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AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND SELF: A READING

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Abstract

Autobiography is a literary genre that enables individuals to recount their life experiences, offering a personal narrative that explores identity, memory, and self-perception. Central to this genre is the concept of the "self," which is not static but continually constructed through the processes of reflection, storytelling, and the interplay of external influences. This abstract explores how autobiographies serve as a tool for individuals to negotiate and articulate their sense of self over time. It examines how authors shape their identities through narrative structures, selective memory, and self-presentation, often balancing truth and fiction in the process. The autobiographical act reveals the fluidity of the self, as societal expectations, personal growth, and historical context influence it.

Keywords: Autobiography, Self, Gender.

Ever since the earliest literary endeavors ranging from the Hindu Upanishads to early Christian artistic depictions, the self has stood at the center of all creative processes. The concept of the individual and what has been the traditional understanding of the term self, have been critical to the thoughts and philosophical systems since the days of Aristotle and Plato. The concept of self has always taken a prime position in literary endeavors. Works like autobiographies, memoirs, diaries are committed to explore the maze of self in the narrative.

Jerome de Romanet in his doctoral thesis *The Narrative Creation of Self in the Fiction by African-American and African-Caribbean Women Writers* comments on the significance of the self in literature:

With the emergence of the Renaissance and of more secular representations of humankind men in both his biological and metaphorical dimensions has two as a necessary gorge of all things and remained as the core of cultural,

social and ideological representations of the world. Indeed the self stands at the center of any creative processes, this is especially true of autobiography an enterprise that purports to write about the self in an attempt to reconcile one's life with oneself and order the experiences of a specific writers like them. (12)

As a genre is by its inherent nature committed to captivate the elusive and discursive phenomena called the self. But because of the fluidity and complexity of the concept it becomes increasingly difficult to contain and limit the phenomena into a specific definition. Various attempts have however been made to contain this genre in definition. Traditionally autobiography means a story of one's life written by oneself. In talking about the narrative image of autobiography, Walter R Fisher in his book *Human Condition as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value and Action* says that the autobiographical narratives along with history and biography

It is a form of recounting the construction of a story to help ourselves and others to establish a meaningful life world the character of the narratives the conflicts the resolutions and the style will vary but each mode of recounting and accounting for is but a way of relating a truth about the human condition. Autobahn does big understood as a way of representing negotiating and understanding oneself. (52)

The West with its exclusive claims on some solemnizing the self has many self referential narratives that can be traced back to the 4th century ad the phenomena of celebrating and exploring the self can be found in Plato's 7th epistle a large part of which is devoted to exploring his own life. But the exposition of the genre in its full schematic inauguration is seen in St Augustine's *Confessions*. His negative weather religious and spiritual orientation but the prime motivation was the self the metamorphosis of the self, the journey from ignorance to self discovery. The centrality of St Augustine's *Confessions* does not only revolve around the spiritual and evangelical orientation of the narrative, but also around the discovery and the development of the self. The basic trajectory of Augustine's confessions consists of an archetypal journey through which the self passes and undergoes transformation with its initial temptation and the resultant victory over the since and recognition of the true self accompanied by spiritual and religious epiphany. On the other hand Rousseau's *Confessions* shows the gradual change from religious sentences in confessional mode to reflective overtones. There are unmistakable similar threads in both Augustine's and Rousseau's narratives, yet in we see Rousseau's the emergence of a unique and independent genre contending peculiarly on the authors life. Rousseau's *Confessions* is a very prime example of the author negotiating, exploring and celebrating the self and thereby asserting individuality and unity. Is negative can be seen as a prototype of modern self-referential narrative.

Both Augustine and Rousseau have thus given us the trajectory of autobiographical narratives whereout in events and developments lead to the ultimate realization and revelation of the true and unique self. Which they have set for the narratives

find their endorsement from critics like Roy Pascal and Jeremy Buckley. In his study of autobiography *The Turning Key* Jerome Buckley puts forward his view which coincides with the paradigm set by the above-mentioned authors.

The ideal autobiography describes avoids of self -discovery a live journey confused by frequent misdirections and even crisis of identity but reaching at last a sense of perspective and integration. Through the alert awakened memory continuity from early childhood to maturity or even to old age and as a work of literature it achieves a satisfying wholeness. (14)

The narratives are thus seen as unproblematical and unilateral which delineate the development of the author cell from innocence and ignorance to awareness and knowledge.

Autobiography has thus become a disputed term in theoretical space. James Olney thus comments on the shifting of attention in recent criticism from BIOS to the auto. He observes in his essay autobiography and cultural movement:

Much of the criticism of autobiographical mode was elected to the question of autos how the act of autobiography is at once a discovery, creation, and an intimation of the self the shift of attention from bios to autos from life to self was largely responsible for opening things up and turning their minor philosophical psychological and literary direction. (19)

The problem before the theoreticians and critics was that the contour of autobiography was an elusive and fluid is the nature of self but our self has to be engraved. Sas such critics and theoreticians assemble new models and revise the way interpreting autobiographies. The attempts by the critics to specify and limit the definition of the general attest to the complexity of the genre along with its notoriety it has earned in the theoretical space. The elusiveness and problems of defining the genre are evident in knot of rice common set autography is just a subdivision of the novel. Many other critics refuse to see self-preferential negatives as a genre and refer to

it as a way of reading. Its inability to express the diverse properties inherent in the genre many critics have replaced the term itself accommodate a range of dimensions Michael Bojor and his poetics of the editorial self-portrait does postulates different terms to the place that term autobiography.

With the herald of the postmodern era such maxims of the Enlightenment underwent severe deconstruction. The easy credence of self is unproblematic and chronologically is no longer possible in the context of current theoretical space. The self was no longer disable and continuous process but rather something elusive and problematic. James Olney remarks in his article "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment":

The self is indefinitely difficult to get that, to encompass and to know how to deal with; it bears no definition; it's good it's like mercury away from observation; it is not known except privately and intuitively. (9)

20th century with the rich array of critical perspective questions are very sanctity of the terms like history narrative and self of the genre. The properties and predilection of these terms undergo a metamorphosis when placed within the context of broader cultural and ideological arguments. Self is no longer an innocent and concrete term. The issue as to how an autobiography is cast is invariably related to the composite construction of the self in the narrative. Critics and theoreticians accept unanimously that self is a construct and that is why the primary discussion of autography now inevitably focuses on the interrelationship between negative language and the cell. Very active constructing the cell becomes embedded in politics because of the interaction of these factors. When the question of textuality arises the subject is at once the writer and the return. The new orientation of the self has been subjected to rigorous questioning and the problem of the subject is expressed by critics like Paul J in being in the text

We are accustomed with thinking about the concept of a thinking or a writing subject at most you mystify and problematize that concept to understand it as having less to natural, privilege and potentially unified psychological condition, then to a historically

constitute set of ideas and assumptions whose reference are complexly that's first in the very language which seeks to constitute them.

Moreover, the autocratic terms of postmodernism post structuralism jeopardize genre itself to such an extent that its operation becomes an impossibility. Postmodernism denies any possibility of truth, which autobiography tends to represent. And this suspicion is well expressed by Jean-Francois Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* where he rejects the idea of a solitary from a unique Sense perpetuated by the maternity of autobiography.

One may come to a set definition of self as something which is continuously in a flux of creation which is clearly demonstrated in the writing so more recently in writers like Maya Angelou. Definition of self encompasses multiple selves in creation which is the backdrop of the writers identity. Scholars of autobiography have pondered over the issue of the continuous self which the self continuously keeps changing and advance remains the same.

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