

## **CONCLUSIONS**

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSIONS

This concluding chapter states in brief some findings resulted from the comparative critical study of the two selected autobiographies viz. *The Confessions* and *The Story of My Experiments With Truth* written by J.J. Rousseau and M.K. Gandhi respectively the two stalwart internationally famous personalities on the acceptable theory of form and function of autobiography. The selected two autobiographies display some common features, therefore, they form together a convenient group of study to many similarities. Though the autobiographers belong to different nations, continents, and the centuries they are stalwart sociopolitical philosophers, who are influencing uncommon epoch making personalities. They are inspiring and thought provoking so that they are indirectly responsible for political upheavals and changes in their own countries. Rousseau's thoughts on 'equality of man' and Gandhi's thoughts on 'National freedom' inspired their countrymen to bring the desirable sociopolitical changes in their motherlands. However, the present study is not merely comparative study of their thoughts, life events and their contemporary documentation but it is a comparative critical generic study of the selected books on the acceptable parameters and the functions of the genre of the 'autobiography proper'.

The origin of autobiography is in the mortal man's impulse to remain immortal in the form of a book on him written by himself. Infact 'autobiography proper' originated in Europe and

then accepted by all nations in other continents including India. In spite of the native traditions of autobiographical writings of their own. St. Augustine's *Confessions* is regarded as the earliest instance of 'autobiography proper'. There is seen a gradual development of autobiography proper since the Renaissance period to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is regarded as the most popular non-fictional prose literary form today. Indians have their own native method of writing autobiographies. However, Indians started to write autobiography proper after the encounter of the British rule and English education. Today Indians have excelled in the art of 'autobiography proper' and contributed a good number of autobiographies.

'Autobiography proper' is a distinct form of literature. The term 'autobiography' is first occurs in *Quarterly Review* in 1809 and is used by Robert Southey. Ample definitions of autobiography are available but Roy Pascals definition is very comprehensive that's why, it is acceptable. 'Autobiography proper' differs from other autobiographical writings such as Diary, Biography, reminiscence, memoirs etc. in spite of many resemblances. The distinctive parameters of autobiography are selection of events, truth, subjectivity and objectivity. Self as the centre and detached view of 'self'. It is very difficult to observe these parameters while writing autobiography. At the same time autobiography proper is the most significant form of self-revelation. The autobiographer has a difficult task to present his character in its growth by taking a retrospective view of a certain standpoint in life in introspective mood. As a result his 'self' emerges fully, truly as it is with all its good and bad traits without

hiding anything and without self justification and glorifications. In addition, the contemporary milieu occurs as an inevitable part as it being the social context of the author's self. Therefore, the self revelation and contemporary documentation are essential functions of autobiography proper.

J.J. Rousseau and M.K. Gandhi belong to different centuries i.e. 19<sup>th</sup> century and 20<sup>th</sup> century respectively. They came to the forefront of social and political happenings of their times as socio-political philosophers. Rousseau happened to the French Philosopher who offered his thought provoking ideas on the fundamental right of the equality of man and was indirectly the cause of the outbreak of French Revolution. Similarly, M.K. Gandhi's thoughts on Political situations inspired almost all Indians to bring the desirable social changes and the Political freedom from the British rule. His thoughts on non-violence were equal to Rousseau's thoughts on equality of man and the result was the freedom movement bringing Indian Independence. Therefore, the two autobiographies contain the autobiographers thoughts, events in their lives and social documentation. However, the present study is not the study of these contents of the selected autobiographies but it is a generic study. The concerned autobiographers wrote the concerned autobiographies at their mature age i.e. above their fifties. Rousseau wrote *The Confessions* at his 54 and Gandhi wrote *The Story of My Experiments Truth* at 59. This is a sufficiently mature age to retrospect with a proper standpoint their past with good introspective mood as such the both authors standpoint is

appropriate and pertaining to their social position and socio-political thinking.

It is surprising that both the autobiographies were written in the unusual conditions, As Rousseau wrote it during his exile in England while Gandhiji was put in Yervada prison by British Government. Perhaps both autobiographer's isolated quiet life and their mood of the time were suitable to retrospect and introspect their past of shape in autobiographies. Infact both of them did not write their autobiographies in english though their english versions are used for this study. They wrote their autobiographies in their own mothertounge i.e. French and Gujarati respectively. But later on, were translated in English. The translator of *The Confessions* was anonymous. Gandhi's autobiography was translated by his followers mainly by Mahadev Desai and Mahadev's friend who translated only 14 chapters.

The motives behind these two selected autobiographies are rare and unusual at the same time spiritual because both autobiographers were spiritual by turn of their minds. Rousseau being a Christian has strong hold on his mind of the concept of the spiritual rite of confession. He believes that one's autobiography should be one's truthful record like the honest confession of sincere Christian sinner. And therefore he is motivated to record his deeds including his wrongs and sins in life to present to readers like a sinner's confession to the Almighty on The Day of Judgement. In addition his autobiography would relieve and unburden his mind to bring him relaxation as the confession does for a sinner. However Gandhi states that he not

intended to write autobiography at all nor the present autobiography was written with a purpose to write autobiography. But he decided to narrate his numerous experiments with Truth in life and Politics on repeated pressing by his fellow workers and also to provide some writings in *Navjivan*, the weekly he had started. Further Gandhi stated that his experiments will be useful to others. Infact the motives of both autobiographers are to a large extent spiritual motives.

The standpoint of both writers compel them to select relevant and significant events in their lives and surroundings around them to present so that they would project their self and the social context of their living. Similarly, the structure of both autobiographies is conventional and chronological. The autobiographies begin with author's birth, ancestral history, childhood, their formative years, youth and various experiences as adults. Both have nearly equal length as *The Confessions* runs into 645 pages and Gandhi's autobiography has 616 pages. Both autobiographies in compass the major portion of the writer's lives. *The Confessions* narrates the period of the 43 years in Rousseau's life and Gandhi's autobiography spreads over a span of 51 years.

Rousseau and Gandhi, knowingly and unknowingly, observes closely the accepted parameters of the 'autobiography proper' with a little deviations from the norms of the form. The selection and arrangement of events in these autobiographies is done by both autobiographers properly and artistically. Gandhiji's selection of events is more artistic and significant as he avoids

trivial incidents but Rousseau gives place to some trivial and unnecessary events in his autobiography. The selection of events in both autobiographies, however contribute in shaping the personalities of the authors. As the parameter of truth is concerned, both autobiographies are acclaimed as most truthful record of the author's lives. Rousseau and Gandhi are known for their outstanding truthfulness and candid revelation of their 'self'. To Rousseau 'Truth' is religious and for Gandhi Truth is God. Infact both autobiographies record the 'naked' Truth about their protagonist and they present the unique life like picture of the real character of the writers as Rousseau states, "the likeness of the man in all the truth of nature, and that man myself."

For that sake they narrate their mistakes and blunders, their follies and sins and the mean and the ugly side of their characters. Sometimes their candidness is undue and they should not have told such private and shameful affairs. One may doubt this extreme truthfulness is deliberate effort by the authors to boast their over honesty and impress the readers. But their truthful accounts of the contemporary, documentation are beyond doubt. At the same time both autobiographers never tried to justify their blunders, follies and sins, Rajmohan Gandhi's recent accounts in his book ***Mohandas : A True Story of a Man, his People and an Empire.*** (2007) of Gandhi Sarladevi love affair are though sensational, but we doubt Gandhiji conceals this love affairs from readers in the autobiography.

In both the autobiographies the authors have taken subjective and objective view of their 'selves'. Rousseau seems

to be more introvert and subjective in his narration than Gandhiji. Though subjectivity and objectivity occurs in Gandhiji's autobiography he is more concerned with his experiments with truth and observes his 'self' objectively in the social milieu. Both autobiographies give central position to the 'Self' of the protagonists. The details of the milieu in these autobiographies directly or indirectly contribute to reveal the central personalities. Both the autobiographies are successful and good examples of the detached view of the 'self'.

On the basis of the last parameter both the autobiographies are, real illustrations of successful good autobiographies.

The self-revelation in the two autobiographies pertains to the revelation of childhood, the formative years, married or sex life the various activities of the protagonists in public life etc. There is surprising similarity of the protagonists admission of their mistakes, bad habits, stealing, liberal untimely sex experiences and its feelings, their attitudes to women education, and respect to all religions. Both of them do not believe in the formal education in the Schools and Colleges but have faith in more liberal education in Nature outside the school and they insisted on practical learning of life with less importance to the a learning. Both of the autobiographers are lovers of books and both are impressed by reading you books. 9 41

Being extroverts both of them have little concern for the members of their family i.e. wife and their sons but Gandhiji shows concern for his parents and Rousseau is silent on Parental concern.



Rousseau and Gandhiji narrate their crimes, sins and follies but Gandhiji impresses us as a man of moral and saintly makeup but Rousseau appears to be an immoral man.

These autobiographers gave on excellent documentation of the socio-political ethos of their concerned times.

*The Confessions* records the contemporary patriarchal family systems, marriage system, educational system, classes in the society, people's taste of reading, monarchy, religious institutions, prostitutions, sufferings of low classes etc. It gives a lot of information about France, and cities like Paris and Venice. *The Story of My Experiments With Truth* reflects on the contemporary child marriages, joint family systems, polygamy, Patriarchal family system, status of the women, educational system, traditions and superstitions, caste system, faith in religion and Political turmoil during 1869 to 1920 in India. At the same time it gives information about the England and South Africa with its racial discrimination.

To sum up, the two autobiographies under study fulfill almost all the essential parameters of the autobiography form. The two autobiographies excel in the self-revelation and the documentation on the proper lines so as to place them among some of the good autobiographies in world literature. Rousseau's *The Confessions* is a significant landmark in the development of autobiography as a genre. J.A. Cudden praises it as "One of the most influential books ever written." M.K. Gandhi's autobiography is a very good specimen, of the version of Indian autobiography.

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