

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Autobiography is a factual record of the author's life experience and his observation, the men and the world around him. It is one of the most important and popular forms of literature for the expression of the 'self'. It is a truthful and candid revelation of the 'self'. 'It is the writing of once own history'; the story of one's life written by himself '1 It has been a long practice in the west to write autobiographies by men of positions since St. Augustine's *Confessions*. Autobiography as a literary form originated in Europe and later on it flourished in the east also along with the west. In the present age autobiography is considered as a distinct literary form. It is now regarded as a conscious literary form and it has become a fashion to write and publish autobiographies containing important daily events in the live of statement, political and social workers, bureaucrats as well as men of social position.

However, in spite of the popularity of the autobiography on the part of the writers and readers, it is seen that very marginal research work had been done. Autobiography is often neglected by researcher and critics as it is considered as non-fictional prose and minor literary form based on factual details. So far autobiographies in general and the comparative study of Western and Eastern autobiographies in particular. But since the publication of *Studies In Autobiography*² ed. James Olney (1988) there was international awareness of the significance of the autobiographical studies. Yet there are only five to six doctoral dissertations completed in Autobiography in Indian

Universities, viz (i) C. L. Chugh's *Indian Autobiographies in English in the 19th and 20th centuries* (Bhopal University 1983) (ii) R. C. P. Sinha's *The Indian Autobiographies in English* (Patna University 1975) (iii) M Dal Manga Thoyar's *Autobiographies of 20th Century Women Novelists from America, England and India : A comparative study in Feminine Sensibility* (Osmania University 1984) (iv) Shenbagvalli K. S *Indian Autobiography in English (Madras University 1987.)* (v) D.R. Konnur`s., *Post Independence Literary Autobiography in Indian Writing in English.*³ (vi) N.G. Wale`s., *Autobiographical Fiction in Indian English Literature.*⁴ (vii) M.M. Kanwadkar`s., *A Critical Study of Autobiographies in English by Indian Women.*⁵

But a comparative study of the Indian autobiography with the Western one is rarely done. That is why the topic entitled, **"THE AUTOBIOGRAPHIES BY J. J ROUSSEAU AND M. K. GANDHI: A COMPARATIVE STUDY"** is selected here for this proposed study.

Some writings of the Indian autobiographers in English is of the national and international level but their autobiographies were ignored so far by research scholars. No concentrated efforts had been made on the comparative study of autobiographies from two continents. That is why I felt every need to undertake a critical and comparative study of selected autobiographies written by the western and Indian autobiographers. Naturally a convenient selection is made for this purpose.

The present study is confined to only two selected autobiographies viz. ***The Confessions***⁶ by Jean Jacques

It is intended here to study comparatively the two selected autobiographies on the acceptable parameters of autobiographies as a literary form. Further, the self-revelation and the light thrown on the contemporary ethos by their autobiographers is also studied as autobiographies are supposed to record the social and political facts authentically. The documentation in the autobiographies is based on the first hand experience of the writers and like history it is not based on the second hand experiences or sources. So the documentation in the two selected autobiographies can be accepted as a better documentation.

At the outset this study will throw light on:

1. Self-revelation of J. J. Rousseau and M. K. Gandhi
2. Documentation of their contemporary social and political ethos
3. How for J. J. Rousseau and M. K. Gandhi adhered to the accepted norms and parameters of the form of autobiography.

Thus this will be a kind of comparative study of the two selected autobiographies viz. *The Confessions* by J. J. Rousseau and *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* by M. K. Gandhi. The study adopts the methodology of the generic study i.e. applying the norms of the genre of autobiography to the two selected autobiographies. At the same time the comparative methodology will be used to compare these two autobiographies and their contents i.e. self-revelation and documentation of the contemporary political phases.

Rousseau and *The Story of My Experiment with Truth*⁷ by Mohandas Karmchand Gandhi. They form a convenient group by themselves for the purpose. It excludes such other autobiographies falling in convenient groups written by Indians and Westerners. The selected two authors of the aforesaid autobiographies were wellknown socio-political philosophers. Both were uncommon and influencing personalities holding significant positions in the respective political situations. J.J.Rousseau was the French Philosopher. His thoughts on the fundamental right of liberty of man were inspiring and were indirectly responsible for the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789. Similarly M.K. Gandhi's thoughts on Indian socio-political situation inspired Indians to bring a desirable social change and to obtain the political freedom from the foreign rule with the non-violence. *The Confessions* was written in 1781 when Rousseau was 54 while *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* was written by M.K. Gandhi in 1927, when he was 59 years old. It was the mature age for them to retrospect and introspect their past properly. Both of the autobiographies were translated in English and Gujurati respectively. These two autobiographies are supposed to be the significant landmarks in the development of autobiography proper as a genre. They are masterpieces in world autobiography literature. The first one is a good example from the Europe and the latter one from India. Therefore, it is an interesting area of the comparative study of autobiographies written by authors belonging to two different countries in two continents i.e. Europe and Asia.

The present study adopts the following scheme of Chapterisation.

1. Introduction
2. Chapter I : Theory of Autobiography
3. Chapter II : ***The Confessions***
4. Chapter III : ***The Story of My Experiments with Truth***
5. Conclusions

Bibliography

It is hoped that this comparative study will be helpful in future as one of the autobiographical studies to researchers in this area. The selected autobiographies are world famous autobiographies written by two stalwarts international personalities belonging to two distinct cultures and distinct continents. The concerned autobiographies and their critical study will help for overall awareness of the significance of autobiography as a literary form on one hand and on the other hand their comparative study will help to understand the basic form of autobiography proper and its function in Indian and Western culture as the two stand as Western and Indian specimen.

INTRODUCTION

REFERENCES

1. ***The Oxford English Dictionary***, prepared by J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. weiner, Vol. 1, Clarendon Press. Oxford, (1991), P. 801.
2. ***Studies in Autobiography***, ed. James Olney, 1st ed. New York / Oxford : Oxford Univ. Press, (1988)
3. Konnur, D.R., ***Post Independence Literary Autobiography in Indian Writing in English with Special Reference to Kamala Das, Dom Moraes, Nayantara, Sahgal & Sasthi Brata***. M.Phil. Dissertation. Kolhapur: Shivaji Univ., 1986.
4. N.G. Wale., ***Autobiographical Fiction in Indian English Literature***, M. Phil Dissertation (Unpublished), Shivaji Univ. 1993,
5. Dr. M. M. Kanwadkar., ***A Critical Study of Autobiographies In English By Indian Women***, P.hd Thesis, (Unpublished) Shivaji Univ. Kolhapur, 1995.
6. Rousseau, Jean-Jacques., ***The Confession***, Wordsworth Classics of World Literature, 1996.
7. Gandhi. M. K., ***An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiment with Truth***. (Truns by Mahadev Desai) 3rd ed. Ahmedabad Navajeevan Publishing house, 1989.
