of *Iqbal-nama* who wrote it in the name of Jahangir for one and a half years. One of Jahangir's military general, Mirza Nathan, also known by the name Ala-ud-Din Isfahani, wrote a memoir *Baharistan-i-Ghaybi* that contains some history of 17th century India. The prestigious family culture of life-writing that introduced by Babur in Mughal dynasty ended in the times of king Aurangzeb who strictly forbade the historians to sketch the events and happenings of his reign. Banarasidasa (born 1586), a descendant of a jeweler's family of Jaunpur in Uttar Pradesh, is considered as the first Indian to write the first full length

autobiography, *Arddhakatha* or *Half-Story*, in Indian vernacular covering 55 years of his life. It opens with a sadistic note of the author about his unfulfilled dream of becoming a famous poet. This life-story geared up the Indians to publish their autobiographies. More and more Indians came up to write their lives in vernaculars that added to the existing lot of Indian autobiographies. India proudly claims that before the advent of the Europeans, Indians knew the art of self-life-writing. Throughout the 18th century, the practice of writing autobiography remained immured in the hands of the monarchs and the higher officials. The Indian autobiographies that survived in the stately mansions of the kings and the queens were mostly written by the Muslims in Persian language. At that time, reading and writing autobiographies were out of reach and of less concern for the common masses and majority of the Hindus who form the larger part of the Indian population. The full flowering of Indian autobiographies came into being when the Indians came in contact with the British. In the beginning of 19th century, the concept of individualism, though intrinsically western in origin, was induced to the minds of the Indians who started writing their lives. The introduction of western education captured the Indian consciousness and helped them in learning the general concept of reasoning, enlightenment, individual freedom and liberty. New ideas were generated and people started taking interests in the western literature, philosophy, science, politics, sociology and other branches of western studies very diligently, and the experts tried their hands in translating them into Indian vernaculars that consequently stimulated their national consciousness.

The camaraderie with the English appealed the highly educated Indians to write their life-stories in English. Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833) was the first Indian to write his autobiographical account in English, being requested by his English friend Mr. Gordon. It was 1832, when Rammohan was in England and was about to leave for France, he wrote in a letter to Gordon, about his life, the genealogy of his family, his schooling, his emergence as a social worker and his combat with the evils of Hindu society like the practice of 'Sati' or burning down of widows alive in the same pyre of their husbands. Much similar to Rammohan's account is another autobiographical letter by Kashiprasad Ghose (1809-1873) addressed to Rev. James Long. The first full length autobiography in English was written by Lutfullah in 1854, with the purpose of communicating his life to his English friends and readers. It was published in 1857 and was highly praised by the British. Lutfullah's autobiography is constructed in simple language and has straight narration, but his venturesome and eventful life enthralled the readers. Around twenty years after Lutfullah not a single full length autobiography in English was published. Lal Behari Dey (1826-1894) bridged the gap of long 20 years by publishing his full length autobiography in the Bengal Magazine, written in English, *Recollections of My School Days*, between 1873 and 1876. The most remarkable part of this autobiography is his art of storytelling, his trifle moments made noteworthy, his eloquent narration, hilarious references and his jocularity. The next autobiography that came out was *The Story of My Deportation*, written by Lala Lajpat Rai in 1908. It basically deals with the

story of his vigorous involvement in politics on account of which he was sent to exile from 9th May 1907 to 18th November 1907. Six years after returning from his exile Lala Lajpat Rai tried his hand in another autobiographical account in 1914, written in Urdu, talking about his workings in Arya Samaj movement. Another short autobiographical description is found in his *Indian Revolutionaries in the United States and Japan*, written in English in 1919, which describes his temporary stay in U.S.A. for five years from 1914 to 1919 and in Japan for about five months. Shyam Sunder Chakravorty, another political activist was also deported with Lala Lajpat Rai, who narrates his days in prison in *Through Solitude and Sorrows* (1910). It is more a prison narrative than an autobiography proper. Bipin Krishna Bose's life as a lawyer and patriot is depicted in *Stray Thoughts on Some Incidents in My Life* (1919).

Maulana Mohammad Ali, the distinguished leader of 'Khilafat' movement, wrote *My Life: A Fragment* (1921-22) which shows the influence of holy Quran in his life. Most of the autobiographies written in the social backdrop of India's freedom movement often sprinkle the aroma of nationalism. In *The Tale of My Exile* (1922), Barindra Kumar Ghose, a Bengali freedom fighter describes his hard days fighting for his country and ultimately striving in exile. Surendranath Banerjee wrote his autobiography, *A Nation in Making* in 1924 and published it in 1925. It is historical as well as an important social record of the annals of India's freedom struggle. Mahatma Gandhi's *An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth* (1927) delineates the journey of a Gujarati boy to become a barrister in South Africa and consecutively a national leader. Bipin Chandra Pal published his autobiography *Memories of My Life and Times* in 1932 after the completion of an era of his dynamic and vivacious participation in the freedom movement of India. Jawaharlal Nehru wrote *An Autobiography* in jail from June, 1934 to February, 1935, and lately published in 1936. Dedicated to his wife Kamala, he described in it his origin from Kashmiri Brahmin stock, discussed about his father Motilal Nehru, his family, his sisters Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and Krishna Hutheesing and about his daughter Indira. It shows his faith in Fabian socialism and his assiduous involvement in the national politics. Subhas Chandra Bose's autobiography, *An Indian Pilgrim*, written during his stay in Austria in 1937 is a record of few years of his life from 1897 to 1920. It remained unfinished because of his tremendous involvement in India's freedom struggle. In 1947, Nagendranath Gupta published his autobiography *Reflections and Reminiscences* which brings forth his times spent in Bihar. Gulab Singh, a political activist and freedom fighter describes his days in prison from 1930 to 1946 in *Thorns and Thistles: Autobiography of a Revolutionary* (1948). At the end of 1949, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel wrote a long autobiographical letter which may be taken into account in this discussion. Nripendra Chandra Bannerji's *At the Cross Roads* (1950) is an autobiographical account of his childhood days spent in Bangladesh and later his college days at Calcutta. Maulana Abul Kalam Azad wrote his life in *India Wins Freedom* in 1957, which is thematically a political and good historical evidence. All these autobiographies are remarkable as they were written in the background of India's national movement. Morarji Desai (1896–1995) a true patriot by heart and a revolutionary in India's struggle for independence wrote a

two-volume autobiography *The Story of My Life* (1982) that expresses his philanthropy and how he rose to become the Prime Minister of India from 1977-79. Till the end of the first half of 20th century almost all the autobiographers talked about the social atmosphere of that time that they had witnessed, or, had boastfully unfurled their enthusiastic and dynamic participation in the freedom struggle of India. Autobiography provides the background and spirit of the age in which the individual grow and develop. Autobiographers generally draw the socio-cultural background of their times in their life-writings because the external world plays an ecstatic role in the self-exploration and development of an individual and reflects his personality. Roland Barthes (1970), keeping view on the two very different personalities of the author, one writing in the present stirring his memory to recollect his past, and, the other confronting his experiences and existence in the past, says: "when a narrator (of a written text) recounts what has happened to him, the 'I' who recounts is no longer the same *I* as the one that is recounted" (p.140). The social workers who dedicated their lives for the cause of the Indian multitudes imbibed too the ecstasies of edifying and commemorating their colossal deeds that they carried out during their lifetime. In 1913, a Brahmo missionary, Banga Chandra Roy published *The Story of My Life* where he states the precepts and tenets of Brahmo samaj. D. K. Karve in his autobiography, *Looking Back* (1936), portrays how he initiated widow remarriage and even insisted on the education of women. In his autobiography, *My Search for Truth* (1937), Dr. Sarvapally Radha Krishnan sketched the principles of Hindu philosophy that he followed in his life. Sitanath Tattvabhushan's *Autobiography* published in 1942 shows his life as a Brahmo missionary. Bhagat Lakshman Singh, a social and religious Sikh reformer dedicated his life towards society for 50 years, wrote his *Autobiography* in 1942, which was posthumously published in 1965, 21 years after he died in 1944. It was at that time many Indians visited foreign soil and brought back the zeal of the West. Nishikanta Chattopadhyaya published his *Reminiscences of German University Life* in 1892. The autobiographical account *My Days with Uncle Sam* (1919) by Rash Behari Dey describes his voyage from his homeland, West Bengal to America where he had to struggle to become an engineer. Dhan Gopal Mukherjee describes his upbringing in India, his excursion to Japan and then his final sojourn in U.S.A. in his autobiography *Caste and Outcast* (1923). In 1939, Krishnalal Shridharani's *My India, My America* came out, which he wrote when he was immigrating to America to complete his higher studies. Har Bilas Sarda published his travel accounts in his autobiography *Recollections and Reminiscences* in 1951. The most controversial and popular personality Nirad C. Choudhuri draws his suffering from alienation in his life-story, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* (1951). It is full of his dilemmas concerning his embracement of two different cultures of the two countries where he lived. Nirad C. Chaudhuri published the sequel to his autobiography *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!* in 1987, where he rejoices the downfall of the British empire from India. After this publication, various experiments were carried out replacing the established tradition of the art of writing autobiography.

It was the dawn of a new era, the debacle of the socialistic and historical

autobiographies, and, the genesis of psychological autobiographies were setting in the motion. The Indians who initiated to concentrate on their inner self started giving priorities to the present than concentrating into the past. Roy Pascal (1960) explicitly comments in this context that “autobiography is...an interplay, a collusion between past and present; its significance is indeed more the revelation of the present situation than the uncovering of the past” (p.11). This opened up new vistas in the expansion and progress of the Indo-Anglian autobiographies. The literary personages like Maharshi Devendranath Tagore (1817-1905) wrote his autobiography in Bengali in 1898 which was translated into English in 1909. The most outstanding creation in the history of Indo-Anglian autobiographies came out with the English translation of Rabindranath Tagore's autobiography *Reminiscences* in 1917. Tagore originally wrote it in Bengali in 1911, and published it as *Jivansmriti*. It is exceptionally impressive as Tagore emerged as the first Indian poet who interwove the contour of his life with the rhythms of his poetry. He delineated his development as a poet and sought the salvation of his soul through his creativity, his art of composing poems. At the end of his life at the age of 80, Tagore wrote another autobiographical account *My Boyhood Days* which is also translated into English from Bengali called *Chhelebelā*. Professor, poet and scientist, Puran Singh's autobiography *On Paths of Life* is an authentic reconstruction of his past and his childhood memories to which he remain attached throughout. He cherished his childhood ecstasies through his writing but the intermittent thwart of his discontinuous memory created a hindrance in its progression.

The renowned Indian novelist Mulk Raj Anand penned down his autobiography *Apology for Heroism: A Brief Autobiography of Idea's* in 1946. It is an account of his life related to the multifarious facets of the Indian society – especially to the downtrodden, pariah and the slum dwellers. Anand poignantly felt and wrote about these impoverished and destitute, and became the renowned author and champion of the poor. Harindranath Chattopadhyaya outlines his development as a poet in the first volume of *Life and Myself* in 1948, but failed to write its sequel. R.K. Narayan's autobiographical sketches *My Days* (1974) focuses on Indian society and has certain drawbacks to be considered as an autobiography proper. It is more like his novels which are redolent of autobiographical elements. Sita Ram Goel, the influential writer and publisher of the late 20th century published his autobiography *How I Became a Hindu* (1982) later enlarged in 1993, under his Voice of India imprint. It shows his inclination towards Marxism during 1940s, but he became anti-Marxists in the latter half of his life. Dom Moraes' *My Son's Father: An Autobiography* (1968) is a compassionate story of a child who never knew the love of a mother. His traumatic experiences being repulsed from his insane mother and thereafter his alienation from his native soil find expression in his poetry and consequently in his autobiography. Dom Moraes wrote a sequel to his autobiography *Never At Home* (1992) where he talked about his constraining drives that made him leave his home, how he set off as a journalist round the globe to find peace and how he found his serene abode in the heart of India to cultivate his poetic genius.

Like Moraes, Sasthi Brata Chakrabarti also suffered the pain of alienation and could neither relish his solace in his native soil nor in abroad, and his autobiography *My God Died Young* (1968) promptly unfolds his private life. In 1991, C.D. Narasimhaiah penned down his life in 'N' *For Nobody: An Autobiography of an English Teacher* that unveil how a rural boy became an internationally acclaimed English teacher. He traveled across the globe and found Indian English literature needs more enrichment. Accordingly he found his own institute "Dhvanyaloka" attuned in Indian style. P. Lal's *Lessons* (1991) is a vignette of three years which exposes his struggle in his death bed in a hospital in U.S.A. Ruskin Bond, the renowned author of children's literature, draws his childhood claustrophobia in his autobiography *Scenes from a Writer's Life: A Memoir* (1997). Harivansh Rai Bachchan, the renowned Hindi poet, took twenty long years to write his life in encyclopedic four volumes in Hindi. It was Mr. Rupert Snell who translated them into English and condensed into one compact but abridged volume called *In the Afternoon of Time* (1998). Khushwant Singh, the famous Indian author, journalist and columnist often occupying the headline for his obsessions and experiments with the feminine sensibilities published his extensive autobiography *Truth, Love and a Little Malice* in 2002. It draws his early life in England, but it reveals that many of his secret affairs with political dignitaries often wrapped him into controversies. Thus, considering all the autobiographies discussed before, it can be stated that James Olney is (1972) appropriate in commenting that "...autobiography is the creative achievements of individual men and the relationship of those achievements to a life lived..." (p.20).

People from every nook and corner of India started taking interest in sketching their life-stories to preserve and immortalize their lives in the pages of their memoirs and autobiographies. Even the saints and the religious reformers published their autobiographies either to pay tribute to their masters or to reform the society. A. S. Appasamy Pillai recollects his feelings as a Christian convert in his two autobiographical sketches *My Conversion* (1919) and *Fifty Years Pilgrimage of a Convert* (1921). The search for finding the meaning of life in terms of dedication and sacrifice to God urged Swami Ramdas to write his two autobiographical books *In Quest of God* (1923) and *In the Vision of God* (1935) which apparently depicts his development as a saint. In 1932, Shri Purohit Swami wrote *The Autobiography of an Indian Monk* which describes his spiritual journey in search of God. Swami Paramahansa Yogananda paid tribute to his master and mentor in his *Autobiography of a Yogi*, published in 1946. The onset of independence spurred the zeal of affirming identity through life-writing and so people from every layer of the Indian society and various profession right from scientists to engineers, politicians to lawyers, diplomats to army generals, economists to journalists aspired to epitomize their lives. Prafulla Chandra Ray, the acclaimed Indian scientist published *Life and Experiences of a Bengali Chemist* in the year 1932. A year later, in 1933, K. Subbarao, published his journalistic career in *Revived Memories* (1933). Hari Singh Gour wrote his life as a lawyer in *Seven Lives: Autobiography of Dr. Sir Hari Singh Gour* in 1944. It describes how he became the founder Vice Chancellor of Sagar University in Madhya Pradesh. Hem Chandra Mitra traced his

development as a lawyer at Chapra in his autobiography *My Reminiscences* (1946). In December, 1949, the founder editor of Hindustan Review, Dr. Sachhidanand Sinha delineates his life as a journalist in *Recollections and Reminiscences of a Long Life in the Hindustan Review*. A.S. Iyengar portrayed his journalistic career in his autobiography *All Through the Gandhian Era* (1950) which covers the most influential 35 years of his life from 1915 to 1950 when Gandhian philosophy swayed the Indian masses.

The famous engineer M. Vivesvaraya who hailed from Mysore talks about his professional life and the development of his projects and constructions in *Memoirs of My Working Life* (1951). Ved Mehta, a visually challenged luminary wove his extremely undaunting life in *Face to Face* (1957) counting his trials and tribulations. In 1993, Ved Mehta published another account, *Up At Oxford* that narrates his days as a student in Oxford. In 1963, Mahar Chand Mahajan wrote his awe-inspiring life in *Looking Back* which depicts how he was discarded at his birth on astrological basis and how he struggled and shone to become the Chief Justice of India. In 1965, K. P. S. Menon, a pioneering career diplomat in Indian Civil Service, published *Many Worlds: An Autobiography*. Following Menon, most of the civil servants and diplomats went on publishing their lives for the next two-three years. In 1967, General B.M. Kaul published *The Untold Story* as an answer to the critics who disparagingly hailed him responsible for India's defeat during Indo-China War of 1962. Dr. Karan Singh wrote his life in two parts: *Heir Apparent* (1982) revealing his early days in Kashmir and *Sadar-i-Riyasat* (1985) dealing with the latter half of his life relating to the annals of the war with China and Pakistan. India's ex-president A. P. J. Abdul Kalam wrote his autobiography, *Wings of Fire* (1999) together with Arun Tiwari. It was first published in English and later translated into 13 other national and international languages. The 8 sections of the book delineates his life & how he as a Muslim boy born in a middle class Tamil family in Rameshwaram started selling newspapers in trains, studied hard to achieve the degree of an aeronautical engineer from Madras Institute of Technology, pursued a six-months training programme in NASA and ended up to become the President of India. Amartya Sen, a Harvard University educated Economist, who demonstrated that starvation and famine is the result of an ineffective distribution of food amongst the population rather than the consequence of shortage of food, wrote his *Autobiography* in 1998, after which he was felicitated with The Nobel Prize for his excellence in the economics of welfare and poverty.

The urge of life-writing that heavily captured the Indian minds, expedited the untouchables and the uncouth to publish their unsung life stories and Hazari bags the credit of being the first untouchable to print his assiduous life in *An Indian Outcaste: The Autobiography of an Untouchable* (1951). His servitude in an English family for years was a boon in disguise that succoured him to improve the quality of his education and for which he remained grateful to them. Translated from the Marathi by Gail Omvedt, *Growing Up Untouchable in India* published in 2002, is the first Dalit autobiography in English written by Vasant Moon. The story revolves around his neighbourhood and a community of people who are subjugated at the bottom of the caste hierarchy. It

reveals an insider's insight into the struggle and pain of slum culture where Dalits are not seen merely as victims but also as a community striving to shed their sense of inferiority. Though this is the story of Moon's life, it develops into a rich narrative where the story of an individual and a community has been woven into the larger realm of Indian politics, providing the readers a rare view of the social and political events that happened at that time. Munshi Rahman Khan, one of the indentured workers who went to Surinam, published *Autobiography of an Indian Indentured Labourer* in 2005. The book is divided into four sections. The first section deals with his life in village Bharkhari, Hamirpur district in the United Provinces till his departure to Surinam, the second is about his experiences under indenture, and the third is about making a living in Surinam. The fourth is shorter than the rest but deals with the breakdown of the harmony forged during the indentured days because of the rise of the communal differences between the Hindus and the Muslims.

Even Indian sports personalities at one fell swoop published their lives to epitomize their career graphs. Tenzing Norgay, the first man to trek the zenith of Mt. Everest, recounts his enthralling and transfixing days in the heart of Himalayas to James Ullman that was later published as *Man of Everest* (1955). Vijay Hazare, the well known cricketer penned down his life in *My Story* (1964). Another legendary cricketer, Sunil Manohar Gavaskar, records the graph of his cricket career in his autobiography *Sunny Days* (1976). Sujit Mukherjee, a well reputed litterateur expressed his passion for cricket in his *Autobiography of an Unknown Cricketer* (1996), but it is less important as an autobiography proper. Kapil Dev, the former Indian cricketer, popularly known as the Haryana Hurricane published his autobiography *Straight from the Heart* in 2004. In it he mentions about his early life in Haryana, his entry into the international cricket as an ordinary player, his achievement as the captain of the Indian national cricket team in building teamwork and his successful effort in winning World Cup for India in 1983. All arts are based on a system of aesthetics and the art of dance use the body to create exquisite patterns in time and space to communicate with the world at large. A renowned dancer, Ram Gopal, ensembled the saga of his life in *Rhythm in the Heavens: An Autobiography* (1957), that bloomed from the womb of the spirit of his dancing career. Ravi Shankar, the eminent sitar player, born and brought up in a family with musical background wrote *My Music, My Life* (1968) where he described how he spent his early life with his brother Uday Shanker, India's international dancer, who inspired him to be a dedicated musician. Satish Gujral's *A Brush With Life* (1997) depicts the life of a painter and the revival of the Indian art and paintings as he has observed. The greatest cartoonist, illustrator and humourist of India, R.K. Laxman, known for his creation of 'The Common Man', wrote his autobiography *The Tunnel of Time* (1998). It reveals his involvement with many reputed journals and newspapers like *The Hindu* and *The Times of India*. The evergreen actor Dev Anand launched his autobiography *Romancing with Life* in 2007. The book is not only about his reel life but also about his real life – about his days before he had joined the film industry. It is loosely structured, episodic that moves back and forth focusing on certain circumstances Dev Anand has

stood for over his career: the ostentatious screen persona, the determination to keep going in the face of dissuasion and mockery and the wish to throw his arms around the world, even when the world didn't particularly want to be embraced. Dilip Kumar's much long-awaited autobiography *The Substance and the Shadow* is published in 2014. It chronicles 91 years of his life right from his childhood, family, his marriage, his wife and six glorious decades working in most appreciated Indian films.

All these Indian men deserve appreciation as they have shown their racking honesty in sketching up their lives. They have stood up to the face of all adversities and fearlessly and candidly reconstructed their past in the pages of their autobiographies, without caring on their image as celebrities. Relating to their upright attitude Georges Gusdorf (1980) writes that "autobiography...requires a man to take a distance with regard to himself in order to constitute himself in the focus of his special unity and identity across time" (p.35). Thus, with the culmination of the first decade of 21st century, life-writing in India, especially autobiographies supplemented and enriched the Indian literary treasury. The immense production of autobiographies in India studded jewels in the crown of its existing literature, and augmented Indian literary scenario. This research paper shows that at present the genre of life-writing is not limited to the lives of celebrities, but to every individual life is precious, and so is its preservation in the pages of autobiography. Moreover, the phenomenal growth of psychoanalysis has raised the awareness of self portrayal in every people. Therefore, the demand and increase of self-life-writing or as we call it autobiography, has once again proved that the concept of life-writing, though not much different from the occidental concepts, had existed in India, and are still in making.

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