CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: THE RETURN OF CHARACTER

Quaint it may sound, literature no doubt continues to mirror life. Though
the last decades of the preceding century witnessed theories and movements that
treated literature anything but a mirror of life, the so called conventional idea is
gaining ground through studies on cognition and literature. The mirror metaphor
was much maligned by the practitioners of new or experimental fiction. To have
an idea of the kind of opposition it had it might be relevant to quote Raymond
Federman here.

The shape and order of fiction will not result from an imitation of
the shape and order of life, but rather from the formal
circumvolutions of language as it wells up from the unconscious.
No longer a mirror being dragged along reality, fiction will not
reproduce the effects of the mirror acting upon itself. It will no
longer be a representation of something exterior to it, but self-
representation (11).

While the new fiction movement held sway the other side did not lie low and
mimetic literature found its champions in critics like Gerald Graff who came out
with stout defence of realism in literature. Graff’s Literature against Itself:
Literary Ideas in Modern Society (1979) is an important work in this category.

Plot, character and setting the mainstay of realistic, humanistic fiction were
challenged by experimental writers and critics who supported them. The idea of a
well developed character was subjected to stringent criticism. The American
philosopher cum literary critic cum fiction writer, William H. Gass, maintained
that characters were just “locales of linguistic energy” and called the practice of filling the literary work with things that are not there through unnecessary psychologizing an “activity” not “literary” (32). New fangled theories and radical ideologies dominated the literary scene so much in those decades that it became an intellectual embarrassment for anyone inclined to speak in defence of novels in the humanist-realistic tradition and the study of characters. While literature studies shied away from characters, personality and human behavior dominated psychology, management science and the like. The popularity of the concepts of emotional intelligence and multiple intelligences in the 1980s should have given a wake-up call to us. But that was not to be. It is interesting to note that the proponents of the two concepts, Daniel Goleman and Howard Gardner, have had a neuroscience background. Their best selling works Emotional Intelligence by the former and Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences by the latter played a great role reviving interest in character.

Another factor is the emphasis on ethology, the study of animal behaviour, in the field of evolutionary biology. Studies on altruism and cooperation in the animal kingdom abound bringing out facts that challenge the idea of exclusive possession of moral consciousness by the humans. So much so that the expression “human and nonhuman animals” has become common. As behavior is the focus here, naturally the concept of character reemerges. Ability to avoid pain to a fellow animal at a cost, cooperative behavior in hunting, habits of food sharing and reciprocity are some of the aspects seriously studied by ethologists. The Harvard Evolutionary Biologist Marc Hauser takes a look at Shakespeare’s King Lear from an evolutionary point of view. “In this story, we see the power of cooperation, the adaptive significance of coalitions, the dissolution of kinship, the
competition for resources, and the challenge to maintaining stable cooperative alliances among kin” (378). The American philosopher Martha C. Nussbaum argues that “studying the emotions of nonhuman animals will prove essential, giving us a sense of contrast between our lives and the lives of other altruistic beings, and pinpointing the uniquely dark capacities of human creatures” (114). Ironical though that study of nonhuman animals should rekindle interest in human animals, it is a welcome move as it helps recovering literature study from excessive and extreme de-centering it has suffered in the past few decades.

Literature’s connections with the social, moral substrates in human biology and psychology have to be re-established. The postmodernist programme, especially deconstruction, did manage to make character based humanistic interpretation of novels an anathema, an intellectual sin to be shunned at all costs. While such literature became the bête noire within the university campuses, the traditional humanistic literature was read, responded to and learnt from elsewhere. For example, it has been fashionable to dismiss Shakespeare as an imperialistic cultural tool say, by the cultural materialists. But this great dramatist has been of use in fields like psychology, philosophy, leadership studies etc. Great scientists have found this man to be inspiring and still continue to do so. One might here be reminded of the astrophysicist and Nobel Laureate Chandrasekar of the Chandra Limit.

The emergence of the multidisciplinary field of cognitive sciences, the advances in the field of cognitive neuroscience and the application of theories of evolution, especially Darwinism, seem to have the potential to bring together knowledge from different fields of human endeavour and study. Literary Darwinism is a recent branch of literary criticism that studies literature employing ideas of evolution, natural selection and gene-culture co-evolution.
Joseph Carroll’s *Literary Darwinism* is a pioneering effort in this field.

Edward O. Wilson is another Harvard Evolutionary Biologist championing the cause of bringing together all knowledge. His best-selling book *Consilience: The Unity of All Knowledge* argues strongly for such a case and devotes an entire chapter to the study of arts—“The Arts and Their Interpretation.” He declares:

“The growing evidence of an overall structured and powerful human nature, channeling development of the mind favors a more traditionalist view of the arts” (238).

The ubiquitous leadership studies are another phenomenon that has brought back and reiterated the centrality of character in all productive human endeavours. One only has to go to the articles in *The Harvard Business Review* to know the importance of character to business productivity.

The old art of learning from characters is definitely finding itself revived. Throughout history, be it any realm of human aspiration and venture, learning from the greats of the preceding times has been the norm. Fictional classics have stood the test of time their characters holding relevance to human experience in all times. Reading fiction provides access to “parts of ourselves (and aspects of our enmeshment in our culture) which we do not normally want to know about or acknowledge.” (Knights 39) In Whitmanesque terms exemplary characters fictional as well as real bring us tokens of ourselves. In retrospect it is obvious that it was an unwise thing to have pushed this type of learning to intellectual hinterland. Nussbaum’s observation while discussing India and the US as democracies is relevant here.

Because our nations are firmly committed to political liberalism, they agree not to base their policy recommendations on any overarching religious or ethical view about human nature. They can,
however, use the results of empirical psychology, the study of animal behavior, and clinical observations of human development. They also see no reason not to turn to imaginative literature for illumination of human life, although with critical alertness, since literary works frequently prove sectarian, articulating some partisan religious or secular view of society’s goals and purposes (138).

She argues in her work for the necessity to read and listen to stories with imaginative participation in order to ensure a positive culture of emotions in a civil society. Classics’ coming to the aid of people in distress has not been infrequent in recent times as evidenced by formation of book reading clubs. A recent Liverpool University research claims that reading classics, Shakespeare, T.S. Eliot, Wordsworth, is more useful to the mind than easy reads. (http://rt.com/)

A reader is enabled to see parts of himself hitherto unrealized when confronting fictional characters. Such reading over a period of time arranges more encounters with oneself that it becomes possible for a reader to carry the accrued learning to real life situations he faces. Often this knowledge is not mechanical and procedural but intuitive prompted more from the subconscious than the conscious mind. We are mimetic creatures, a fact which has been known since time immemorial. Though Aristotle is credited with introducing the concept of mimesis, Plato, his teacher, had earlier talked about it. But it is Aristotle who gives it a conceptual basis in his Poetics. The representational value of arts and literature since then has been discussed and practiced widely. Aristotle seemed to have been upstaged if one were to go by the proclamations of the radical literary quarters of the late twentieth century which rejected the idea of linking a text any objective reality an impulse that culminated in that famous Derrida statement,
“There is nothing outside the text.” In hindsight it might be said that the aggressive anti-realist ranting and an overemphasis on teaching language have forced English Studies into intellectual backwaters. The humanistic tradition of interpreting literature, a programme set in motion by Professor John Churton Collins (1848-1908) who underlined the role of moral and aesthetic education and later developed by F.R. Leavis with emphasis on literature’s humanizing power, was devastated by the fire power of the radicals of the late twentieth century. But what was lost sight of was the fact that it was the factor of this morally and psychologically developing human personality in a socio-cultural milieu which attracted readers who were not teachers and students of literature. It was the realistic element, verisimilitude, that enabled readers to connect with literary texts and enter a conceptual realm where they could introspect on self and its relationship with others and society.

It was literature’s societal pedestal—its spiritual, intellectual, psychological, moral, social moorings—that explains why people from other disciplines and domains are drawn to it. That is where we have had our connections with the living society. That is where they could take a look at their selves and spend some quality reflective time with themselves. And this has been the raison d’être of literature. Literature alone gives us the space to introspect in private space the ramifications of both the private and the public and to take a replenished self to the world. We have probably paid the price for neglecting mimetic literature which is reflected in the concern about the falling enrolment in humanities programmes in leading universities in the US like Harvard and Stanford. The intellectual front is dominated by scientists and the pressure is felt by academics of humanities. Louis Menand, a Harvard English professor, responds thus. “In the scholarly
world, cognitive sciences have everybody’s ear right now, and everybody is thinking about how to relate to it ... How many people do you know who’ve read a book by an English professor in the past year? But everybody’s reading science books.” The response of Anthony Grafton a Princeton History professor is representative. He states that he sometimes feels “like a newspaper comic strip character whose face is getting smaller and smaller.” (http://www.nytimes.com)

Though it is a damaging statement we have to admit the element of truth in Richard Dawkins’ declaration, “Philosophy and the subjects known ‘humanities’ are still taught as if Darwin had never lived” (1). No doubt science dominates today. Our response under the circumstances should neither be taking refuge in the margins nor competing with science on its own terms but capturing man’s experience of science impacting his life. Do this, and then our faces may start getting bigger and bigger.

But breakthroughs in neuroscience with reference to mirror neurons testify to the correctness of Aristotle as to his ideas of mimesis and representation. Humans are held to be unmatched in imitative talents. In fact, whatever we witness we imitate at the subconscious level. Your enjoying the heroics of your favourite hero on the screen and your visceral response while watching a horror movie are possible because of your mirror neurons. They play a great role in learning.

Emphasizing their importance V.S. Ramachandran says:

May be there was a lucky set of environmental circumstances and a few accidental inventions by a gifted few which could tap into a preexisting ability to learn and propagate information quickly—the basis of culture. And in case you haven’t guessed by now, that ability might hinge on a sophisticated mirror-neuron system (134).
The biologically embedded mimetic nature is the foundation of all culture and knowledge. Turning to science and listening to what it has to say about mind and its operations bring out the hollowness of theories that rejected mimetic arts and literature. There is no doubt that it is time to return to the art of imaginatively participating in the lives of others—fictional as well as real. Describing the primeval replicators Dawkins gives a philosophical orientation to his scientific speculation.

They are in you and me; they created us, body and mind; and their preservation is the ultimate rationale for our existence. They have come a long way, those replicators. Now they go by the name of genes, and we are their survival machines (20).

With science affirming Chomsky’s idea of innate capacity for language and the findings on the role of mirror neurons, it is high time we started a re-look on the representational value of literature.

There are many reasons and theories proposed by philosophers to validate the centrality of imitation in formation of personality and behavior. The process of transferring and imbibing traits and qualities from others is also a concern of thinkers and scholars. The concept of heritability is stressed by evolutionary biologists but they also discuss the trainable part of the brain—the nurture paradigm. Heritability notwithstanding, we are not born with knowledge or personality which we acquire through the process of acculturation. Cultural, moral and ethical sensibilities are not inherited but formed through an interaction between individuals and environment. While inheritance at the genetic level is possible what is learnt and imbibed in a life time by a parent cannot be inherited by the off springs. What we make ourselves in life depends on how we learn and
adapt to change behavior and develop cognitive capabilities in tune with the
demands of culture. An experiential monitor is active in all of us sustaining
awareness and meta-awareness. But caught as we are in the flux of life it is not
easy for us to arrange consciousness in perspectival slots. This is where literature,
especially fiction, plays an important role by depicting graphically characters in
their introspective space negotiating difficulties in comprehending their condition.
An imaginative participation in the lives of these characters help groom ourselves
in the emotional and cognitive domains sharpening the capabilities of our
experiential monitor so that we would be able to organize our responses backed by
cognitive alertness to people and events we come across in real life. According to
Samuel Johnson the essential function of literature is to teach the art of living and
creating good souls for the society. The world seems to be slowly waking up to this
reality if we are to trust the voices in the media supporting liberal arts education and
its value to the society. By trimming curriculum in literature, it is possible to put
in place insight promoting modules. Not just insights involving philosophical
speculations but also meaningfully actionable ones as well. The tangible asset
syndrome that prioritized utility-professional education and short-term gains
seems to have completed a full round and we are at the threshold of reentering the
educational paradigm of producing not immediately tangible but long-term
assets—worthy human beings with strong character and sound cultural and moral
sensibilities.

Literature involves the moral capabilities of humans by presenting
characters in situations that warrant considerations of the right and the wrong.
The narrative we read ought to provide rich content with the various ways the
characters can respond to the challenges they encounter in life. “Studying of
literature provides with occasion for moral reflection and dialogue, an occasion to examine what informs the moral compass guiding fictional lives” (Bohlin 27).
The characters in a narrative give a firsthand experience of their desires, conflicts, trials and triumphs through which the author/writer reveals moral contours life takes in its journey. Reading such fiction helps a reader decode situations in the narrative and reflect upon his own reading—which significantly corresponds with his self perception—leading to a critical awareness of his situation. It is usually occasioned by glimpsing into the meaning of one’s own self and his place in culture.

Understanding character, as is the case with anything that requires understanding, demands that it needs to be segmented. A person cannot be understood as one monolithic whole. In fact anything that involves a functional system must first be split into components—in our case traits or characteristics—so that an understanding emerges. Character studies earlier mostly treated characters as exemplars to be emulated or evil to be shunned. Most such criticism seemed to conform to the sixteenth century Italian critic Lodovico Castelvetro’s theory of admiration which he added to the then existing Aristotelian theory of tragedy. In real life too, we do not make a total impression of a person immediately. Initially what we observe are little mannerisms, behavior under varying circumstances, thoughts, actions etc., before moving on to a proper conception of that person.

So, to study characters we need units of measurement and a scale—to put it in terms social sciences—to make sense of identities and the process of transactions and interactions they have with their fellow beings. Trait theory (also known as dispositional theory) in psychology deals with human personality by using a comprehensive list of what can be called traits, attributes or characteristics.
It is used to analyze and interpret personality. Trait theory also offers us a framework to study learning characters who grow to reach a working equilibrium. We all have learnt from other people. If one is a good speaker, he would have collected efficient performance practices—tone, use of face and body, sentence constructions, pauses and the like—from different people, say elders in the family, teachers, favourite actors and speakers. We do not learn the whole thing from one person. The word for such a thing would be ‘aping.’ What is to be noted here is that imitational learning happens at the micro level. Learning from a person is picking up positive traits from him. So, imaginative participation in others’ lives—in others’ performance—aided by the faculty of empathy is mimetic learning. We value narratives, fictional as well as nonfictional, for the scope they offer for mimetic learning.

According to Potolsky, mimesis involves artworks, actions and imitating another person particularly nature, truth, beauty, mannerisms, actions, situations, examples and ideas. He further elaborates that mimesis plays an important roles in emulation, mimicry, dissimulation, doubting and resemblance (59). Such mimetic situations serve as instances of cultural transmission making it possible to observe and identify characteristics of that transmission. Further, we see how that transmission takes place with the help of language, sound and gesture. It is here that the Trait theory in psychology becomes relevant. Pocklington and Best (1997) have termed some repeated text as “term-subspace traits” and they have used traits and other cognitive motifs as true conceptual replicators. Their study illustrates cultural microevolution in texts. Learning is accretionary be it text or life.
**Personality, Character and Traits**

Personality is the dynamic and organized set of characteristics possessed by a person that uniquely influences his or her cognitions, motivations, and behaviors in various situations. Many theorists have come with different perspectives to classify personality—Freud’s psychoanalysis, Jung’s analytical psychology, Adler’s individual psychology, Horny’s social and cultural psychoanalysis, trait perspective, cognitive perspective, humanistic/existential perspective and social-behavioristic perspective. The trait theory of personality has occupied an important place among researchers. Limitations notwithstanding, the theory has proved its continued relevance. Classification and assessment of personality is mostly done based on traits, a feature one comes across on a daily basis in discussions of personalities in sports and politics in the media. It would be pertinent at this point to take a look at the perspectives and definitions of personality offered by the school of trait psychology.

The study of personality is aimed at understanding human personality and motivation throughout the developmental process, from young to adult and adult to old age step by step. Gordon Allport defines personality: “The personality is something… It is what lies behind the specific acts and within the individual” (48). Studying others’ personalities not only satisfies our curiosity but also gives greater sense of control over our lives and makes the world more predictable and less threatening. The words ‘personality’ and ‘character’ are interchangeable though its connotations may vary. In Antony Quinton’s words “we tend to speak of personality when our concern is with how a person presents herself of himself to the world.” (26)
Though the Trait school of psychology may be of recent origin, trait study as such has been instrumental since the period of Aristotle, Hippocrates and Theophrastus. The term ‘Character Sketches’ coined by Theophrastus was one of the earliest descriptions of moral/personality types intended to transcend time and place. A trait theory of personality is determined by the observation of one’s behaviour. Traits cannot be directly observed, but rather must be inferred from patterns of behaviour and experience that are known to be valid trait indicators (McCrae et.al 2000). The trait indicators that signify the characters’ behavioral pattern helps in understanding personality briefly. The important elements are agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to new experience, extraversion and neuroticism and it depends on one’s choices, learning experiences and skill development. Traits may remain consistent throughout one’s life and help determine what career may fit an individual’s primary personality (Nevid & Rathus, 2005).

Natural language is a useful tool to observe one’s character where it suits a wide range of subjective experiences. It contains an intuitive vocabulary like ‘anxious,’ ‘jovial,’ ‘reckless’ and ‘cowardly’ for describing personality. In all human cultures the fundamental traits of human personality can be identified by natural language. The ability to use language to describe the qualities of the individuals allows the humans to lubricate the social mechanisms to permit them to live and work in the close proximity of each other (Dumant 153). The trait model is comparatively more fundamental to human experience and the terms for those traits are easily found in all languages facilitating description and subsequent understanding. Trait study also throws light on the evolution of cultural models.
The idea of personality traits is as old as human language. Traits are the descriptors that aid in characterizing someone’s personality. Aristotle (384-322 BC), in his *Ethics*, uses terms such as vanity, modesty and cowardice as key determinants of moral and immoral behavior. Theophrastus (371-287 BC) in his book describes thirty ‘characters’ or personality types which his translators feel should be named ‘traits’ instead. The idea of personality traits proper begins with Allport and Odbert (1936) who after extensive survey identified 18,000 English personality relevant terms that go to describe character. Even nouns, sentences and actions can have personality connotations. There are two major assumptions regarding traits i) it is stable over time and ii) it is generally believed that traits influence behaviour. By observing manifested traits by humans in real life or characters in narratives in given situations it is possible to understand their personalities and assess their behaviours. In a world that mostly consists in communicating and interacting with fellow creatures the faculty of knowing character, behaviour and motives by close observation of traits and combining them in clusters to make inferences is a necessary and actionable knowledge.

There are four major objectives that govern the study of personality:

1. developing general theories of personality, 2. studying individuals, 3. analysing specific processes and classes of behavior 4. understanding individuals and their lives. Literature Studies’ emphasis which has solely been on studying characters—people in action, people in relationship, people in introspection, people under stress and so on—stand to benefit from application of the trait theory. Studies of life narratives of individual persons tend to rely on case study, archival, historical and interpretive methods. Especially an author of an autobiographical life narrative has the unique advantage of lived through, experiential elements that
gives him a vantage point to explain and interpret personalities, behaviours and situations. Persistent exposure to situations where one has to make sense of people endows a person with the talent of predicting the behavior of people—a talent much valued in today’s corporate world.

Character traits are important factors in developing moral reasoning and moral decision making. It accounts for the rightness of actions and goodness of one’s character. In Kant’s ethical system the possession of a character trait enables us to perform right actions (Upton 2). Aristotle and Nietzsche list bravery, temperance, generosity, truthfulness, wit, aestheticism, style and exuberance as the traits of a strong character. Trait as a basic unit of personality “represents a readiness to respond in a particular way because, on the input side, various situations are treated as similar and, on the output side, the person has an expressive and adaptive style.”(Pervin 39)

Gordon Allport’s Trait Theory

In 1936 the psychologist Gordon Allport came out with the observation that one English-language dictionary alone contained more than 4,000 words describing different personality traits. He categorized these traits under three levels:

- **Cardinal Traits**: Traits that dominate an individual’s whole life, often to the point that the person becomes known specifically for these traits. People with such personalities often become so known for these traits that their names are often synonymous with these qualities. Consider the origin and meaning of the following descriptive terms: Freudian, Machiavellian, narcissism, Don Juan, Christ-like, etc. Allport suggested that cardinal traits are rare and tend to develop later in life.
- **Central Traits:** These are the general characteristics that form the basic foundations of personality. These central traits, while not as dominating as cardinal traits, are the major characteristics you might use to describe another person. Terms such as *intelligent, honest, shy* and *anxious* are considered central traits.

- **Secondary Traits:** These are the traits that are sometimes related to attitudes or preferences and often appear only in certain situations or under specific circumstances. Some examples would be getting anxious when speaking to a group or impatient while waiting in line.

Allport, the main theorist in the school of trait psychology, is considered a pioneer in the study of traits. His major themes are personality consistency (one behavior measured across time and situation), social influence (people in society exerts significant influence for social issues), the concept of self (is important in all aspects of life and a concept central in social and personality psychology, interaction of personality with social influence (situations influence people and they influence individuals in different ways). He suggested that it will be more important to know about traits unique to a person, than to know where the person stands relative to others on some common traits. The important part of trait study is inferring the traits from the character through their behaviours. Allport adopted a method of inferring traits by four categories.

- Neutral terms designating personal traits (e.g., ‘artistic,’ ‘assertive’)

- Terms primarily descriptive of temporary moods or activities (e.g., ‘alarmed’ ‘ashamed’)

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- Terms conveying social and characterial judgments of personal conducts or designating influence on others (e.g., ‘adorable’, ‘asinine’)

- Miscellaneous: Designation of physique, capacities and developmental condition (e.g., ‘alone’, ‘Anglican’)

Inferring traits from behaviour is done by analyzing an individual based on how he interacts with another. It is made in natural circumstances. The expressive traits are one’s style of behaviour that shows the character exhibits, emphasis and expansiveness. In understanding the cognitive development of a person one needs to include perspectives from literature, psychology, anthropology and neuroscience according to Howard Gardner who lists the following factors as important in the process: “the influence of affective factors or emotions, the contribution of historical and cultural factors, and the role of the background context in which particular actions or thoughts occur” (6). Knowing and comprehending the traits in a character would contribute to the understanding of the personal development of that person through events, incidents, situations and contexts of his life.

**Big Five and 16 Factor studies**

The two dominant models in the field of trait psychology are Cattell’s 16 factor model and the Big Five model. In 1946 Raymond Cattell identified the 16 factors. He believed in using the life data of a person and that his personality could be determined by studying his language. H.S.Odbert’s observation in this regard helps enhance our understanding. “Those individual differences that are most salient and socially relevant in people’s lives will eventually become encoded into their language; the more important such a difference, the more likely is it to become expressed as a single word.” (67) This statement constitutes the lexical hypothesis of Odbert and Allport who used two English dictionaries to
study the 18000 personality describing words. From that they narrowed down to a
d list of 4500 “personality describing adjectives” denoting, in their opinion,
permanent traits. Later Cattell whetted the list further to bring it down to 200 by using
computer technology and the statistical technique of factor analysis. Cattell identified
35 major clusters of personality traits which he referred to as the "personality sphere."
This allowed Cattell further narrowing down to 12 basic character revealing factors
and 4 additional factors that culminated in the 16 factor model.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptors of Low Range</th>
<th>Primary Factor</th>
<th>Descriptors of High Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Impersonal, distant, cool, reserved, detached, formal, aloof</td>
<td>Warmth (A)</td>
<td>Warm, outgoing, attentive to others, kindly, easy-going, participating, likes people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concrete thinking, lower general mental capacity, less intelligent, unable to handle abstract problems</td>
<td>Reasoning (B)</td>
<td>Abstract-thinking, more intelligent, bright, higher general mental capacity, fast learner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reactive emotionally, changeable, affected by feelings, emotionally less stable, easily upset</td>
<td>Emotional Stability (C)</td>
<td>Emotionally stable, adaptive, mature, faces reality calmly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deferential, cooperative, avoids conflict, submissive, humble, obedient, easily led, docile, accommodating</td>
<td>Dominance (E)</td>
<td>Dominant, forceful, assertive, aggressive, competitive, stubborn, bossy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serious, restrained, prudent, taciturn, introspective, silent</td>
<td>Liveliness (F)</td>
<td>Lively, animated, spontaneous, enthusiastic, happy-go-lucky, cheerful, expressive, impulsive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expedient, nonconforming, disregards rules, self-indulgent</td>
<td>Rule-consciousness (G)</td>
<td>Rule-conscious, dutiful, conscientious, conforming, moralistic, staid, rule bound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shy, threat-sensitive, timid, hesitant, intimidated</td>
<td>Social Boldness (H)</td>
<td>Socially bold, venturesome, thick-skinned, uninhibited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilitarian, objective, unsentimental, tough minded, self-reliant, no-nonsense, rough</td>
<td>Sensitivity (I)</td>
<td>Sensitive, aesthetic, sentimental, tender-minded, intuitive, refined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trusting, unsuspecting, accepting, unconditional, easy</td>
<td>Vigilance (L)</td>
<td>Vigilant, suspicious, skeptical, distrustful, oppositional</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the field of psychology the Big Five factors of personality are extensively used to describe man’s personality. They are representative of the basic dimensions of human personality. The Costa and McCrae model emerged as a considerable influence and played an important role in understanding personality and behavior.

Atkinson’s summary of the Big Five and their constituent traits can help in a proper understanding (437).
Openness to experience – (inventive/curious vs. consistent/cautious).

This includes appreciation of art, emotion, adventure, unusual ideas, curiosity, and a variety of experiences. Openness reflects the degree of intellectual curiosity, creativity and a preference for novelty and variety. Some disagreement remains about how to interpret the openness factor, which is sometimes called "intellect" rather than openness to experience.

Conscientiousness – (efficient/organized vs. easy-going/careless).

This denotes a tendency to demonstrate self-discipline, act dutifully and aim for achievement and suggests planned rather than spontaneous behavior; organized, and dependable.

Extraversion – (outgoing/energetic vs. solitary/reserved).

Energy, positive emotions, surgency, assertiveness, sociability, the tendency to seek stimulation in the company of others and talkativeness are the indicators of extraversion.

Agreeableness – (friendly/compassionate vs. cold/unkind).

The term refers to a tendency to be compassionate and cooperative rather than suspicious and antagonistic towards others.

Neuroticism – (sensitive/nervous vs. secure/confident).

This is a proneness to experience unpleasant emotions such as anger, anxiety, depression, or vulnerability. Neuroticism also refers to the degree of emotional stability and impulse control.

Like any other theory or school the trait theory has and its ups and downs. Of course every theory has its peak time, then counter theories arrive which is followed by a paradigm shift. Perspective taking, prompted by theories, remain
afloat however to regain the centre space when the times require it. This has been witnessed in the history of ideas. The trait theory has regained ground in the current scenario. The field of evolutionary biology has been responsible for reemergence of the importance of traits. The discipline of management sciences does borrow from ethology, the study of animal behavior to apply effectively the trait approach in recruiting and training personnel. The trait approach dominates in such areas. If we take a look at sports journalism especially articles dealing with great sports personalities it is the trait approach that is invariably adopted. Biologically we are a network of tissues, cells and the bacteria and microbes that dwell inside ourselves. Likewise the human personality is a conglomeration of traits, attributes, characteristics etc. Hence any proper understanding of personality has to start with splitting or segmenting a character into traits. In this respect trait theory has been of tremendous use in studying and understanding personality. The concepts of emotional intelligence and multiple intelligence are also very much related to traits as is neuroscience which has a lot to tell us about our mind and behaviour.

Autobiography is a life narrative. According to Spender it confronts two lives. First is that of the individual self and secondly the social, historical person with achievements, personal appearance and social relationship. For life narrators personal memories are the primary archival source. The usefulness of evidence for their stories lies in the ways in which they employ that evidence to support, supplement, or offer commentary on their idiosyncratic acts of remembering.

Traits are considered as patterns of thoughts, feelings or actions that distinguish people from one another. A trait can refer to thoughts, feelings or behaviour. It distinguishes people from one another leading to recognition of
people by their traits. Traits are a definite requirement to explain those aspects of personality in which consistent patterns can be detected. The main part of studying traits consists in situations where we can see a person in action in a particular context by which it becomes possible to guess correctly the person’s inner thoughts and characteristics. Ferdman observes: “Repeated patterns of behaviour and repeated storylines are important in understanding the total concept of literacy and can shed light on the learner's cultural consciousness and on ‘the interrelationships between collective and individual experience and behaviour’” (185).

In autobiographical narratives, imaginative acts of remembering always intersect with such rhetorical acts as assertion, justification, judgment, conviction, and interrogation. That is, life narrators address readers whom they want to persuade of their version of experience. This is a cultural act in which cognitive memory leads to the development of self by involving oneself in writing a life narrative. In his influential essay, ‘Life as a narrative,’ Jerome Bruner stresses the interconnections of narrative life and lived lives: “...[C]ulturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure the perceptual experience, to organize memory to build the very ‘events’ of a life”(15). All our narrative acts are attempts at giving a shape to our experiences by a careful examination of the contours that life experiences take. They also help us hold our consciousness in a perspectival continuum. If the recent interest in storytelling and insistence on the importance of it are any indication then it is reasonable to surmise that it is time for addressing the question of fragmented lives and fractured selves. They are also symptomatic of an urgent need to foreground the importance of a holistic understanding of our selves and
situation. The world is already moving into such a paradigm as evidenced by the prevalence of words like integration and holistic perspective.

In the past few decades life narratives or personal narratives have been gaining precedence. Its importance is increasingly felt in the socio-psychological dimension of existence. The old humanistic concern for the complete development of a person in the realms of love, fulfillment, self-worth and autonomy seems back in focus. The capacities for self-awareness, self-scrutiny, self-regulation and self-enhancement in a human being are studied intensively in different disciplines. The human potential is much valued today a point well captured in his famous book on personnel management by Edwin Flippo “Humans constitute the greatest resource on this planet, ranking only below the angels” (384). The developmental process in a learning individual seems to hold much relevance to the experience of people if the increasing popularity of personal narratives like autobiographies and memoirs.

**Memoir and autobiography**

Memoir: personal history; the personalizing of history; the historicizing of the personal. Memoir: the personal act of repossessing a public world, historical, institutional, collective.…

The memoirs are of a person, but they are ‘really’ of an event, an era, an institution, a class identity.

—Francis Russell Hart, *History Talking to Itself*

In literature the most suitable genre for studying characters is life narrative. By analyzing the choices and the decisions of the characters in autobiographies, memoirs and biographies it is possible for a reader to become aware of his own inclinations and proclivities and learn from the experiences depicted in those works. An intimate communication with reader is provided especially by the
autobiography and the memoir. The reader is taken into confidence and the act of confiding opens him up to his own experiences and his way of making sense of them thus creating space for reflection and introspection. According to O’Connor “Autobiography is generally seen as the purview of a person who has been in the public eye and who, toward the end of an illustrious life” (24) looks back. Memoir is called a special kind of autobiography that deals with the author’s life in relation to his public persona, historical context, event or his place in them. The author, besides presenting a picture of himself, gives an account of his personal knowledge and experience of the shaping events of the times. Written in first person from the first person point of view, it does not try to give each and every detail of the author’s life but rather looks at select events which the author examines in relation to the central theme of his work. The memoirist divulges a new perspective, understanding or lesson learned from the stock of experiences. Characterization in a memoir is done in such a way as to reveal the accruing learning and how it influences the thinking and decision making of the protagonist in the post-change, post-transcendent stage. In other words it demonstrates the capability for absorption of life lessons, how it is developed and applied in later life situations. In there we have the contours of the cognitive and emotional development of an individual. While reading a memoir a reader has opportunities to encounter ideas hitherto unknown to him and philosophies challenging his world view which propel him to rethink and rearrange certain thought patterns to which he has been habituated.

A memoir is a life narrative that historically situates the subject in a social environment, as either observer or participant. It is easier to learn from real life characters of their experience than from fictional characters. As Couser says,
“we see life narrative, again, not as a kind of literature but as a constellation of behaviors and process through which we define ourselves and lead our lives” (47). In the continuum of life writing in response to social, cultural and historical changes with reference to personal and social growth has been a concomitant feature of contemporary western culture. The memoir is such a genre where the narrator encapsulates the social, cultural and political events of his time and we get the picture through his experiences selected to be included in the narrative. The narrator is a kind of onlooker and we too witness the happenings over his shoulders. In an autobiography we get a complete account of the subject’s life which is the focal point. But in a memoir attention is directed more to the actions and lives of others. It could be said that the narrator is present as a subject only as a developing entity in interaction with others and the impacting events of his times. According to Curr, “memoirs are traces of life memories of others, of situations and one’s own self stories of having lived, in the best word the writer can capture to tell them, are shaped from the traces” (26). Vivian Gorrick says a memoir is a stock of one’s narratives in which one states oneself as if he is stating someone else’s condition in a particular milieu. He adds that by doing so one can attend to personal growth as well as concentrate on further narration. ‘…[E]very work of literature has both a situation and story. The situation is the context of circumstance, sometimes the plot; the story is the emotional experience that preoccupies the writer; the insight, the wisdom, the thing one has to come to say” (75). Hence the memoir is both a record of public life and of a person’s that narrated in terms of events during his life time.

The memoir in comparison with the autobiography has received much less attention and acknowledgment and most often considered as a mere supplement to
the latter. George Fetherling describes the memoir thus. “A memoir is more tightly focused, more daring in construction, and (its author hopes) more penetrating. A memoir can be of one’s self or of other people or of a particular decade—or of a particular place.” (qtd in Julie Rak, 305). But the genre has managed to find readership and in recent times it has become almost a routine for memoirs by famous personalities from different spheres of human achievement to find themselves in the best seller list. It would not be an exaggeration to claim that the memoir is the publishing industry’s darling right now. Refreshingly free from any esoteric elements, the memoir uses this advantage to connect easily with a vast number of readers. And it has the archetypal ingredients of a successful narrative—the identity of the protagonist, his inner development as a person, the role of environment in the process of that development and finally achievement and success. The memoir does all this without compromising on the reality of the pangs of growing.

The memoir has also been sidelined by scholars and critics owing to the literary recognition enjoyed by autobiographies and their dominance in the field. But things are looking up for the memoir. More memoirs are being written today and their sales have sky rocketed in the last decade or so, a phenomenon which Leigh Gilmore describes as “the memoir boom” (2). The autobiography gained importance and prominence based on the romantic conception of creation of the artist and the accompanying subjectivity. It could easily claim kinship with major literary forms for, it is a tale of an artist composing the music of his life. Nussbaum describes memoir as “assumptions of an individuality that is distinct from collective humankind; …the existence of an essence, a personality, which unfolds in the narrative of the past” (1968: 4). The memoir too creates an
individual in writing but in its aesthetics point to higher truths. It is not “mere recapitulation of the past; it is an attempt and drama of a man struggling to reassemble himself in his own likeliness at certain moment of history” (Nussbaum 43)

Memoirs have been classified into different types. We have the domestic memoir or the personal narrative that focuses on accounts of family life. Secular memoirs, written by public figures such as soldiers or diplomats, tend to picture their actions in the public sphere bringing out their professional caliber and the historical importance of their performance. Books by retired civil servants would also fall under this category. The memoir does include elements of both autobiography and biography but it is more creative and free in giving expression to happenings and situations. Autobiography is usually written in linear, chronological manner. It can also sometimes begin from that point when the writer becomes a famous figure and move back and forth and is based on facts, research, letters and recollections from his past. Differentiating autobiography from fiction Philip Roth says, “You search your past with certain questions on your mind—indeed you search out your past to discover which events have led you to asking those specific questions. It isn’t that you subordinate your ideas to the force of the facts in autobiography but that you construct a sequence of stories to bind up the facts with a persuasive hypothesis that unravels your history’s meaning” (8). The memoir offers freedom to the writer as it may begin at any point in the writer’s life usually highlighting a particular phase of his life. Identity is the main characteristic of the memoir and the autobiography but the former requires self reflection. “Memoir is how to make sense of who we once were, and what values and heritage shaped us” (Zinsser 6). The importance of self is reflected in the writing of a memoir in which history must come into concourse with literature in
order to make a self, a life, and to locate that living self in a history, an era, a relational and communal identity. Unlike the autobiography which focuses on the trajectory of life events, the memoir choosing insight from the events gives “the reader to access memoirs’ messy, conflicted and unapologetically subjective material” (Zinsser 19).

The importance of nonfiction writing lies in its scope for experiencing the truth in the story that maintains accuracy and portrays the most touching experiences of one’s life. Learning from others’ life has been the most important aspect of knowing one’s self and developing it further. The memoir generally concerns itself with fundamental human activity and narrates life in terms on which we can effectively meet it. According to Ben Yagoda, “Memoir has become the central form of the culture: not only the way stories are told, but the way arguments are put forth, products and properties marketed, ideas floated, acts justified, reputations constructed or salvaged” (74). In the article entitled ‘The Age of the Memoir is now’ James Atlas examines the growth of the memoir: “Fiction isn’t delivering the news. Memoir is. At the best, in the hands of a writer able to command the tools of the novelist—character, scene, plot—the memoir can achieve unmatchable resonance and depth … it chronicles the journey from there to here.” (www.nytimes.com). The memoir’s status as a literary form has been questioned by critics but in its scope for character development, plot construction, description of scenes, adopting points of view and making meaning out of memory it is no doubt on a par with its literary cousins.

The essentials of memoir writing have been in existence since much earlier times. The humans are naturally prone to sharing their experiences with their fellow beings. In this impulse lies the intention to leave knowledge of their
personal lives to the posterity in the form of an autobiography or a memoir. Autobiographical elements are found in many literary works of the past. Benjamin Franklin the most prominent among the founding fathers of the United States of America laid much store by autobiography. It was his staunch belief that by writing of one’s life one left the most important legacy to the succeeding generations. The lessons learnt from life were best preserved this way which would have tremendous positive impact on the youth that get to read them. Already a statesman of eminence by 1771, he began such writing in the form of letter to his son William. “Having emerg’d from the Poverty and Obscurity in which I was born and bred, to a State of Affluence and some Degree of Reputation in the world, and having gone so far thro life with a considerable share of Felicity… my Posterity may like to know, as they may find some of them suitable on their situations, and therefore imitated.” (Yagoda 71)

Critics usually describe the memoir as texts that are merely about public personae or historic events. Misch maintains that it is “peculiarly loose and apparently unregulated method pursued by the writings known as Memoirs” (qtd in Smith 6). He goes on to add that it is also a dress rehearsal for real life writing like autobiography, history and biography. Lee Quinby notes, “[W]here as autobiography promotes an ‘I’ that shares with confessional discourse an assumed interiority and an ethical mandate to examine that interiority, memoirs promote an ‘I’ that is explicitly constituted in the reports of the utterances and proceedings of others. The ‘I’ or subjectivity produced in memoirs is externalized and ... dialogical” (qtd in Smith 299). Memoirs mainly engage readers by painting a clear picture of the characters faced in the past and how they evolved by making clear sense of the situations encountered. Among genres or art forms, the memoir is
perhaps uniquely embedded in widely shared human practices and fundamental cultural assumptions. Even in the age of the memoir, “relatively few people actually write their life stories, but in our culture nearly everyone is considered to have a story, and nearly everyone tells personal stories—lots of them” (26).

In *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir* (1998), William Zinsser has described the pleasures and problems in writing a memoir. Memoirists write of the sense of loneliness and isolation and the yearning for community. He specifically discusses the nature of telling the truth in the art of memoir. He urges us to create our own version of memoir because one should not allow others to tell our stories. This is an important point to be held in mind always for, the stamp of individuality or the uniqueness of a person’s perception is best met in memoirs than elsewhere. In other words they can act as best guides in finding our own voice.

**Evolution of Memoir Writing**

Memoir writing took hold in the literary scene from the beginning of the 20th century. In surveys and histories of literary forms the term memoir started finding a place. The memoir as a literary form is derived from autobiography and biography. Getting back to the idea of the origins of life narratives it might be stated that we have the beginnings in St. Augustine’s *Confessions* (397 AD). This work is considered by some to be the very first autobiography. Later, traditional biography emerged from Plutarch’s *Lives* during the end of first century. But St. Augustine was the first to explore his invisible, internal spiritual journey in his work. The title *Confessions* was arrived at from the word ‘Confiteor’ which means ‘to testify, to bear witness, to speak what the heart holds true.’ Freeman states this act as the beginning point in man’s attempt to know
himself better. According to him St. Augustine “is revealing his own transformation from what he considered an inferior state of being to a better one” (20). By his work St. Augustine introduced to the world the idea that revealing the innermost thoughts is the beginning of the development of the self. The confessional mode humanized the individual and set him on a path of purification and redemption. The idea of rewriting the self, along with the interconnected conceptual triad of history, memory and narrative came to the fore and remained a pivotal point around which human lives and self development could be thought of and reflected upon.

David Hume has enunciated in his *A Treatise of Human Nature* that such a work would be considered as romance or history. He then goes on to observe: “He enters deeper into the concerns of the persons: represent to himself their actions and characters, and friendships, and enmities. It helps the readers to interpret the individual concerns and their actions with clear picture of understanding” (128).

There are always sorrowful situations to be faced in everyone’s life. Victor Frankl, a Viennese psychiatrist, has transformed his sufferings at the Nazi concentration camp in to a moving story of the triumph of human spirit. In his book, *Saying Yes to life in Spite of Everything: A Psychologist Experiences the Concentration Camp*, he categorically demonstrates how his narrative of inhuman torture and unbearable suffering can remain a constant reminder of how life can sustain itself even under the most testing circumstances. He states that he wrote it “to convey to the readers by way the concrete example that life holds a potential meaning under any conditions, even most miserable ones” (quoted in Yagoda 221). The holocaust memoir has come to enjoy a sizeable literary presence and continued interest in it is indicative of the fact that the event still remains a horrid reminder of the depths of depravity the humans can sink into. The holocaust narratives have also proved
their sensitizing power, pointing to the fact that the memoir carries a more immediate sense of urgency which is not definitely lost upon the reader. So, a memoir is the slice of life shared by the writer with perception and sensitivity so that readers will learn of life significantly. As already mentioned memoirs are of many types presenting experiences in interesting, entertaining and informative ways. The memoir usually deals with themes like psychological or physical illness, specific events of one’s life, specific station or place, of that talk about the family legacy and finally the adventurous life of a narrator. Following are some of known classifications of memoirs.

1. Personal memoir based on particular experience or event of a person such as child abuse, divorce, illness, or adventure.

2. Portrait memoir based on event or experience of a person who is not an author.

3. Coming of age memoir focuses on the transformation of the writer from childhood to adulthood,

4. Spiritual quest memoir focuses on the search for spiritual meaning and transcendent meaning, purpose of the spiritual seeking writer

5. Travel memoir discusses the writer’s experience in traveling and describes his picaresque descriptions with first person experience.

6. Confessional memoir portrays the confessions of the author about his sins or wrongdoings and how he/she made amends or reformed his/her ways.

7. Political memoir gives an account of the experiences of leaders holding high offices.
8. Public or celebrity memoir elaborates how it feels to be famous. The writer shares his experiences, feelings, thoughts, opinions, points of view giving an idea of how it is to be in the public eye.

(http://davehood59.wordpress.com/2010/04/15/types-of-memoirs)

Though distinct from the novel the memoir for its success relies on communication of character, conflict, plot and theme just as it would happen in the former. More specifically, a memoir is at its best when the author uses specific events of his/her own life to distill and extract meaning in order to communicate that meaning to the reader. The memoirs are known to bring controversies with them. This is so especially in the case of the political memoir as the writer cannot but give expression to opinions that may not go well with people with contrary views. Any critical remark ruffles feathers and leads to debates and in some cases to vibrant exchange of invectives.

**Character Study and Literature**

Responding to characters in literary works with openness and sensitivity activates the moral imagination of the reader. The reader is with the character at the experiential level monitoring his/her actions, behavior and motives and is prompted to judge them (whether right or wrong). Any reader is driven into thinking what he would do under given circumstances. This empathic connection is what makes the interaction between the character and reader worthwhile. The reader is enabled to parallel his life and his experiences with that of the character in a literary work. This paralleling exercise results in extension of sympathetic consciousness, the foundation of a balanced culture of emotions in a society. This is the reason why Nussbaum suggests that liberal democracies may
rely on imaginative literature in this regard. It is quite likely that any sensitive reader will carry the deliberations with the character to corresponding situations in his own life. Studying characters in literature always happens in a context and the reader is a sort of trained in the art reading contexts as well. The width of reading will determine the context alertness of the reader. It is an education in the art growing up in awareness. It happens to the character now and the reader who goes along with the process will recognize readily when he has to activate the same when his life situation demands it. “Character is an inclusive term for the individual as a whole. It helps in the formation and transformation of a person, includes education in society and through individual participation in social networks” (Arthur 9).

Character study plays a central role in studying mankind. H.G.Wells in his *Experiment of Autobiography* had predicted the importance life narratives will gain.

As mankind ‘matures,’ as it becomes more possible to be frank in the scrutiny of the self and others and in the publication of one’s feelings, biography and autobiography will take the place of fiction for the investigation and discussion of character (48).

Character study went out of fashion for quite some time but the current indications are that it is staging a comeback. One major sign is of course the increasing popularity of memoirs. Literature apart, lot of research has gone into character and personality—the art of building characters—both private and public. It’s no longer a simple matter of home and church and school. It is sociological, psychological, and both collective and individual. Dr. Hartshorne gives a detailed account of what has been done, what is being done, and can be done to build character (43).

We tend to speak of character and personality by how a person presents himself
or herself to the world and how he/she characteristically thinks and acts in a particular situation.

Teaching character through literature is the need of the hour because the civil society now faces a litany of alarms—“increased violence, evidence by brutal hazing, chronic depression, and growing incidences of suicide” (Miller 15). The pattern of these behaviors calls for immediate steps to revive character building education. Harvard University’s first woman president Drew Gilpin Faust declared paraphrasing W.E.B. Dubois: “Education is not to make men carpenters so much as to make carpenters men” (http://www.nytimes.com). The emphasis on character here is obvious. This idea has not been lost sight of in the corporate world as evident from Flippo’s statement, “It is not enough that one is able to work: one must be willing to work” (369). Ironical it is that intimations of the importance of character should come from Mammon’s quarters (the corporate world) this once.

Though it might seem trite to state that the desires and aspirations of the youth should be tempered by moral sentiments inculcated by education there is no doubt it is the need of the hour. The anti-realist theories of the preceding decades have vehemently rejected literature’s role in aiding moral development so much so that all that decentering has only succeeded in relegating literature studies—character study in particular—to the margins. The result is there for everyone to see: we are struggling to relate to the emerging multidisciplinary studies. To get back to the centre a return to character study is inevitable.

The major steps in studying character are Dewey’s (1944) progressivism and Kohlberg’s (1985) moral cognitive development studies. Importance is given to problem solving, democratic participation, improved moral reasoning and an
ethic of caring (Bohlin 2). These two thinkers brought philosophy, psychology and education together. Any reading of them will make it clear that character or personality development cannot happen through instruction or training but only by a process that is experiential where one will invest one’s reason as well as emotions.

Such an engagement is possible in reading literary works of longstanding merit. By studying rich narrative content one can comprehend its experiences and distinctive choices. The trials and tribulations of the characters of narratives become case studies for the reader which he can apply to his life. As all great writers specialize in forcing defensiveness off the readers, works by such facilitate reflection and dialogue with oneself which flashes a series of insights along the moral journey of life lighting one’s path. Citing Bloom, Nussbaum says that human infants exhibit “emotional contagion” which is “connected to a propensity for mimicry.” She adds: “But quickly they progress to perspective taking and empathy: they are adept ‘mind readers’ from an extremely early age...” These qualities give them the capacity for “connecting the distant through the imagination” (2013:155). This innate capacity is kept alive and continued in the art of responding to others—characters. It is a common human heritage having neurobiological as well cultural basis. To have cast it aside as old fashioned seems a worst case of regressionism in hindsight. We have unwittingly kept us away from what David Brooks calls “humanity’s inherited storehouse of moral, emotional and existential wisdom” (http://www.nytimes.com/).

Milburn considers the adolescent stage to be important where most development takes place in human life. During this phase one should read the great stories. He further argues that stories give them practice in sorting out
conflicting desires and aspirations. Every human yearns to discover an authentic individuality within himself, conceiving great ideals, agonizing over relationships to others based on which they make the life choices from their feelings (94).

Studying a rich narrative would be a sound practice in evaluating the worthiness of completing goals in one’s life. The character one studies must face struggles that are of interest to the reader as he sets a course for his own life journey. Characters in literature reveal their struggles with conflicting desires. Appleyard identifies three main elements that the reader should have while reading a story or a novel.

- Ability to identify with characters as models,
- Ability to see the novel as realistic account of life, complete with sufferings, setbacks and moral complexity.
- Ability to allow novels to make him think about his own life and ideals.

(qtd. in Bohlin 28).

Narrative literature gives students both exposure to a variety of lives and choices that give those lives shape, and scope to practice envisioning and setting their own life goals.

The word character is often treated as synonymous with personality. Derived from Greek it has two meanings 1. instrument for marking and graving, impress, stamp, distinctive mark and distinctive nature 2. personal qualities; particular constitution of the mind, which involves the character’s habits and tendencies of thought and action. As Harry Frankfurt has noted, “A person is no more to be identified with everything that goes on in his mind… than he is to be identified with everything that goes on in his body” (240). He suggests that
behavior is predicted from the act of mind rather than the body of a person by the causation and predictability of our thoughts and actions. It is universal to understand how a person interacts with another is a way to predict his behavior. Character plays a vital role in how we act. The way one acts plays a major role in any explanation of one’s behavior (Kupperman 7).

Success in life is determined by the correctness of the choices one makes. Existential philosophy though emphasizing meaninglessness and randomness of life talks about man’s freedom to make a choice. Narratives are replete with contexts and situations where the protagonist is faced with options out of which he has to make a choice. An attribute of high philosophy once, the problem of making a choice finds extensive expression in popular culture also. Instances abound in the Hollywood. A typical example is the sage advice given by Professor Dumbledore to Harry Potter in Book II. “It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities” (333). Popular culture or high literature the need to make choice is fundamental to life. Misery befalls one who allows others to make the choice for him. Living on choices made by others makes one’s life inauthentic. All of us have to make choices in life—aabout education, profession, marriage and so on. Personal narratives abound in situations involving the dilemma of making a choice and instances of these can prepare the readers to deliberate aptly in their life situations. They create spaces for the readers to practice reflecting on the power of choices and commitments. Applebee’s observation is relevant here. “[L]iterature helps students to interpret and understand their lives as they are and will be … by learning to analyze literature, students can learn to analyze their own lives… they are able to live a life, but also able to stand back and look at it” (416). Reading narrative literature provides an
important point of comparison and entry into stories of others. By witnessing their journey, we learn to appreciate the narrative quality by studying the principles, driving forces and such other causal factors behind the literary characters’ choices and hopefully become more capable of evaluating the significance of our own choices. MacIntyre points out that “every one of us is actively plotting our lives, both consciously and unconsciously, by attempting to construct ourselves as significant characters within what we regard as meaningful life stories” (165). He also concedes that “the narrative can illuminate purposes, plans, and goals, which are the forms by which our lives have some direction, motivation and significance for us” (171).

The present study focuses on three recent memoirs and applies the trait theory to analyze the protagonists’ learning curve in relation to circumstances, situations and contexts and the people they come across and who exert influence on their development. Their thought patterns and emotive behaviours during the crucial moments in their lives are selected and closely analyzed so that the factors contributing to their positive growth are identified and listed. Studies such as this are relevant in the present context when the society needs to address a spate of intra personal and inter personal problems that one sees occupying prominent space in the media. There are too many distractions for the youth in the present day world preventing them from conceiving a self, paying attention to it and making it full. A future society where the majority are fragmented selves is no doubt a recipe for disaster. World over, adolescence has not been successfully managed. It is a stage when one cannot comprehend what is happening with in themselves. Sensitive mentoring and guidance to adolescents to spend time with themselves are absolutely necessary if adolescence is to be nurtured into
responsible productivity in adulthood. The conversations with one’s own self in the inner space is what determines the quality of the development of the individual. And that space is offered only in novels, biographies, autobiographies and memoirs. It is time that we look for ways to build capacities and capabilities to benefit from reading works of this nature. The present study aims to contribute in this regard by demonstrating how the protagonists of the selected memoirs rally their thoughts, feelings, emotions and perceptions to achieve effective worldviews that help them successfully negotiate the unpredictable and challenging contours human life takes. The dominant traits in their characters are identified and classified. It is also brought out how certain traits form clusters while the protagonists are involved in crucial interactions with the situations of their life. How the character is revealed through the progress of the narrative is explained. Traits are what show us the character. Another facet of the protagonists’ experience is their inclination and ability to make insights after sustained thinking and introspection. This part of the analysis is highly relevant in the current scenario where individual who can make actionable insights are much in demand.

The following are the three memoirs selected for study. A brief introduction to the writer and the work is given in each case.

**Mitch Albom (1958- )**

*Tuesdays with Morrie* is Albom’s groundbreaking work published in 1997. Its special characteristic is that its narrative framework stands on the discussions and conversations the writer has with Professor Morrie Schwartz, suffering from ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis), a deadly disease. This book captures the essence of the time Albom spent with his professor on Tuesdays. Albom is also known for his sports writing. He has been radio host as well. He has been
acclaimed as the best sports columnist thirteen times by Associate Press Sports Editors. He is also the recipient of National Headliner Awards, and a member in the American society of Newspaper Editors, the National Sportscasters and Sportswriter Association and the National Association of Black Journalists. *Tuesdays with Morrie* initially sold only twenty thousand copies. But a brief appearance in the Oprah Winfrey Show led to much interest in the work resulting in it topping the *New York Times* Best Seller list for 205 weeks. Later it was also adopted as movie in the *ABC* channel which won four Emmy awards. *Tuesdays with Morrie* is regularly taught in high schools and universities around the world. Mitch Albom’s other works are *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* (2003), *For one more day* (2006) and *Have a Little Faith* (2009).

**Howard Zinn (1922-2010)**

Zinn rode the American scene as one of the most interesting multidimensional personalities. As a retired war veteran and a social activist his contribution to public life was enormous. He is an author, playwright and social activist who wrote extensively about civil rights and anti-war movements and history of labour in the USA. The memoir *You Can’t Be Neutral on A Moving Train* published in 2004 has been very successful in reaching the readers and has sold extremely well. Born and brought up by factory worker parents his childhood was marked by poverty. He self educated himself by reading extensively Charles Dickens on his own. Later he obtained M.A and PhD in Political Science from Columbia University in 1952 and 1958 respectively. He worked in Spelman College in Atlanta from 1956 to 1963 and later moved to Boston University for a long stint of 24 years. He retired from there at the age of 64. During his stint at Spelman College he participated in the Civil Rights movement and later in antiwar movements in the 1970’s. He was

**Frank McCourt (1930-2009)**

An Irish-American teacher turned writer McCourt has received rich accolades for his memoir *Angela’s Ashes* which won him the coveted Pulitzer Prize. Born in Ireland, he reeled under severe poverty. His parents found it tough to raise their children. His father moved to Limerick to find work in the factories where McCourt joined him at the age of eleven. At the age of nineteen he moved to New York to look after himself and his family with the money saved by working in the post office. He worked in New York University on probation for a year and completed a degree in English. *Angela’s Ashes*(1996) won him the annual Pulitzer Prize for Biography and Autobiography and sold successfully to make him a millionaire. This work was followed by *‘Tis*(1999) and *Teacher Man* (2005). McCourt was a member of National Arts Club, and recipient of Award of Excellence from the ‘The International Center.’

Chapter I establishes the current relevance of character study. It gives a brief account of how character study has suffered neglect over the years thanks to the dominance of radical theories in the past few decades and how this neglect is responsible for literature studies not occupying centre space in the academic and research domains. References from the fields of evolutionary biology,
neuroscience and current philosophy are cited to strengthen the demand for reviving character study. Then follows a brief account of the basic tenets of trait psychology and then its relevance to character study is pointed out. The recent popularity of personal narratives is mentioned with select examples and possible reasons for the phenomenon are suggested. The literary face of biographies, autobiographies and memoirs is described. That people are now more interested lives of real people is indicated by pointing out increasing popularity of the memoir. What transpires and gets transferred in the character-reader interface is discussed in detail to establish the relevance and usefulness of studying characters. The chapter ends with a discussion of aim and the relevance of the study and brief introductions to the writers and the works.

**Chapters II, III, and IV** deal with Mitch Albom’s *Tuesdays with Morrie*, Howard Zinn’s *You Can’t be Neutral on a Moving Train* and Frank McCourt’s *Teacher Man* respectively. The three middle chapters focus on the protagonists’ crucial, turning point, life changing moments and situations analyzing what traits manifest during such periods and how they determine outcomes. Carefully selected passages are scrutinized and it is found that through the progressing narrative the character of the protagonist is revealed to us. These chapters also examine how experiences in the memoirs relate to the readers’ experience. The important political, social and cultural events with historical undercurrents having a bearing upon the protagonists’ fate are also discussed. The main focus in respect of all the three works is on the growth trajectory of the protagonists and the role of traits in it.

**Chapter V** sums up the results of the analysis listing similarities and differences between the three works selected. It demonstrates how the trait approach to character study offers useful insights. The trait approach, it is found,
enables entry at a micro level and lends analytic rigour. This kind of micro
analysis facilitates progress to a macro perspective that is more concrete and
authentic. The chapter recalls the argument of the first chapter regarding the urgent
need to bring back character study to the centre stage. Taking the argument further, it
gives suggestions as to how best personal narratives and narratives in general could be
utilized to reintroduce readers to character enhancing literary treasure.