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CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

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The five autobiographies that we have studied give us a living feel of the ethos of post-independence India, characterized by vast changes in socio-cultural values and some intellectual and emotional responses to it. The autobiographies throw significant light on the nature of creativity that gets manifested in Indian writing in English. This creativity is governed primarily by city-oriented, westernized culture where English still plays a dominant role. Secondly, it is governed by the processes of industrialization and urbanization which generate revolt against the old values on the one hand and a kind of moral chaos on the other. The writers, therefore, are thrown back on to their own experiences in search of values that would lend significance to their life. The anguish of exploration is so great during the early period of the writers' life that they plunge into writing their autobiographies in their early thirties or so. They seem to be consumed by the desire to explore their experiences in their rawness because they consider them as dramatic and worthwhile and existentially valid.

These autobiographies not only help us to understand the literary ethos of Indian writing in English on the one hand and on the other they also help us indirectly to understand the literary ethos that generated some modernist trends in other

Indian literatures in our own languages. This literary ethos is characterised by (a) a questioning attitude in respect of old traditions and values, and (b) an attitude of exploration towards one's own experiences in an uninhibited manner (as in the case of Kamala Das and Sasthi Brata) or in the narcissist, egocentric manner (as in the case of Dom Moraes) or in a highly sophisticated, impersonal manner (as in the case of Nayantara Sahgal).

One common trend that binds together these autobiographies is that of more or less honest self-analysis and self-criticism. There might be an element of self-justification in some cases, say, in Kamala Das and Sasthi Brata, but there is absolutely no self-glorification. All of these are actuated by a desire to understand the self by squarely facing the more or less traumatic experiences of childhood and adolescence with a view to strengthening oneself to face the existential future. Kamala Das, for example, writes her autobiography with a view to preparing herself for a possible death. Sasthi Brata writes in order to understand himself and to justify his self-exile, whereas Dom Moraes writes in order to examine his past and prepare himself to accept the responsibilities of his adulthood, of his 'son's father'. If the old, traditional autobiographies were past-oriented, recalling nostalgically and sometimes analytically the events of a life which is almost over, the new autobiographies

are future-oriented, accepting, what Eliot speaks of, 'the pastness of the past and its presence' and the possibility of both being present in the future.

Now the next question is, what light do these autobiographies throw on our understanding of the psyche of the Indian writer in English? First and foremost, they reveal that the Indian writer in English is often west-oriented since he is educated in westernized institutions or in the institutions abroad. Westernization, naturally, results in some kind of alienation and an attitude of protest against or rejection of traditional socio-cultural values of Indian society. They also reflect the spirit of modernism, i.e., the spirit of experimentation coupled with an urge to seek new values of freedom, justice, equality on which the new emerging society could be built. But essentially they reflect the central ambivalence in the psyche of the Indian writer in English who is subject to two equally powerful pulls - one that of Western culture which works through English language and the other that of the demands of their Indian roots.

This study of Indian literary autobiographies could be easily extended by taking into our ken the entire range of Indian literary autobiography from Lutfulla to Kamala Das, and I am sure, the extended comprehensive study will give us the inside story of the various currents and cross-currents that shaped the Indian sensibility which expressed itself in Indian writing in English for over a century and a half.