CHAPTER 2
THEORIES OF AUTO/BIOGRAPHY

2.1 OVERVIEW

This chapter discusses the major characteristics, problems and uses of autobiographies, biographies, and collaborative autobiographies. It considers theories related to identity, structural and textual issues, revelation of truth, narrative techniques, referential language, issues in selection of incidents, presenting the coherence of selfhood, intention, subjectivity and objectivity and turning points. It also examines the characteristics of a good autobiographer and biographer.

2.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

“Auto” means “self”, “bio” means “life” and “graph” means “writing”. Thus, autobiography means one’s own life written by himself. Critics and readers evaluated autobiography by analyzing the portrayal of the ‘self’ in it. Many theorists and critics attempt to define the term autobiography. Each definition brings out different aspects and characteristics of autobiography. Lejeune defines autobiography as “a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life in particular on the development of his personality” (Anderson 2001). For Pascal, “… the genre, autobiography depends on the seriousness of the author, the seriousness of his personality and his intention in writing”. He anticipated that the autobiography should reveal “the writer’s
mind” as well as “the events” that shaped his destiny. (Anderson 2001). Olney persisted the autobiographer “to portray his creative achievements” and his “relationship with those achievements”. For him, “isolating the uniqueness of the subject” is the primary quality and condition of the autobiography (Anderson 2001). The autobiographer should present the invisible world within his personality and the secrets of the “subjects’ present status”. Bates (1937) viewed autobiography as “a great store house of first hand, vivid, authentic information about human personality in all its variety, beauty, depth, intricacy, squalor and grandeur in which the immediate future is bound to be tapped, explored and put to utmost use by talented people”. Anderson’s discussion on the definitions of autobiography confirms that the autobiographer should deal with the incidents that reveal his intellectuality and emotions, hard and light moments, praising and cursing experiences, physical and psychological struggles and growth of body and inner mind either in written or in oral form. Therefore, an autobiography should expose the writer’s usage of conscious, sub-conscious and unconscious mind, thought, senses, emotions and internal and external memory stimulators. It should be filled with his identification, recollection, interpretation and articulation of his past.

Autobiography has its own impact on literature. For Naik (1962), “autobiography is a popular and satisfying form of literary art and a great blessing to humanity”. It provides first hand information about the subject. The tone of the autobiography may be fictional, scientific, lyrical, philosophical, spiritual, musical, etc. It exhibits the answers discovered by the autobiographer through his enquiries about life, behaviors, characters, success, struggles, strategies, experience, attempts in different fields and the results of his attempts, his observation and justification on others, etc. It presents the individual person’s life along with his status of his mind at the time of crisis and in the time of success, his self identity, motives and aim. It
pictures the development of the protagonist’s personality and conveys his multiple identities and inspirational forces. It creates a space for the readers to understand his personality. For Sodhi (1999) the autobiographer should be frank and straightforward. Jelink (1980) listed the qualities of a good autobiography. For Jelink, the central focus of the autobiography should be the author. It should represent the time and the autobiographer’s search for the self, his self-awareness and self-knowledge. It should present the autobiographer as if he/she aims to explore, not to exhort. It should reflect his effort to give meaning to some personal mythos (Jelin 1980). All these qualities create an important place for this genre in literature. Gunzenhauser (2001a) said, “Autobiography has a psychological and philosophical dimension that requires its writer to balance the deeds of an active public self with the thoughts of a contemplative private one”. According to him, a protagonist’s journey which includes childhood, adulthood and old age stages and spiritual and personal growth is the formal convention of autobiography (Gunzenhauser 2001a).

Critics like Andrew Maurois, George Henry, Spengemann and Anderson classified autobiography into different types. For example, Spengemann (1980) classified autobiography into three types: Historical Autobiography, Philosophical Autobiography and Poetical Autobiography. Anderson (2001) differentiated the characteristics of autobiography as male and female autobiographies. Generally woman autobiography is said to be focused on the various relationships like those with her parents, her siblings and later with her spouse, children and her mother-in-law and man’s autobiography is said to be concerned mainly with his success story, his achievements and very rarely a vivid account of his wife and children. In short, George Henry affirmed that “masculine mind is characterized by the predominance of the intellect and the feminine by the predominance of the emotion” (Anderson 2001).
Spengemann (1980) observed three main phases in autobiography’s formal and structural evolution in *The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes of History of Literary Genre*. He pointed out that the autobiographers like John Bunyan used sense of self to develop his “spiritual wholeness”. Philosophical autobiographers like Rousseau (1822) and William Wordsworth (1850) emphasized that autobiographers should incorporate the “epistemology of an individual’s mental processes” (Spengemann 1980). For Abbs (2001), lyrical autobiographies should consider the issues of truth found in the process of inventing poetic self and its expression. For example, Abbs observed that Wordsworth’s *Prelude* demonstrates “a progressive movement from one level of consciousness to another and from the intense engagement of childhood to the reflective understanding of maturity”. Abbs also viewed that Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* (1855) portrayed “the relationship between God, nature, humanity and the poet and it celebrates the lyrical power of memory”. He also discussed Wordsworth’s usage of iambic parameter and Whitman’s usage of sprawling free verse as part of lyrical autobiographies.

According to Gunzenhauser (2001b), literary autobiography should portray the life of a person through “formal attributes of linguistic sophistication like the manipulation of chronological narrative or the development of the themes relating to how personal memory and identity shape artistic creation”. Further, he viewed that literary autobiography explores the difference between the mental process and textual structure and the difference between the memory and imagination. Albert E. Stone probed metaphors of self, characterization and peculiar characteristics of narration, description, argument, dialogue, dramatic scenes, synecdoche, etc., in a literary autobiography (Gunzenhauser 2001a).
Religious autobiography is a type of autobiography which dominated the earlier periods. For Aikman (2001), the religious autobiography deals with the autobiographer’s relationship with God, process of conversion, quest for salvation, commitment, remembrance of the past birth, the inner life, pilgrimage, experience, etc. For example, Augustine’s *Confessions* is filled with religious and intellectual conversions.

Spiritual autobiographies and religious autobiographies share certain characteristics. Barbour (2001) claimed that a spiritual autobiographer attempted to interpret his or her life in relation to the norms of a religious tradition. He discussed a number of the characteristics of spiritual autobiography. The scrupulous examination of conscience, confession of sins, internal struggle, belief, experiences of continued doubts and temptations, or “backsliding” are a few characteristics of religious autobiography. Moral introspection, doctrines of religious books and religious institutions, acceptance of reality, a sense of life’s goodness, self-surrender, healing and belief are the predominant themes of spiritual autobiographies. He (2001) viewed that “seeking” became more important than “finding” in them. Barbour also extracted a few characteristics of spiritual autobiography by observing three types of western Christian writers. For him, the Protestants like John Wolman and George Fox dealt with the subjects by taking the biblical figures as models or metaphor for interpreting their own experiences. Puritans and Quakers presented the individual’s life as an example to instruct others in the central truths of a faith. They are highly introspective. For example, Margery Kempe prioritized inward focus of life and prayer and vision to the neglect of ordinary social life in the spiritual autobiography. There are also other types of autobiographies like Scientific Autobiography, Collaborative Autobiography and Musical Autobiography.
Sutherland (1969) discussed the characteristics, subjects, themes, concepts of the autobiographies written in 17th century. He observed that 17th century was filled with spiritual and political autobiographies. For him, Bunyan dealt with spiritual travails. Lodowick Muggleton dealt with trials, spiritual sufferings and the supreme sense of conviction. George Fox dealt with unshakable conviction, strong and questioning inner mind, deeper truths and strong sense of vocation. Fox’s motivation by inner light conveyed the spiritual purity as, “I knew nothing but pureness and innocence and righteousness” (Sutherland 1969). Richard Baxter examined reasonable nature, spiritual understanding, intellectual integrity and willingness and motives of the protagonist in spiritual autobiography (Sutherland 1969).

Anderson (2001) discussed the subjects and forms of autobiography with reference to many critics like Olney, Gusdorf, Nussbaum and Roy Pascal. He believed that the conception of “authorship” dominated in the nineteenth century autobiographies. For Olney, autobiographers provide “proof of the validity and importance of a certain conception of authorship: authors who have authority over their own texts and whose writings can be read as forms of direct access to themselves” (Anderson 2001). Felicity Nussbaum inscribed the importance of the developmental narrative thus: “it orders both time and the personality according to the purpose and goal” (Anderson 2001). For Gusdorf, “a kind of consciousness of self”, “the inward turning gaze” and “crucial narrative design” and “the representative moments of the growth of a personality” are the bases of writing an autobiography. He further added: “the task of writing autobiography is to be undertaken by an “aging man to appease the more or less anguished uneasiness” (Anderson 2001). For Pascal, “creating integrated succession of experiences” is the main motto of an autobiography and for Marcus, the autobiography should deal with people who have some “historical importance to say” (Anderson 2001).

Naik (1962) considered revealing the protagonist’s human urge, quest,
curiosity, character, experience and knowledge as the mighty forces of writing autobiography.

Andrew Maurois explained the peculiar nature of autobiography thus: “the most jealously guarded secrets of nature are being revealed by the talented creature” (Naik 1962). The success of an autobiographer depends on expressing his secrets and attitudes. Augustine viewed memory as “the best resource for writing an autobiography”. He believed that it was a place where a “person can meet himself” and it was a container of his experience. Memory is both source and authenticator of self expression. “Memory” is the root for “consciousnesses” (Smith & Watson 2001). Researchers from the fields like neuroscience, cognitive psychology and philosophy, have argued that memory helps to remembering which involves a reinterpretation of the past in the present (Smith & Watson 2001).

Experience is another aspect of autobiography. It paves a path for validating a person. For Smith & Watson (2001), experience acts as one of the major skills between “memory” and “identity”. Further, the autobiographer should deal with his family background, creativity, ambitions, decisions, challenges, motivation, focus, strength, inspirations, passion, reaction to failures and curiosity, career, and other aspects which would help to evaluate his personality and self.

2.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF BIOGRAPHY

Biography is defined as the story of a person told by someone else. The words are derived from Medieval Greek, “bios” which means “life” and “graphia” which means “writing”. Thus, biography means “life writing”. Biography is defined in The Oxford English Dictionary (1971) as “the history of lives of individual man as a branch of literature” or “a written record of the life of an individual”, whereas it is defined in The New Oxford English
Dictionary (2001) as “an account of someone’s life written by someone else”. Lee (2009) defined biography as “a platform in which “Individual lives are constructed performances, played out in a public arena, shaped by choices and functions and dependent upon reception and recognition”. Lee (2009) also instructed that, “Biographer’s job is to get behind the public performance and show us the real person at home” a definition approved by Plutarch, Bacon and Dryden. Naik (1962) defined biography as “the view of an individual by another”. Lynn Z. Bloom (2001) argued that, “biography is not a sombre meditation but as action and event.” He views that “in theory, biography is democratic”. Further, Lee justified defining biography as a hard task, considering the inclusion and exclusion of information, structure and forms.

Biography displays the dual nature of human personality. It portrays the brighter and darker side of life. It is a production of retrospection of a person’s life lived. It connects philosophy, history, sociology, spirituality, psychology, politics, science, novel, poetry, etc. It portrays the public and private life of a personality. It is filled with the mixture of human emotions. It creates secrets, suspense, thrilling, etc. It also lists out turning points, rising and falling circumstances, etc. For Naik (1962), biography is essentially objective. Lee (2009) emphasized the biographer to present the “truthful transmission of his personality”.

Johnson believed that “any life might be the subject of a biography”, as “any life of high and low has some scarce of good or ill, which is common to human kind” (Rollyson 2001). Biographies portray the lives of monarchs, philosophers, political leaders, criminals, doctors, naval heroes, army generals, saints, priests, bishops and celebrities like sports personalities, rock stars, and film actors as their subjects. According to Lee (2009), the biography of the celebrities should be constructed with “the central performance of their subjects in the context of the political conditions that produce them, the society in and on which they operate their race, class,
nationality and gender and many other figures who surround them”. He suggested that the celebrity biographer would portray his individual personality, “with the army of talent-spotters”.

Sutherland (1969) examined many seventeenth century biographies. He found that the 17th biographies portrayed the life of military persons, Bishops and ordinary peoples. For example, in *The Life of General Monck (1671)*, Thomas Gumble dealt with the Military person’s life. In *Bishop Hacket's Memoirs of the Life of Archbishop Williams and Scrinia Reserata*, John Hacket dealt with the life of Bishops. And in *Cheating of Solicitor Cheated* (1665), Richard Farr dealt with numerous lives of rouges and criminals.

Cuddon (1992) gave a brief account of the focus and themes of biography age by age. For him, earlier biographies portrayed the life of monarch and personalities depicted in Old Testament and in the Greek, Celtic and Scandinavian stories, epics and sages. He observed that Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives* and Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* were known for their plots as the information are arranged as “pair types” in them. He observed that hagiographies were so popular during the Middles Ages and they highlighted the lives of saints. The biographies like Boccaccio’s *De Casibus Virorum et Feminarum illustrium*, written during the renaissance period prioritized hero-worship. Translation of classical biographies like Bacon’s *The History of Henry VII of England* (1622) became a notable aspect of the Elizabethan period.

Cuddon (1992) considered the seventeenth century an important period of biography due to its multiple productions. Aubrey’s *Brief Lives*, Gilbert Burnet’s *Some Passages of Life and Death of the Right Honorable John Earl of Rochester* (1680), Sprat’s *Life of Cowley* (1688) and Dryden’s
*Plutarch Lives* are a few notable biographies of the 17th century. Cuddon (1992) observed that the biographies like Carlyle’s *Past and Present* (1843) of the Mid-Victorian period were filled with prudishness and blurred truth made by “respectability”. The 20th century biographies were viewed by Cuddon in two parts: the biographies written before 1950s and after 1950s. Two major biographers popularly known for their writings in the first part were Lytton Strachey and Harold Nicolson. Strachey was known for *Eminent Victorians* (1918) and *Queen Victoria: A Life* (1921) and Nicolson was famous for *Tennyson* (1923), *Byron, the Last Journey* (1924) and *Curzon: the Last Phase, 1919-1925: A Study in Post-war Diplomacy* (1934). Strachey was best known for his style of writing. He did not have any hesitation in selecting his subject. He had elegance, ironic wit and acute perception. But, the second part is said to be having a variety of biographies and subjects. There are historical biography, celebrity biography, literary biography and others (Cuddon 1992).

Biography portrays the identity of a person. Various intentions and point of views of the biographer shape the identity of the person in biography. The biographer pictures his subjects, the subject’s growth, stages of life, emotions, intellect, achievements, important incidents, selves, etc. Generally, the biographers of every age add certain special aspects through their positive or negative applications to biography. Lee (2009) reported that James Stansfield criticized the biographies which mixed “sympathetic emotion” and “moral illustration” and for censoring “particulars”, which did not reflect “great honor of the subject”. The historians concentrated on notions of chronology, representation, truth, objectivity, referentiality, causation, contextualization, human intentionality and moral lessons (Lee 2009). According to Sutherland (1969), mercantile imperialism, urbanization, religious conflicts, the eventual development of capitalism, etc., are the concepts that connected biography and history. For Virginia Woolf, the new
biography went “through a period of reaction against historical assumptions about “separate spheres” domestic priorities, modest invisibility, or aberrant exceptions” (Hoberman 2001b). Sutherland (1969) noted that the biographies compiled after Restoration discussed the lives of those who suffered in the Royalist cause during the civil war. David Lloyd’s *Memories of the Lives, Actions, Sufferings and Deaths of those Noble Reverend and Excellent Personages* (1668) is the best example of this case. Lee viewed childhood abuse, madness, rape, sex, beauty, the image of the “dumb blonde” magnetism, charisma, pornography, publicity, fame, power, marriage, divorce, miscarriage, abortion, alcohol, self-destruction and death as the subjects of celebrity autobiography.

Lee (2009) elucidated the basic nature of biography as “biographies can run backwards which can be organized by themes.” He also said “they can choose to dwell on certain key moments in a life, or can intercut their narratives with passages of history, literary criticism, description, or autobiography”. For Bacon, the biography should deal “… with worthy personages and with both their public and private actions, but it should avoid the trivial and concentrate on those deeds and on those aspects of character which will best serve as pattern for lesser men” (Sutherland 1969). Lee connected biography with philosophy, because both seemed to answer the questions about reality and the way to make the sense of one. He also confirmed the dual nature of the biography by bringing out the concept of “two Brownings” from the story Robert Browning. He explained that the two Brownings are “the genius and the bourgeois”. Hoberman (2001a) discussed the subjects of biography written in different periods. For him, Johnson concentrated on the ordinary lives and minor incidents for writing biography. Plutarch’s usage of diction and Theophrastus’ characters were said to have encouraged and dominated the earlier biographies. The new biographers like Lytton Strachey, Maurois, Emil Ludwig and Harold Nicolson speculated
freely about their subjects’ inner lives. They also assumed that the inner life of the subject was shaped by the unconscious motives of the biographers (Hoberman 2001a).

Tone plays an important role in a biography. Lee (2009) clearly explained that “tone and approach would reveal the status of the subject and the act of iconoclasm”. They also help to identify, whether the biography is an interim report on a living person or a revisionist return and also help to identify the key behind long-kept secrets of the subject. Woolf considered the narrative tactics as an important part to set the tone to create a “point of view” (Hoberman 2001b).

Biography has close relationship with history, autobiography, fiction, novel and other literary forms. Lee (2009) found insight into a culture, justification on human character and virtuous action, character’s ethos (the moral element in character) dianoia (the intellectual or rational quality of his or her thought) and hero-worship as the common phenomenon found between biography and history. Munslow (2001) observed that the theme “recounting and retelling of the lives of famous men and women to convey moral lesson” found a common place in history and biography. But, the deconstructionist like Jacques Derrida looked at history as a mere representation by commenting on the language of history and also commented that historical understanding was not epistemological but ontological (Munslow 2001). New biographers like Lytton Strachey and Virginia Woolf viewed 20th century biographer as an artist who actively engaged in the construction of his or her subject (Hoberman 2001b). Munslow (2001) expressed the difference between the new biographies and biographies of various periods as “this vision of the new biographers contrasted with the imaginative and constructionist act of the writer and correlated with the “positivist – inspired rational/inferential and reconstructive operation of the historian”. Maurois compared the autobiography and biography and observed that autobiography is subjective and biography is objective (Naik 1962).
Aikman (2001) noted that stories of miracles, faith, traditions, portraying the model for saint’s life, the way in which the king nurtured the spiritual life of his people, cultural contexts, exposure of service mind of the subject and narrative in theology played major roles in the religious biographies. Nicolson expected the biographer to portray his subject coherently by selecting, synthesizing and depicting certain facts and moments of his or her subject’s life (Cuddon 1992). For Hoberman (2001b), modern biographies were concerned with truth and knowledge of complexity of human character and its inner conflicts and the New Biographers emphasized on the discovery of a human soul”. For Alan C. Elms (1994), Psycho Biography “… looks backward over the course of a person’s life and tries to sort out why things happened as they did”. “Predictive enterprise” is the major character of this type of biography. Elms believed that predictive enterprise applied mostly with biography of politicians.

Rollyson (2001) discussed many characteristics of fictional biography. He pointed out that the fictional biography of Plutarch’s Vitae Parallelae (Parallel Lives) (1579) provided vivid accounts of Greek and Roman leaders, their great deeds and personal anecdotes. He observed that James Joyce applied psychological approach and the technique of stream of consciousness to reveal the intimate thoughts of the subject. The biographers producing fictional biographies also applied orthodox Freudians’ psychoanalytical styles in order to fathoming their subjects’ mind. Rollyson (2001) articulated that “Following Freud, biographers combined the interest in psychology with a fresh sense of the importance of childhood”. Freud believed that “subjects’ early life was the key to their later adult behavior” (Rollyson 2001).
Arana (2001) found that versified life writings varied widely in the tone and in subjects” by exemplifying the *Poetry Themes: A Bibliographical index to Subject Anthologies and Related Criticisms in the English language, 1875-1975* by Peter Marcan. This book is filled with more than 1500 entries and many of which describe anthologies made up entirely of biographical poems. This is also filled with lampoons, mock serious eulogies and funny and light hearted narratives solemn eulogies and patriotic verse. Alexander pope’s verse epistles are popular among these works.

Pilditch (2001) observed that weakness, strengths of the subject, observations, conduct, habit, speech, names of the streets, sounds of the streets, conversations, etc., are some characteristics of literary biography. Romantic poets like Wordsworth, Shelley, Coleridge and Keats showed a clear connection between literature and life. Celebrity and popular biography portrayed people who got the “fifteen minutes fame”. Bloom (2001) observed that the popular biographies concentrated on the changes in the subject’s characters, pursuits and accomplishments, complex motivations and a lot of familial, social, political, economical, religious, environmental and other facts influenced the subject’s life. Bloom (2001) also admitted that “as a rule, popular biographies do not carry on extended debates in footnotes.”

2.4 PROBLEMS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

The critics of medieval western theories, structuralism, new criticism, poststructuralism and the recent post colonialism discussed various problems in writing autobiography by prioritizing the divisions of the term ‘autobiography’ and raising the issues in ‘auto’, ‘bio’ and ‘graph’. The new critics formed the word order of ‘auto-bio-graph’ as ‘auto’, ‘bio’ and ‘graph’ and raised issues on ‘self’. Though the medieval western critics prioritized ‘auto’, they concentrated on ‘graph’ through which the autobiographer should represent his complete self. The 20th century theorists
raised the issues on depicting personal life in an autobiography. The structuralists, poststructuralists and postcolonialists prioritized ‘graph’, and raised structural and textual issues on ‘auto’ as they meant it to be a creative self and ‘bios’ life. Lejeune, a structuralist critic raised the issues of the intention of the autobiographer. He believed that the “intentionality of the author” will not connect author, narrator and the protagonist (Anderson 2001). Naik (1962) concluded that “autobiography was a bane rather than a boon”. Paul de Man, a de-constructionist, viewed autobiographer and autobiography as dead objects (Anderson 2001).

Form, definition, characteristics, completeness, subjects and subjectivity are a few fundamental problems in autobiographical writings. Critics view the relation between the author and the subject of the autobiography as a problematic part of autobiography. They expect the autobiographer as a literary artist to be objective in presenting his subject. This particular view of objectivity compels the author to be objective in order to create himself as a subject by taking a distance. The trembling self-consciousness and intentions employed in writing autobiography cannot draw a clear line which distinguishes the part played by the subject and the writer. Naik (1962) informed this paradoxical issue of the writer and subject in autobiography clearly: “the autobiographer must be able to forget himself and he must be able to remember himself”. It is an important feature of an autobiography. Poststructuralists also commented about this problem, as “the self appears to be doubly present as a narrator and protagonist in autobiography” (Naik 1962).

Naik (1962) saw self-examination as “the ability to view oneself critically” as a rare quality which suggested “a way to test the amount of honesty of the autobiographer”. Naturally, “man is a window dresser”, even ordinary people’s unconscious mind reacts immediately, when others point out their mistakes/negative characters. Man’s nature uses his conscious mind
to highlight only the impressive nature or talent to the public. Generally autobiographies are written by aristocrats, politicians, scientists, popular people, who by nature maintain high sensitiveness. This sensitiveness of maintaining dignity is the prime force that plays a vital role in problematizing autobiography. By evaluating their self favorably, celebrities present their deceptive image in their writings.

Moreover, Naik (1962) discussed another problem, which collapses the art of writing autobiography from the publishers’ point of view. It is “motive”. He analyzed different kinds of people and proved that their motives spoiled the construction of their writings. He found that vindictive people and people running after money, vainglory also attempt to produce their autobiographies having the motive related with their real nature. The publisher’s assumption of profit and the artist’s dual purpose of earning money as well as fame, the vindictive people employing much venom on others and vainglorious people’s desires to cultivate a noble opinion for them among the public motivate them to write their autobiographies. Naik felt that these motives created a danger to the genre autobiography. These attitudes will definitely damage the image, value and good sense of other good autobiographies.

Anderson (2001) observed that the critics of 1930s and 1940s blamed intentionality as the authors used this tool to control the internal meaning of the text. This gives an outlook to the readers that the origin of the text of the autobiography is the author himself. Siegel (2001) discussed the problems of autobiographies produced between 1900 and 1950. According to him, Freud, Darwin, Nietzsche, Jung, Heidegger and Kierkegaard are the major critics, who formed the ground breaking theory between 1900 and 1950. They questioned the complicated views of life writing and they were concerned about the suitable approaches to be used to present the life reliably.
Besides raising the issues on religion, existence of God, the obscure self and the coherence of selfhood, they criticized the subject, revelation of truth and the referential language. For Olney, autobiography did not have strong “theoretical and critical literature on autobiography” even in the earlier period of 20th century (Anderson 2001).

The dominant criticism in the 1960s was New Criticism that focused on the effectiveness of ‘self’, ‘life’ and ‘writing’. Critics like Jean-Paul Sartre, Simon de Beauvoir and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, known as existentialists, asked questions on self and its existence (Siegel 2001). Siegel (2001) reported the unstable condition of self as “self is defined and re-defined by himself or herself with every new choice”. Moreover, the new critics initiated check points on the fact and fiction, the possibility of presenting a life objectively and language employed to produce truth and reference.

The major part on which the structuralists built their criticism is on language. They believed that autobiographical writings should be attempted to precede and construct the reality of the self and not to reflect it. In order to emphasize this idea, they discussed “referent” and “figure” and their relationship. Mirror has the characteristic of reflecting what is shown to it and does not have the capacity to show more than what is shown to it. Autobiographical texts like the mirror cannot reflect more than the “self” or “truth” employed in the work. This ultimately leads to another problem “intention” that critics handled as a tool of illusion. They expected the autobiographer to have the “intention” to construct his “self” and “truth” through “language”. They correlated with Lejeune’s basic concept of autobiography. He stated that there must be an identity among the author, the narrator and the protagonist (Anderson 2001). The Derridean and the de-
constructionist’s concepts also degrade the autobiography with the “referential theory”.

Anderson (2001) intimated the problems of autobiography by referring to Paul de Man’s ideas found in *Autobiography as De-Facement*. Paul de Man listed out textuality, experience, interest, knowledge, voice, subjects, etc., as the constructive parts of autobiography. Paul de Man blamed that “autobiography falls in the problem of its textuality”. He pointed out that the “text” should be written in a way to attain “aesthetic dignity” by providing an “empirically useful way to understand the text”. He compared the experience described in the autobiography with “revolving door”. It indicates that the intention of the autobiographer connects to the experience of the author not the self-revelation. Apart from this, he identified the linguistic dilemma which usually happens when the author attempts to portray himself as a subject out of his own understanding. He also passed his comments on the language as the author reveals his interest and knowledge. His final comment “language both gives a voice and takes it away” expresses the crucial role played by language in autobiographies. He also brought out the problem of the complex subject of autobiography “I” with its relation to the subject, autobiography and their identity. Paul de Man viewed ‘self’ as a subject stabilized with autobiography in which it is presented only as an “illusion unmasked” (Anderson 2001).

There are also some complaints against the theories of autobiography as there was no constant theory produced in order to draw a clear structure for autobiography. The theorists like Olney felt that forming a complete theory for autobiography is a hard task. The unstable condition of ‘autobiography’ could be identified through Anderson’s description on how Lejeune felt unhappy about his own definition of autobiography. Anderson expressed Lejeune’s unhappiness with his definition as Lejeune felt that the
definition, to him does not provide a sufficient boundary between the narrator and his subject. The unstable condition of autobiography was also evidenced through the autobiographical theorists’ attempt to change the definition of autobiography. Anderson (2001) also brought out the issues about writing autobiography with developmental self-narratives, revealed by Nussbaum. They are vocation, incoherence, lack of integrity, scantiness and inconclusiveness.

In the recent times, another form of autobiography that received severe criticism is “collaborative autobiography”, an autobiography written with the collaboration of two or more authors. This collaboration is used in ethnography and celebrity autobiography. The authors, sharing their work to write an autobiography are vehemently attacked by the critics as it breaks up the author’s individuality which is already questioned by critics as an illusion. The critics felt that the collaboration of the authors, the individuality, questions related to self-revelation, authenticity, authority, agents, memory, proofs, aim, etc., created epistemological and ontological problems for writing autobiography.

2.5 PROBLEMS OF BIOGRAPHY

A biographer composes the life story of another person for various reasons like popularity, gratitude and for benefit of the subject and the writer through the available data collected. He selects incidents according to his intention. His utilization of truth, identity, self-portrayal, memory, intention, consciousness, knowledge, language, coherence of narration, incompleteness, availability and utilization of the internal and external sources, readability, reason and relevance are the common problems for writing biographies and autobiographies. Lee (2009) evaluated a few issues of writing biography and identified that the biographers holding the control over their work, living subjects holding the control over biographers, biographer’s awareness, his
invasive nature, revengeful or respectful intentions, popularity and his ability to differentiate the life of the subject and text, etc., are the major problems of writing biography. These problems create a false identity portrayal in a biography. He believed that it would change the biography as a work of art of impurity or amorality (Lee 2009).

Denzin (1989) pinpointed some of the common problems in narrative expressions of life experiences. They are common to both autobiographies and biographies. They are the existence of others, the influence and importance of gender and class, objectives of known and unknown authors, turning point experiences, etc. He expected the biographer to use the equal proportion of mind’s double perspectives. Lee and Denzin talked about the problem of gender and classes. For them, gender did not become an issue until women biographers started writing biographies. The common perspective of the female writers is that they feel that their life writings are hardly recognized. He also believed that the biographer has to expose the self of his subject through hard, diligent and attentive work, or else the biography will be simply an interpretive work. He expected the biographer to fit the objective markers and subjective markers into a place that give coherence to the life.

Hoberman (2001a) mentioned some of the limitations of biography. He categorized them into four kinds like aesthetic, epistemological, ethical and political. He revealed the unstable nature of biography by discussing the critics’ views on positioning biography as a genre and as a sub-genre. He criticized the biographies written on the basis of self-praising. He accused the biographies written with frankness and by new biographers. He found that the first one collapsed the ethical values and the later one provided misinformation and distortion. Hoberman (2001a) viewed biography as a sub-genre of history, where time plays an important role in narration. It has
resemblance with fiction, in which the writer focuses to evoke the subject’s inner life and its literary realism. Like autobiography, biography depicts the subject’s life. Hoberman’s view indicates the difficult status of biography which claims the generic status. Carlyle attacked eulogistic biographies, because, “respectability limits the biographer’s freedom.” For Hoberman (2001a), Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell’s *The Life of Charlotte Bronte* (1857) is criticized badly due to its description of Branwell’s sexual entanglements and Froude’s *Thomas Carlyle: A History of his Life in London*, for its marital conflicts. Both were attacked for their frankness (Hoberman 2001a). He also focussed an aesthetic issue of biography by referring Virginia Woolf. He identified that the arrangements and the mixing ratio of fact and personality of the subject became an aesthetic issue of biography. Due to this, Woolf believed that biographer “is a craft-man, not an artist” and biography is not an art but “something betwixt and between” (Hoberman 2001a).

Biographical issues become more controversial in the hand of new critics and poststructuralists. Hoberman (2001) explained the unsolvable epistemological issue through the basic concept of new critics and poststructuralist. For him, the epistemology of biography depends upon biographer’s valuable knowledge about reality which leads to truthfulness of a work of art. But, biographer’s valuable knowledge about reality is disturbed by his intention and other forces. He also exposed the problems in depicting the selfhood by quoting the belief of the Poststructuralists and Postcolonialists as: “if language cannot transparently convey reality, if the self is a fictive construct or mere multiplicity of subject positions, if narrative itself imposes a false coherence on events then no biographical account of someone’s life can be in any sense true” (Hoberman 2001a). Further, Hoberman found that ethical issues arise on the quantity of honesty and genuine nature employed by the biographer. He admitted that the boundary for this quantity is not defined by the biographical theorists. He also identified that there are
complexities in defining the boundary line to fix scale for intrusiveness in theory of biography (Hoberman 2001a).

There are also a few issues in the literary biography, religious biography and new biography. Pilditch (2001) was dissatisfied with: “Biography reduced morality to the individual case”. He felt that “Darwin’s theories of evolution eroded religious faith” and “hero-worship eroded the relevance of the individual”. For example, the biographer imagines himself as the disciple of the subject and creates problems to writing biography. There are also mythical issues related to faith and existence of God found in religious biographies.

2.6 USES OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Autobiographical writing and its forms have been developing tremendously from the ancient period to the present time. Initially, it was initially started as a subject of a genre and became a sub-genre of drama, poetry, prose, history, biography and fiction. Since the 17th century, critics, who support autobiography, have been trying to shape it as an autonomous genre by developing its uses regionally as well as globally. The uses of autobiography spreaded over the world with many branches of autobiographies like spiritual autobiographies, philosophical autobiographies, scientific autobiographies, literary autobiographies, political autobiographies, celebrity autobiographies, etc. Autobiography covers all the stages of human life like childhood, boyhood, middle age, parenthood and old age. Autobiographical elements are also reflected in diaries, testimonies, confessions, elegies, memoirs, epistles and interviews. Confessions, repentance, revelation, recovery, motivation, success, love, trauma, shame, slavery, insanity, criminality, self-narratives, memory, time, identity, agency and authority are the major tools used to construct the self of a person in an autobiography. Autobiography has been used for various purposes. It reflects
the personal and spiritual philosophies of a person, to register his/her achievements in various fields, his/her psychological status, to record the voices of slaves and suffering groups, etc. It is also used to represent sociological issues, religious philosophies and other thoughts of a person either through poetic or prose forms.

In addition, autobiographers shared their intellect in their works. In *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, Sarah Meer (1995) revealed the triangle uses of autobiography. She stated that “this is explicitly tied to a realization of the power of literacy and Douglass’s determination to be free becomes entangled with his extraordinary secret efforts to learn, to read and write.” These words indicate that Frederick Douglass who was an abolitionist lecturer in the Anti-Slavery Society, used his autobiography to expose the status of the American slaves, to portray the power of education and to inform the reader that education and a person’s inner thrust would demolish the slavery. According to Gunzenhauser (2001a), the American slave narratives deal with themes like “uncertain parentage, mistreatment by a cruel master or mistress, barriers to education and literacy, construction of a new identity and the institutions of slavery”.

The 20th century Indian autobiographies deal with the impact of colonialism. Indian women and dalits registered their voice for their rights in the post-colonial Indian autobiographies. Rao & Jeyaprakash (2010) observed that Bama utilized her autobiography “to elevate her autobiographical tone from the individual to the communal, seeking justice to change and reform the Dalits’ life”. They quoted words from *Karuku* which represents the feelings of Bama as “We who are asleep must open our eyes and look about us. We must not accept the injustice of our enslavement by telling ourselves it is our fate, as we have no true feelings; we must dare to stand up for change”.
Aikman (2001) evaluated the uses of spiritual autobiographies written on the context of Christianity, Muslim, Buddhism and Hinduism. For him, Augustine used *Confessions* to emphasize intellectual conversion, Ghazali used *al-munqidh min al-dalal* (*Faith and Practice*), to narrate his views on pilgrimage, Pei-yi Wu used *The Confucian's Progress: Autobiographical Writings in Traditional China* to convey his insights into the factors that shaped spiritual narratives by the Buddhist monks, and Phyllis Granoff used his autobiography to share his views on the quest for salvation. De Man showed the philosophical face of autobiography (Anderson 2001). In the same way, Plato’s *The Seventh Letter*, Augustine’s *Confessions*, and William Wordsworth’s *The Prelude* are the best examples that are filled with philosophies of the subjects. Gunzenhauser (2001a) stated the uses of older form of autobiography thus: “While autobiographers choose many different and overlapping forms in which to tell their stories, conversion narrative, immigrant story, adventure tale, poem and Bildungsroman must have traditionally accepted these stories as useful, reliable and true accounts of the writer’s experience”. Most of the autobiographers share the incidents that served as the agents of success in their life. Autobiographers also register their characters, capabilities, power, nature, attitudes, techniques, trends, styles and secrets of their success. These elements one way or other way create an impact positively or negatively among the readers.

### 2.7 USES OF BIOGRAPHY

Biography deals with the life of a human, knowledge of the biographer and his subject and it also reflects the status of the people, society and culture of a particular age. A biographer analyzes the subject’s public and private deeds and observes its feelings, inner thoughts, views, emotions and concepts. By using his invasive nature, the biographer reveals the secrets of great personalities or those who search for knowledge and those who have
some important things to say. Biographer register the answers found by philosophers, psychologists, scientists, spiritualists, socialists, humanists etc., in their search for “why we live?” “how to live?” and “what is life?” etc. Munslow (2001) said, “Biography can teach one how to live one’s life or can open one’s mind to lives”. Though the plot of the biography situates around the protagonist, the biographer presents his understanding on life from his point of view as well as from their subjects’ point of view. Biographers use the biography as a tool to convey the thoughts like keeping faith in God as well as not to keep, to believe in fate and not to believe, to be self-conscious, to do hard work, to eat, drink and be merry, not to sleep till the goal is reached, to be selfish, to be useful for the society, to view life as everything as well as to view life as an illusion, to lead an ascetic life as well as to lead a family life, etc.

Hoberman (2001a) briefly discussed the development, subjects and themes of the earlier biographies, biographies of middle ages, European hagiographies, non-European medieval biographies, Victorian biographies and biographies of 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. Hoberman (2001a) pointed out that the earlier biographers depicted the life and philosophies of individuals to “explore the larger ideas, such as leadership and courage” in order to produce “models of imitation”. While explaining the subjects of European hagiographers of the middle ages, he substantiated that they dealt with “the dual goal of the saints’ lives to present evidences to support the subject’s canonization and to provide readers with exemplary role models.” He presented many examples from non-European medieval biographies and confirmed that they concentrated on hero-worship, wars and portrayal of religious prophets. He also noticed that the 17th century biographers dealt with “annals” and “narratives”, Victorian biographers brought the biography back to a form of hagiography, in which the modern hero was treated like a saint,
18th and 19th century biographers dealt with adult characters and 20th century biographers gave preference to “personality” (Hoberman 2001a).

Sutherland (1969) gave a short note on Richard Baxter’s *Memoirs of Margaret Baxter* while talking about the biographies of the 17th century. For Sutherland, Baxter’s motive to write biography was, “… to obtain relief from an oppressing sorrow” and his main reason for publishing it was his belief that it would be useful to other people.” Hoberman (2001a) expressed the importance of biography through the words of Johnson as, “All knowledge is of itself of some value”. He also noted that biographies of Mark Antony dealt with the Roman Leaders, *Plutarchi Vitae Parallelae (Parallel Lives)* by Plutarch provided a vivid account of Greek and Roman leaders and account of great deeds and of personal anecdotes, Theophrastus in *Characters* dealt with the characteristics of his teachers and Dryden in *Plutarch’s Lives* dealt with a collection of short lives. Rollyson (2001) discussed a notable characteristic of the 18th century biographies. For example, in *Pamela or Virtue Rewarded* (1740), an epistle novel, Samuel Richardson portrayed an ordinary person as the protagonist. The heroine of the novel is a servant girl. It gives a voice for women’s freedom too (Rollyson 2001).

Cockshut (2001) believed that 19th century biographies like John Gibson Lockhart’s *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott, Bart* (1837) and Arthur Penrhyn Stanley’s *Life and Correspondence of Thomas Arnold* (1844) “emphasized their subjects’ force of will and achievements as adults”. He also observed that the 20th century biographies are said to be occupied by the new biographies like Lynton Strachey’s *Eminent Victorians* (1918) which is characterized by its artistic nature and psycho-biographies like Sigmund Freud’s *Leonardo da Vinci and A Memory of His Childhood* (1910) is filled with Freudian interpretations of psychology. Aikman (2001) pinpointed that the religious biographies were constituted on the themes like “holiness,
Biography provides a number of benefits to the society though reflecting the life and the self of a person with his characters, nature, intelligence, talents, achievements, attitudes and observations. Lee evaluated biography as it is stretched with one’s “personal story” and “political and social implications”. She also believed that Samuel Smiles’ *Self-Help: with Illustrations of Character and Conduct* motivated the society, and encouraged the workers to depend upon self-help through education rather than revolution. Hoberman (2001a) observed that the biographers reflected the impact of “empiricism, Protestantism and capitalism” while describing their “encounters with the external world”. It dealt with a good life of martyrdom. Thus, biography deals with heavenly and worldly thoughts, good and bad impressions, right and wrong things, war and peace, etc.

### 2.8 CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD AUTOBIOGRAPHER

Critics like Philip Lejeune, Paul de Man, Elizabeth Burr and Paul John Eakins criticized autobiography for its subject, form, incompleteness, construction, interior designing, authorship, authenticity, language, narration, etc. At the same time, another group of critics like Spengemann and Robeson Brown Burr attempted to fulfill the limitations of autobiography pointed out by structuralists, post-structuralists, post colonialists and other critics. This intellectual clash between the supporters and critics of autobiography helped to structure the autobiography to a good shape and revealed the limitations of autobiography. Thus, a good autobiographer understands the limitations of writing autobiography before he tries his hand at this art. A study on the autobiographical subjects and aspects will highlight the areas to be focused to produce a good autobiography. For Smith & Watson (2001), memory,
experience, identity, agent and embodiment are the five important elements of an autobiography.

Memory is the store house, where all the incidents and information about one’s personality is stored. Smith & Watson (2001) envisioned memory “as a source and authenticator of autobiography”. Steven Rose explained that “memory involves in the reinterpretation of the past and present” (Smith & Watson 2001), which remains Lejeune’s “retrospection”, an element of autobiography. In order to collect information for writing autobiography through retrospection, memory has to depend on the internal as well as external motivators. Man’s mind, the basis for thoughts, ideas and concepts, as well as man’s consciousness, the basis for intention and senses are some of the internal motivators of memory. These internal motivators alone cannot provide all the necessary details to reveal the complete personality of a person. The autobiographer needs to depend upon the external motivators in order to avoid the fragment registration of his personality. The external memory has the stimulating power. Even a tree or a stone or a bench of a school or of any other places can act as an external memory. Critics use these external memory stimulators as checking tools of truth incorporated in an autobiography.

Some of the external memory stimulators pointed out by Smith & Watson (2001) are scrapbooks, family albums, photographs, private rituals, anniversaries, family reunions, Urns filled with ancestral remains, religious holidays, memory theatre, archaeological model, processual model, poems, public documents, holocaust, genealogy, memorial day parades, Veterans’ Marches, heirlooms, videotapes, computers, sexual abuse, disability, etc. Some tools like sense and tortures serve as both internal and external memory stimulating tools (Smith & Watson 2001). A good autobiographer utilizes internal and external memory stimulators in order to reveal his complete personality.
Experience plays a significant and subjective role in shaping a person’s personality and identity. It is the basis for a person’s knowledge, thought process, attitudes, characters, maturity, skills and reactions to situations. Further, it teaches more than what academics can teach. An autobiographer experiences his life twice before he writes his autobiography. Experience allows one person to think psychologically, philosophically, professionally, socially as well as individually. Smith & Watson (2001) regarded experience as a process, an authority and a discursive one. They considered it as a process, because it leads the person to become “the subject of certain identities in the social, material, cultural and inter-psychic relations”. They considered it as an authority, because it authoritatively invites the readers’ beliefs and also it justifies certain claims as truthful. They considered it as discursive, because the autobiographer has to record “human experience” like feeling of the body, spirituality and sensory memories and “material universe” which includes the feelings like hunger, thirst, desire and stress discursively in language.

Identity is one of the important functions of autobiography. Brockmeir (2001) defined identity as, “a subject or a theme that runs through a life and its various accounts”. In order to find out his identity, an autobiographer attempts to do an inward search to find answers for the questions like “Who is he?”, “Who are others?”, “What is he at present?”, “How did he become like this?”, “What type of a person does he believe?”, and “What story of his life does he find appropriate and fitting?” Brockmeir (2001) also viewed identity as it needs to be answered for the question "what is to be an individual or perhaps several individuals?" Smith & Watson (2001) observed that identity is marked by many categories like “gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, generation, religion, political ideologies and family genealogy”. Brockmeir (2001) viewed identity in two angles. Firstly, he observed identity as something that guides the self in its journey. Secondly, he
believed that ‘turning points’ in life help to discover and constitute identity. He also declared that personal identity has been seen by “identity of consciousnesses through duration often with memory as the guarantee”. He classified the principal aspects of identity as, “identity as something unchanging”, “identity as something that is multiple” and “identity as a sense of self”. Moreover, he explored the problematic aspects of identity pointed by the post structuralists and the 19th century critics. For him, Poststructuralists found fault with the fluid and fluctuating nature of identity as it lead to “referentiality” (Brockmeir 2001) and the 19th century critics debated on identity’s development, its unstable nature as well as on its nature of producing multiple temporary selves as they felt that these issues created psychiatric, philosophical and cultural discourse. A good autobiographer has to discover his identity using inward search, consciousness and he has to construct his identity in language by analyzing its markings, aspects and criticisms.

For Smith & Watson (2001), the “material body” has something to do with the autobiographical subjects and autobiographical texts. Viewing this material body as an autobiographical site, Smith & Watson (2001) differentiated the body and the life narrative by saying, “the body is a site of autobiographical knowledge because memory itself is embodied and life narrative is a site of embodied knowledge because autobiographical narrators are embodied subjects”. They stressed that embodiment is necessary in life writing because it is to link the memory and subjectivity to shape and to reconstruct the sense of identity, to recover memory and to internalize images, sensations and experiences.

Agency is the last feature among the autobiographical subjects. Smith & Watson (2001) brought out some examples to show, how the subjects exercised the agent. According to them, postcolonial theorist Arjun
Appadurai located the agency in “imagination mobilized”, which he felt as an organized field of social practices, Feminist philosopher Judith Butler located it in the performativity of subjectivity, Feminist theorist Teresa de Lauretis in the “unconsciousness” and Sherry B. Ortner, an anthropologist, in “the ability” with which people play the “games” of culture with their rules and structures, wit and intelligence (Smith & Watson 2001).

Naik (1962) differentiated art, autobiography and biography. He argued that autobiography is not a sub–genre of biography but a separate genre and he also presented the limitations of autobiography. Naik (1962) viewed autobiography as an art and said that one could understand “the personality of the writer so far as it is reflected in the work.” His opinion interlinks the duty of the literary artist as well as the autobiographer. For him, this hard attempt increases the responsibility of the artist as well as the autobiographer, but the amount of difficulty is more for the autobiographer, because the nature of presenting oneself will fall under problems of exaggerating or degrading the writer’s personality. A good autobiographer handles this issue carefully. Naik (1962) emphasized that the autobiographer should register “truthful transmission of his personality.”

Naik (1962) believed that “man has a world within”, which can be presented through art, by carving on stones and through text. He expected the artist to put forth his effort to give “a view of the invisible world within the personality”. It informs the autobiographer that his search should not be limited with identification of the personality, as it would present incomplete nature of his personality. The inward search of the autobiographer is stressed more here. The autobiographer has to view his personality psychologically, philosophically, scientifically and spiritually. This outlook leads to the identity of the self which is assumed to be within the personality. Moreover, the self is capable of producing multiple identities of a personality and truth
about life. The westerners see the autobiography as a work based on mind process. That’s why, they evaluated ‘autobiography’ in the view of “meditated products”. A good autobiographer employs deep consciousness, meditation on the experiences, observations and incidents consciously in the process of identifying the self. Naik (1962) identified that, Milton in *Paradise Lost*, John Ruskin in “*Unto this Lost*: Four first Principles of Political Economy*, Jonathan Swift in *Gulliver’s Travels*, Oliver Goldsmith in *Letters from a Citizen of the World to the Friends in the East* and Michel De Montaigne in *Essays* represented the secrets of their personality. Hence, Naik emphasized “that portraying their personality and self” is an important aspect of an autobiography.

Finally, the autobiographer has to employ many autobiographical subjects and acts to produce a good autobiography. Man’s thirst for the liberation of his personality, achievements, sensitiveness, self-introspection, imaginativeness, aesthetic pleasure, adventure, creativity, different stages of life, clarity of thought and expression, tastes, emotions, will power, feelings, intellects, interests, talents, family tradition, wisdom, fear, hope, examination to discover the fundamental truth about human nature, nationalistic feelings, goals, motivations, turning points like the list of things to be concentrated by the autobiographer proceeds. The effectiveness of a good autobiographer relies not only on collecting all the personal details through various sources but also finalizing what are necessary and not. Shashi Bhushan (2004) remarked that “a genuine autobiography is both an essay in truth and an experiment combining the most significant features of philosophy, psychology and history”. Naik (1962) suggested avoiding the personal details related to sense of shame, common place of daily life, boring, disagreeable, shameful and insignificant details of an individual in an autobiography. But, the autobiographer has to be very careful in avoiding the minor details which appear to be unnecessary to the author but very sensitive for the critical study.
Naik (1962) also blamed those who write their autobiography for popularity and for taking revenge on others. In his view, "a good autobiography is neither wholly objective nor wholly subjective”.

2.9 CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD BIOGRAPHER

A biographer is one who attempts to write or narrate the life of another person. He becomes the re-creator of a person’s lived moments. The biographer plays the role of a faithful disciple, a righteous judge, a true friend, a loyal family member, a secret agent, a thief, a cursor, a ridiculous mocker, a psychologist, philosopher, spiritualist, socialist, artist, composer, organizer, narrator, etc. He holds the authority to highlight or degrade his subject by using tools like selection and censoring. At the same time, there are a few forces like the public, the readers, the critics, the subject if it is living, or the relationship and friendship circle of it and the biographer’s inner consciousness control the freedom of the biographer. For example, as a person describing the life of a subject, he has to undergo a few critical confusion due to the scale fixed by the theorists, who questioned “to what extend the biographer can picture the life of a person”. Plutarch, Bacon and Dryden approved that “Biographer’s job is to get behind the public performance and show us the real person at home …” (Lee 2009). The available sources which provide the information of the subject’s life hardly, help the biographer to produce the complete life of the person. So, there are definitions which stress the biographer to be selective. Moreover, Sutherland (1969) instilled that the biographer should avoid the trivial incidents of the subject’s life. For him, a biography should deal with the life of worthy personages. For Lee (2009), the biographer should concentrate on picturing the deeds, aspects and characters of his subject. The social anthropologists prefer to portray “the public and private life of an individual shaped by choices and functions and reception and recognition” (Lee 2009). Thus, the
success of a biographer relies on his decision about dealing with this issue either to be selective or not and if selective what to be. For Lee (2009), biographical narration should “proceed chronologically from cradle to grave”. She also suggested the biographers to concentrate on the part of life they had witnessed” by believing that “total coverage is not an invariable rule”.

Sutherland (1969) illustrated another major problem of the biographer. The estimation of Sutherland and Anthony Wood on John Aubrey, the writer of Miscellanies upon Various Subjects provide a problem of the biographer. For Sutherland (1969), “Aubrey had a genuine passion for antiquarian studies, but it was mixed up with so many other interests, all struggling to assert themselves that he never quite succeeded in completing any task that he set himself”. For Anthony Wood, “facts, half facts, traditions, gossip, anecdotes, folklore and pure fiction, all claimed his ready attention and settled together in his brain in an autobiography state of absolute equality” (Sutherland 1969). The first one suggests that the lack of focused mind and spreading various interests in the mind makes the biography a complex one. The later suggests the biographer to have an awareness and analytical mind on sources.

The awareness of the requirements of different types of biographies helps the biographer in many ways. It guides the biographer to be aware of the structure and themes. It avoids confusion and leads to a clear focus. According to Lee (2009), “literary biography does not split the performing public and everyday self off from the private writing self”. Sutherland (1969) brought out the aspects of ecclesiastical biography by evaluating the distinct style of Dr John Fell applied in The Life of the Most Learned Reverend and Pious Dr. H. Hammond (1661). For Sutherland, John Fell narrated the life of Dr. Hammond in an orderly way, maintained the relevance of his narration and also he revealed his subject’s piety, charity, and his influence on young.
Lee (2009) suggested the biographer “to reveal the truth of the human personality”. She said, “The value of every story depends on its being true”. She also added that the biographers who deal with biographies of celebrities have to construct the individual’s personality, “with the army of talent-spotters, promoters, managers, agents, producers, backers, publicists, photographers, directors, writers and audiences who surround and often create the central performance”. For her, psychoanalytical interpretations or historical moralizing facts are the major forces to be considered to write biographies based on adventure. She also suggested that the biography should “include the social and cultural politics of its time” and the place, where “the biographer has to be aware of the assumptions”.

Apart from understanding the structures and forms of different types of biography, a good biographer has to focus on its integral parts. In order to give life to the subject, the biographer should specifically concentrate on the construction of his subject’s identity. For Lee (2009), the biographers should deal with the subject’s growth, stages of life, emotions, intellects, achievements, important incidents, selves etc. For Naik (1962), a biographer gives a clear picture of his subject’s character. Character description was a popular tool of biographies written during the restoration period. Sutherland’s judgment on Theophrastus’ method would show the way of quality characterization. Sutherland (1969) said that characterization is “an abstraction rather than the assessment of an individual person. But it must have encouraged psychological discrimination and the orderly presentation of ideas”.

Identification of the subject’s self is another task for the biographer. There are discussions between the theorists and critics of biography on how best the self could be portrayed in biography. Early structuralists questioned the self portrayed in autobiography as well as biography. Lee (2009) viewed
that the self can be represented “through anecdote, revelatory incidents, description, conversation, encounters with others, moments of decision making, single acts, preferences, peculiarities, repeated habits …” She advised that the biographer should reveal the formation of self, and its public performance. She believed that philosophers like Plato, Wittgenstein, Austin and Moore worked on questions of an essential self, philosophical system or the relation between acts and emotions and presented the self by explaining to what extent a life can be lived. Critics expect the biographers to discover the secrets, the peculiarities and contradictions of their subjects apart from presenting their public actions and events. Nicolson justified Chaucer as the greatest English realist who possessed all the energies and all the faculties of the supreme biographer (Cuddon 1992). A few aspects of Chaucer admired by Nicolson are curiosity, acute psychological observation, humor, sympathy and a genius for selection. The ultimate aim of the biographer must be producing a biography, in which there should be a “truthful portrayal” and “transmission of personality” (Cuddon 1992).

Lee (2001) justified that the biographer’s consideration of the inclusion and exclusion of information as a hard task by saying that “there must be some involvement and there must be some detachment”. A good biographer has the knowledge of where he has to involve and where he has to detach himself. Lee (2001) felt that the biographer can put up his thoughts in some places without disturbing the self portrayal. Bloom (2001) considered that “biographical narrative is an artificial construct, since it inevitably involves selection and shaping”. As the biographies are open for inspection, sometimes, even minor information about popular figures of various fields comes under hot criticism. Bloom (2001) believed that biography is attacked for “breaching trust, violating privacy, trivializing a life’s work, simplifying a person’s complexity…” This makes the issue more sensitive. This confuses the biographer where to be subjective and where to be objective and where to
be sensitive. A good biographer implements his intellectual faculties in order to overcome the complexity. He is supposed to spend a lot of time to deal or to sort out the myths, lies, exaggerations and secrets. Emotional guess works, emotional crisis, revengeful nature, flattering, misremembering events, and over involvement make the biography a more complex one.

The challenging place, where the biographer has to play a major role as a writer is the composing part. The biography should have a beginning, middle and an end. Lee (2009) said that the opening and ending are the most difficult parts of the biography. Strachey recommended the biographer to shape his material and construct a coherent, artful and convincing portrait (Lee 2009). But, writers like Anthony Wood, having the antiquarian spirit encouraged the collection rather than the digestion of orderly presentation of biographical data (Sutherland 1969). It is necessary for the biographer to produce evidence of sources. The reason is that biography is involved with legal issues of property, permission and copyright (Sutherland 1969).

The task of writing biography is clearly described by Sutherland while talking about the process where Anthony Wood attempted to include short biographical notes of the writers and bishops in Athenae Oxonienses (1991-92). As per the instruction of Dr Fell Wood, he took enormous pain to collect the data from various sources for a long time for giving a credible biography of his subjects. Lee (2009) also gave some inevitable conventions of writing a biography. For him, the biographer has to concentrate on the time, place, character and events. Further, he said that the biographer can construct his biography by “setting the main figure in its context, mixing the plot with the account of the subject’s work, or of subsidiary characters and using description and observation, documentary sources, witness testimony,
peripheral materials and firsthand knowledge to construct the story” (Lee 2009).

2.10 COLLABORATIVE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Smith & Watson (2001) defined collaborative autobiography as “the production of an autobiographical text by more than one person through one of the following processes: the as-told-to narrative in which an informant tells an interviewer the story of her life: the ghost written narrative of a celebrity recorded, edited, and perhaps even expanded by an interviewer: a coproduced or collectively produced narrative in which the individual speakers are not specified or in which one speaker is identified as representative of the group”. The first two descriptions of Smith & Watson represent the image of a celebrity autobiography and the next description represents the image of “ethnography”.

Further, Couser (2001) added that auto/biography, confession of crime narrated by whom the crime was done and the forms of psychotherapy as the shapes of “collaborative autobiography”. These forms of autobiography challenge the form and structure of both autobiography and biography. Because in autobiography, the subject, the narrator and the writer are the same person and in biography, the subject is one person and the narrator and the writer is another person, but in collaborative autobiography, these features are combined. Dhanavel (2007) viewed the collaboration of the authors, subjects and themes symbiotically. Both the author and the subject participate in the process of writing equally to give a shape of the autobiography in the first person narrative. It resembles a peculiar recent American trend of “autobiography”. According to Gunzenhauser (2001a), Native Americans’ autobiographies are “typically mediated productions, an oral account dictated to and transcribed by an editor/translator”. Regarding subject and the themes, the subject consciously or unconsciously allows
having collaboration of the different elements of autobiographical types like mixing the elements of scientific autobiography, spiritual autobiography, biography and philosophical autobiography. In the same way, the subject allows a collaboration of multiple identities of single person in one autobiography.

Now-a-days, collaborative writing is encouraged for various reasons. Composing, transcribing, rewriting, editing and publishing are the processes, a work undergoes before it get published. A deep and broad analysis would certify that though any work is done under the control of the author, through the process it undergoes, it could be called a collaborative work only. But, the soul of writing would project the complete shape as it belongs to its author hiding the other writing processes.

Frank Smith (1994) illustrated that collaborative writing facilitates both the authors and allows doing each one’s task in a better way for the writing process of the work and also helps the authors to inspire each other. Another valuable advantage is that it helps the author to overcome the problem of loss of consciousness which naturally happens to all due to other commitments and disturbs the thinking process. It can substitute the co-author’s memory as a “short term memory” which motivates the author to get connected with the point where he got struck up. The most important and supportive part of the collaboration or the co-authorship is distributing the work. Smith (1994) provided the measures of the distribution as the subject takes care of “composition” which includes the act of getting ideas, selection of the words, grammar and revision, and the co-author takes care of “transcription” involving physical effort in writing, spelling, legibility, paragraphing, criticism, and suggestion.

Smith (1994) also did not fail to include the disadvantages of the collaborative writing. The average receiving and productive capacity of
writing process, compared with the capacity of listening, speaking and reading is a slow one. It is also said to disturb the thinking process which is capable of producing millions of ideas in a short time and somehow could be overcome by electrical and electronic recorder. Personal ego, authors’ stress on their view, changing and dropping the view, incoherence of ideas, unequal distribution of the character portrayal, author’s sense of receiving complements and complaints and turns in drafting are some of the problems of collaborative writing according to Davis & Gannon (2006).

The term “collaborative autobiography” is considered a less prestigious type of autobiography for the following reasons. In ethnographic autobiography, the subject’s choice to audit and edit the manuscript is limited and in the celebrity autobiography, the “ghost-writer” or “as-told-to participants” are dominant. Though it has the traditional way of narrating the subject’s success, the exacerbated narration of personal sufferings such as sex, drugs, abuse, alcoholism, eating disorders, mental illness etc., violate the general nature of autobiographical subjects. Couser (2001) pointed out that the collaborator will be maintaining close relationship with the author. This auto/biography seems to violate the privacy of the subject as well as the form. Apart from these, the false confessional stories, and the form of psychotherapy affect the subjectivity, the root of autobiography.

The dignity of the autobiography is based on the truth which is an important tool used by the structuralists and poststructuralists to evaluate an autobiography. In all the above types of collaborative autobiography, the interference of the co-author is said to disturb the privacy of the subject. The less involvement of the author in ethnography and loyalty of the to-said-to-partner or the ghost writers to the authors in the celebrity autobiography disturb the complete exposure of author’s original individuality, interest, role, reputation and intention. They either reduce the status or exaggerate the status
of the subject. Not only the subject portrayal becomes an issue but also the work distribution of the partner creates more problems to its credit to the collaborative autobiography. The distribution is not a measurable part. Moreover, ethnography highlights the writer and the celebrity autobiography highlights the subject. Couser (2001) commented that in the case of celebrity autobiography, “the writer is viewed as the “dummy of the subject”, but the text often owes more to the writer than the subject”.

2.11 SUMMARY

This chapter discussed the theories of autobiography, biography and collaborative autobiography with reference to the key concepts like identity, truth, language, selection of incidents, etc. It also brought out the characteristics of the autobiographer and biographer.

The next chapter will deal with the autobiographical elements in Kalam’s autobiographies Wings of Fire and Turning Points.