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PERSONAL MANIFESTO: A STUDY OF SELECTED POLITICAL AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

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ABSTRACT

Men always have a deep urge to express about himself. Through every medium of art, man tries to express his inner feelings. Different forms of literature help in a great deal in fulfilling such need of men. Especially confessional and autobiography writings helps man to show the true side of his personality and give a chance to share his thoughts in a larger canvas. Writing autobiography is an art of self-portrayal. It is form of regeneration of self. In literature, autobiographies are considered as history of self-hood, recollection of true events, mirror of society and a source of one's moral vision of life. Autobiography is a faithful account which based on true events and focuses on existence of an individual. Autobiography articulates the journey of man towards self-analysis and self-discovery. Sometimes autobiography functions as a translation of one's personality. The individual writer recreates own identity by providing intimate details of his life. An autobiography can analysed from cultural, political and religious perspective. Life writings are not purely anecdotes but a revelation of self to the world. Autobiographies of great leaders are important as they are admired and popular. Other than that these accounts have different significance as it uncovers the person beneath the power and position. This particular study evaluates selected autobiographies of Indian politicians in term of its philosophical, historical and literal value.

Keywords- Autobiography, Genre, Memoir, Politics, History.

For a poet an autobiography is a record of his own accomplishments and disappointments which can be traced in his poetry. From a writer's points of view, an autobiography is a self-expression of truths of his own life. For a politician his autobiography is a self-construct life story and a reliable document for the readers. The famous Indo-Anglian writer-poet K. Satchidanandan feels that autobiography is that genre of literature that "most immediately and deeply engages our interest and holds it and that in the end seems to mean most to us because it brings increased awareness, through an understanding of another life in another time and place of the nature of our own selves and our share

in the human condition" (Satchidanandan, 109). Autobiographical elements can be traced in confessions, journals, memoirs, meditations and self-portraits as much as in other forms of literature such as fiction, poetry and drama. In an autobiography, the author attempts to capture important events of his life including inner struggle and challenges he faced as well as family life, relationships, education over all his life experience. Through autobiography one can leave a legacy for generations. An individual shares the deepest secrets, his victory and defeat along with the lesson he learned in his life. So life writing can motivate and have lasting effect on readers. A memoir is

slightly different from autobiography. A memoir is record of memories and important events of author's life but not the whole life story. Few significant memoirs are 'A Movable Feast' by Ernest Hemingway, 'Walden' by Henry David Thoreau, George Orwell 'Down and Out in Paris and London' etc.

The term autobiography derived from the Greek word 'auto-biographia' which means "self-life writing". An autobiography is a dynamic source which provides actual facts regarding the individual writer's life and experiences. A study on history of autobiography suggests that –

"Autobiography is a form of religious literature with an ancient lineage in the Christian, Islamic, and Tibetan Buddhist traditions. It became an increasingly common and significant form of discourse in almost every religious tradition during the twentieth century and its many forms and recurring themes raise crucial religious issues"

This particular genre has no limitation. It became a strong means of protest against social norms and exploitation. It became a channel to express the story of struggle for the Feminist, Black, Dalit, Queer and Minorities. There is the convergence of literary, philosophical and psychological interests in the study of this genre. When C.G.Jung feels man as a process rather than a being; Jacques Lucan makes psychoanalysis of the writing to know the writer. The later employs Saussurian linguistics as a means and reaches at the man- of course, not a coherent autonomous man. Important psychoanalytic critics like Ernest Jones, Norman Holland and Lucan have analysed literature from psychological point of view. Similarly, historicists, like Greenblatt attempted to re-historicise the text and express clearly that literature reflects directly or indirectly historical reality and therefore it is a presentation of another area of one's autobiography. Cultural criticism is no less an autobiographical tenet in literature. This interdisciplinary approach includes social theory, gender study or even post-colonial inquiries.

A political autobiography can accomplish different purposes. It gives an opportunity to the politician to open up and influence a large audience

other than media and propaganda. The glimpse of personal perceptive and struggle for power fascinates the readers. It also serves as a process of socialisation and an effective medium to project own ideology in front of a large audience. An autobiographical account gives an effective scope to address complex issues which cannot be communicated in any other way. These kinds of confessional writings expressed directly covering social, political, personal and political range.

An autobiography serves as an evidence which makes aware about own existence and this place in the world. An autobiography can expose the real self-other than what people were perceived him. Autobiography of political figures has distinct significance. These stories related to the part history and events. It functions as both personal and historical account. Adolf Hitler's 'Mein Kampf', 'An autobiography' of Benjamin Franklin, 'My Early Life' of Winston Churchill, are few examples of autobiography by political leaders. The tradition of autobiography in literature in India takes us to the years of struggle for independence.

The autobiography of Mahatma Gandhi "The Story of My Experiments with Truth" is a wide read text. Though it is not a complete account of life, it covers from his childhood days to till 1920. Originally it was written in Gujarati and translated into English by Mahadev Desai. It was published weekly instalments in the journal from 1925 to 1929. Gandhiji, adopted the western practice of writing autobiography is to narrate his experiments with Truth. The book projects a philosophical and spiritual journey rather than political.

Gandhiji, mentioned the important values he gained from Indian folklores. The story of Harischandra, a king who sacrificed everything just to keep his words and Shrivankumar's ideology devotion towards parents, made a deep impact in his mind. He continued giving instances of morals from Bhagbat Gita and New Testament. He adopted the path of truth and nonviolence. He left his practice as a lawyer and devoted all his life for the motherland. Hinduism made profound impact on his thoughts. He states the term Religion 'I am using in its broadest sense, meaning thereby self-realisation knowledge of self'. Gandhiji's autobiography can be

read as a philosophical text as well as political text, talking about his deep faith on God he says:

"I did not then know the essence of religion or of God, and how He works in us. Only vaguely I understood that God had saved me on that occasion. On all occasions of trial He has saved me. I know that the phrase 'God saved me' has a deeper meaning for me today, and still I feel that I have not yet grasped its entire meaning. Only richer experience can help me to a fuller understanding. But in all my trials of a spiritual nature, as a lawyer, in conducting institutions, and in politics I can say that God saved me. When every hope is gone. 'When helpers fall and comforts flee,' I find that help arrives somehow, from I know not where. Supplication, worship, prayer are no superstition; they are acts more real than the acts of eating, drinking, sitting or walking. It is no exaggeration to say that they alone are real, all else is unreal.(79)"

The story of Gandhi's life was full of struggle. While he was in England, he struggled to survive in a complete new world. While he came back to India, he joined the freedom struggle. He went on protesting against the British rule in various ways. He took leadership of Non-cooperation movement, Civil Disobedience movement and Quit India Movement and paved the path of independence. The autobiography of Gandhi provides us a clear picture of India of his time. The superstitious Indian society full of orthodox practices, the inequality, the class system, the humiliation and exploitations of British are vividly projected. It is necessarily a historical account. The realism, the religious context, socio-political affairs, the representation of self, Gandhi's autobiography is a precious document for post-colonial studies.

Jawaharlal Nehru contributed significantly towards development Indian English Literature. He wrote *Glimpses of World History* (1930). "*An Autobiography*"(1936) and *Discovery of India*(1946). All his works are true accounts that depict his own inner life and outer experiences. His works are venerated for their artistic sensibility and elegance. Jawaharlal Nehru was a national leader and as

important personality in Indian Freedom movement. He wrote these works in English language not in Hindi as he was aiming for large audience. He wrote in the preface of *An Autobiography*:

"I was not writing deliberately for an audience, but if I thought of an audience, it was one of my own countrymen and countrywomen. For foreign readers I would have probably written differently"(XV)

From his view it is clear that he wanted to reach vast masses. He called himself as writer by accident. For him writing was only to enlarge himself it alone fine. Nehru's autobiography is a mixture of his experiences both personal and political. We can find chapters which paints the natural beauty of India. Though Nehru did not spiritualise nature or overwhelmed by the beauty of nature. He was a keen observer of nature. He finds vital philosophy in the changes of nature. He describes the seasonal change on a peepal tree in his autobiography.

"Even four magnificent peepal trees which stood in front of the gaol gate, much to my surprise dropped nearly all their leaves. Gaunt and cheerless they stood there, till the spring air warmed them up again and sent a message of life to their innermost cells. Suddenly there was a stir both in the peepals and the other trees and an air of mystery surrounded them as of secret operatives going on behind the Scenes and I would be startled to find little bits of green peeping out all over them. It was a gay and cheering sight. And then, very rapidly, the leaves would come out in their millions and glisten in the sunlight and ply about in the breeze, How wonderful is the sudden change from bud to leaf!"(354)

Nehru kept sharing his thoughts about the future of the country and about world politics. He had a great role in making India. He speaks "Mussolini and Hitler are considered by them in perfect good faith and with righteous indignation for their attacks on Liberty and Democracy and in equal good faith, similar attacks and deprivation of liberty in India seem to them as necessary and the highest moral reasons are advanced to show that the disinterested behaviour on their part demands them"(341)

Nehru speaks drawing from his memories on Gandhiji's withdrawal of Civil disobediences moment. Nehru was really shocked by the decision.

He wrote:

And now? Suddenly I felt very lonely in that cell of Alipore goal. Life seemed to be a dreamy affair, a very wilderness of desolation of the many hard lesions that I had learnt, the hardest and the most painful now faced me, that is not possible in any vital matter to rely on anyone. One must journey through life above to rely on others is to invite heartbreak.(507)

Nehru witnessed the fall and rise of India. His life emerged along with the struggle of the nation. The autobiography is a testimony of Nehru's own discoveries of self through the emotions attached for the nation. Nehru's autobiography projects his thoughts, impressions, views overall a journey of an extraordinary politician. Nehru's style is transparent as well as transcendental. His deep love for his country can be found in every page the book. About himself he speaks:

"I have become queer mixture of the east and west, out of place everywhere, at home nowhere. Perhaps my thoughts and approaches to life are more akin to what is called western and eastern, but India cling to me. I cannot get rid of either that past inheritance or my recent acquisitions." (598)

The autobiography of Indian political personalities gives us picture of major historical events, struggle of independence, Colonial life and life after independence. Lal Krishna Advani, a frontier of Indian politics and co-founder of a major party wrote his life story "My Country My Life". The text describes his early childhood and heart breaking partition of India and Pakistan, outrageous events due to religious extremism, India's victory over Kargil war and many major and minor events. The text serves as testimony of great historical events. It is also a struggle read about the reality of national affairs, war, emergency and over all about political wisdom. AtalBihari Vajpayee puts it as-

"Advaniji's autobiography aptly titled My Country My Life, closely follows the

defining moments of Independence India, including the tragedy of partition that accompanied the joy and freedom from the British rule, allowing reads to learn both him and to some extent, also about the extraordinary times he has lived in".

K.Natwar Singh was Minister of External Affairs and he had also worked as Indian ambassador in different countries. His autobiography gives us insights about his personal and political life as well as the political leaders he worked with. Several chapters of his autobiography dedicated to three Prime ministers of India. He recorded the political events, the defeat and victory of his party, political conspiracy and his part in Indian politics. K. Natwar Singh's autobiography starts with lines- "I believe that life is a journey without maps. Many leaves have turned in my garden. There is now on losing or winning. There is only self-realization. Each dawn is no longer a promise."(ix). His autobiography is essentially a political memoir full of stories about world and Indian politics. It's an honest account of journey of Indian politician, "a well lived life" and "an eventful life"

These political autobiographies are dynamic sources for understanding of a person's life, deeds, accomplishments, failures as well as these are witnesses of Time and Events. These open texts are field of literary analysis, psychoanalytical analysis, cultural study, historical study, Gender study etc. It can be interpreted through various lenses. It proves to be powerful medium for the writer as it gives a freedom to his voice as well as gives liberty to the readers to visit the past. Autobiographies Indian politicians are considered as story of Heroes. The selected autobiographies are not only limited to the writers only but we are introduced to other major personalities related to politics. Life histories of politicians remain in high the eyes of public. Though writing autobiographies are a conscious attempt to express and expose of inner self, it have immense literary value as it records truth and ethics.

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