CHAPTER: I

AUTOBIOGRAPHY:

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In this rapidly developing world we get a regular access to various media. We get updated and well informed through computers and internet.

Computer has turned the world into a global village. All the technical resources provide us with all the information about the world. This information is incomplete without a human touch. As a matter of fact, we don’t get much time to stand and share the problems of others. In this technical era man has turned out to be a machine. In such a scenario literature is the only key to human understanding. Life – writing is the best medium to unlock human heart.

The great critic Thomas De Quincy has distinguished literature in two broad categories

1 Literature of knowledge.
2 Literature of power.

“All that is literature seeks to communicate power, all that is not literature to communicate knowledge”¹

Autobiography is a record of a person’s life. It informs us about the various incidents of a person’s life. However, autobiography is not only ‘Literature of knowledge’. It also moves us. It portrays life in a very aesthetic manner. In order to understand the moving as well as informative function of autobiography one has to understand its nature and elements thoroughly.
1.1 Definitions:

According to Oxford English Dictionary: An autobiography is

1. “An Individual’s account of his own life”  
2. “It is a biography of yourself”  
3. “It is biography, life-history, life story, life an account of the series of events making up a person’s life”

According to Collier’s Encyclopaedia:

“Autobiography, a form of biography in which the subject is also the author; it is generally written in the first person and covers most or an important phase of the author’s life”

In his grand work, ‘English biography’ Mr. W. H. Donne remarks; “Autobiography, which is worth the name, is serious and truthful self study”.

All the above definitions suggest that autobiography is life-history. It is a biography of the individual written by himself. It covers an important phase of a person’s life. It is necessarily truthful and serious attempt of self-study.

While biography is defined as ‘an account of a person’s life” or as “literature which consists of the histories of individuals”, autobiography is called: “the story of a person”. The coinage of the term ‘autobiography’ is quite modern. Murray’s New English Dictionary notes “…the first recorded use of the term occurred in 1809. Before this date, the autobiographical form passed under various names: life narratives written by the author him self, memoirs, journal, diary, biography by self, history by self etc”.

James Olney breaks the word “autobiography into three different parts: “autos”, the self, the “I” stated or implied, without which the work would become meaningless. The 'bios' or the 'life', which is the entire life of the individual unto the time of writing. Lastly the 'graphe' or the act of
writing. It is through writing the self that the life takes a specific dimension and image.

There are three main types of autobiography

1) Informal autobiography
2) Formal autobiography
3) Specialized forms of autobiography.

Informal autobiography includes extremely intimate writings not necessarily for publication. Letters, diaries and journals for instance reveal the personal life of the author very consciously. Publication of collected letters of some eminent persons such as the volumes of W. S. Louis’s correspondence with Horace Walpole, an 18th century man of letters (34 Vol, 1937-65) can enlighten the reader about different ways in which a person can reveal himself or herself. Similarly, Mozart and Byron have revealed themselves in an uninhibited fashion in their letters. In the 20th century, the young Jewish girl Anne Frank wrote her diary in such a manner that a script was prepared for a drama and a film. Records of the personal experiences in journals have offered a confidential history of their writers. Leonardo de Vinci’s notebooks reveal his teeming and ardent brain. Dorothy Wordsworth’s Journals (1867) bear the proof of her sensitive nature. Memoirs and reminiscences emphasize what is remembered rather than who is remembering. In the 15th century Philippine De Connynes speaks more of the life of Louis-xi, master of statecraft than himself. In the 20th century Sir Orbert Sitwell’s volumes of recollections are noteworthy.

- Formal autobiography:

“… Offers a special kind of biographical truth: a life, reshaped by recollection, with all of recollections conscious and unconscious omissions and distortions”.
We find the examples of formal autobiography in the literature of the antiquity and the Middle ages also. In the 2nd century B. C. the Chinese classical historian Ssu-Ma gives a brief account of himself in *Shih chi: Historical Records*. Julius Caesar’s *Commentaries* speaks little about himself and more about the conquest of Gaul. *The confessions* of St. Augustine of the 5th century A.D. is a remarkably early instance of this genre.

In Europe autobiography begins with the Renaissance. Margery Kempe, an Italian mystic dictated an account of her life during this period. Enea Silvio Piccolomini, who became Pope Pius-II in 1458, wrote his autobiography *Commentari*. The 17th century is rich in autobiography in England. Autobiographies written by Baxter and John Bunyan are the examples of religious life-accounts. In the 18th century, Colley Cibber’s *Apology for the life of Colley Cibber, Comedian* attracted the readers. During the 18th century three autobiographies were written by the distinguished writers like Benjamin Franklin, Edward Gibbon and Rousseau. Rousseau’s ‘Confessions; inspired Wordsworth to write the *Prelude*’ and Byron to write *Childe Harold*.

- **Specialized forms of Autobiography:**

  They are classified under four heads: thematic, religious, intellectual and fictionalized autobiographies.

- Adolph Hitler’s *Mein Kempf* (1924) and Richard Wright’s *Native Son* (1940) can be called thematic autobiographies.

- St. Augustine’s *confessions* and Peter Abelard’s *Historia Calamitatum* in the middle ages and a few chapters of Thomas Carlyle’s *Sartor Resartus* are instances of religious autobiographies.

- John S. Mill’s Autobiography and Edmund Goss’s *Father and son* (1907) are intellectual autobiographies.
• Fictionalized autobiographies are thinly disguised as novels. For instance, Samuel Butler’s *Way of all flesh* (1903), James Joyce’s *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*’ (1916) and George Santayana’s *Last Puritan* are fictionalized autobiographies.

1.3 HISTORY

Formerly, we Indians were quite unaware of the importance of systematic documentation of the events of history unlike the westerners. The forms of biography and autobiography were quite alien to the Indians before the British arrived. However, the forms of informal autobiography or confessions could be discovered in the Vedic literature like *The Gambler’s Lament, Rigveda* (10, 34.2), 1500 B.C. or in the Buddhist literature like *Theragatha, 6th Century B.C. to 3rd century B.C.*) Or in the later Sanskrit literature like *Bana’s life* given in the first few chapters of ‘Harshcharitam (7th cen A.D.) or in the Mughal literature like *Babarnama, Tuzak –i- Jahangir* etc. Such informal autobiographies appear to have been written either to promote spirituality or to glorify the autobiographer himself. The systematic development of autobiography in various languages including English in India can be traced from the second half of the 19th century.

The first piece of autobiographical writing in English was Raja Rammohan Roy’s short autobiographical sketch (1833) which is a very realistic presentation. Kashiprasad Ghose’s letter published in James Lang’s *Hand book of Bengal Missions* (1848) is of greater literary interest. The first extensive autobiography was written by Lutufullah, a tutor in Persian, Arabic and Hindustani to British officers in 1857. Novelist Lal Behari Dey’s *Recolections of My school Days*, serialised in the *Bengal Magazine* (1873-76), proclaims the superiority of English education to oriental learning. Nishikanta Chattopadhyaya’s
Reminiscences of German University Life (1892) and Rakhal Das Halder’s The English Diary of an Indian Student (1861-2) were the only attempts of autobiographical writing by Indians in the 19th century.

In the first half of the 20th century there was the quest for freedom. Those great figures who devoted themselves to the freedom struggle wrote about their own experiences through autobiographies. Surendranath Banerjee’s A Nation Making (1925) is an apologia for moderate politics. Mahatma Gandhi’s The Story of My Experiments with Truth (1927) written in Yeravada jail appeared first in a Gujarati weekly Navajivan. In 1940 it was translated into English by Mahatma’s secretary, Mahadevbhai Desai. The story is often compared with St. Augustine’s Confessions with all its pre-occupation with spirituality. Lala Lajpat Rai’s The Story of My Deportation (1908) and Jawaharlal Nehru’s An Autobiography (1936) are two important autobiographies. Nehru’s autobiography is a marvellous piece of self-analysis. It is a living record of the Indian history written in impressive language.

Barindarakumar Ghose’s The Tale of My Exile (1928) and B. K. Sinha’s In Andamans: The Indian Bastille (1939) are notable autobiographies by the revolutionaries.

Dhan Gopal Mukherji’s Caste and Outcaste (1923), Mulkaraaj Anand’s Apology for Heroism (1946) and K.Subba Rao’s Revived Memories (1933) are the literary autobiographies of high merit. Mulk Raj Ananad’s autobiography also provides a valuable insight in understanding fiction.

Other autobiographies of the period include social reformers like D. K. Karve Looking Back (1936) or men of spirituality like Swami Ram Das’s In quest of God (1923), an educationist like G. K. Chatur’s The last enchantment (1933).
Suniti Devi Maharani of Cooch Bihar was the first Indian woman to write an autobiography. Her book *Autobiography of an Indian Princess* was published in 1921. Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit wrote three autobiographical volumes, like, *So I Became Minister* (1936), *Prison Days* (1945) and *The Scope of Happiness* (1979). Krishna Hutheesingh wrote *With No Regrets* (1944) and ‘We Nehrus’ (1968).

After independence, one can notice a rich harvest of autobiographies. Among the most outstanding of them are Morarji Desai’s *The story of My Life* published in three volumes between 1974 and 1979 and M. R. Masani’s *Bliss was in that Dawn* (1977).


Other women autobiographers like Nayantara Sahgal’s *Prison and Chocolate Cake* (1954) and *From Fear Set Free* (1961), Kamala Das’s *My Story* (1976) and Lady Dhanvanthi Rama Rau’s *An Inheritance* (1976) are noteworthy. Further more Amrita Pritam’s *Revenue Stamp* and *Shadow of Words* (2004) are famous Punjabi autobiographies. Recently Shobha De’s *Selective Memories-stories from my life* (1998) and Taslima Nasreen’s *My Girlhood Days* are famous women autobiographies.

Pandit Ravi Shankar’s *My music, My life* (1968) reveals his career as an artist. Hazari’s *An Indian Outcaste* (1951) presents the life-story of the oppressed classes. Our well known Missile man Dr. A.P.J. Kalam has gifted us with *Wings of Fire* (1999).

### 1.4 ELEMENTS/FEATURES;

Autobiographical form reveals four different aspects that vary according to the auto biographer’s mode and mood. These aspects can be classified into Subjectivity, self-revelation, introspection and self concealment. The centre of any autobiographical work is the life. James Olney rightly observes:

“The ‘I’ that comes away to it’s own being shapes and determines the nature of the autobiography and in so doing half discovers, half creates itself that opened up the subject of autobiography specifically for literary discussions”

It has been rightly said: “God created people because he loved stories”.

Each one of us has at least one book in him. Each individual is a moving story. It is only by writing and expressing himself that the autobiographer exposes the life and creates a place for himself. Thus, autobiography is at once subjective, self-revelatory and introspective.

- **Experience based features:**

  Self written life-story: Autobiography, as the very term suggests is a life-story written by the person himself. It includes all the events of a person’s life right from his childhood. These events focus on the internal and external life of the person.

  The writer himself gives report of his own life. The basic necessity of writing about one’s life arises from the sense of individuality. Janet Gunn observes:
“Autobiography is the act of ‘settling down’ or of wedging one’s feet downward. It represents an act both of discovery and creation that involves at the same time, the movement of the self in the world recognizing that “the land makes man” and the movement of the self into the world, recognizing well that “man elects his land”.11

The great poet W.B.Yeats says in his autobiography “It is my self that I remake”. Thus, the art of autobiography involves a process of reconstruction of the writer’s life. It is the self-picturing in which the writer is indulged. “Self-portraiture is a synonym of self-knowledge”.12 “When a man is attempting to describe another’s character, he may be right or he may be wrong but in one thing he will always succeed, in describing himself”.13

• **Self centeredness:**

Autobiography is a never ending dialogue with the self. All the other incidents, persons, nation, era etc. should be narrated with special reference to the author’s self. The self of the author should be at the centre.

Many a times when autobiography is written by a political or social leader, he indulges himself in narrating other persons, individuals and events so much so that his self is completely dissolved. This is not advisable in autobiography. The writer should maintain a balance in giving account of other events and his own self. The self-referentiality of autobiography should be evident in the language, narrative and the structure of the work.

**Realistic touch or Factual Record:**

Creator and his creation are strongly associated with one another. Literature grows out of life but the truth of literature is imaginative. Facts
of life are dissolved in imagination and reshaped by literature. Facts get a distinct shape by getting the touch of an artist.

Autobiography is a record of a person’s real life, lived in a particular time and place. George Gusdorf says that this mode of writing “is limited almost entirely to the public sector of existence”. That is to say, autobiography not only deals with personal but also with public lives of the people. It deals with the realities of life. It is a search of self through the annals of history, an act which embodies the self where the ‘real’ or ‘actual’ self is replaced “by a new self made object, a cultural artefact- the book at hand, the autobiographical text”. (Charles J Rzepka, pg-33, Sodhi) As autobiography is a life-history it is surely associated with reality. Fact is the soul of autobiography. It recreates life through the imaginative transformation of facts. However an autobiographer’s treatment of fact is quite different from that of a historian. A historian is concerned with the results of the events while an autobiographer is concerned with the events themselves. An autobiographer is honest to his experiences and feelings.

An autobiography is beyond the limits of time-span. A strict order of chronology is not expected from an auto biographer. Many a times an autobiography does not follow the chronology of details. For instance, Amrita Pritam’s autobiography ‘The Revenue Stamp’ starts with chronological details of her childhood but later on she doesn’t maintain this chronology. However, readers relish her flash backs and flash-forwards methods of narration. Maurice O’ Sullivan’s life story ‘Twenty years – A Growing’ does not record the facts of his life in chronological order. However, it is full of confessional tone, authenticity and honesty. Hence, it is a complete factual record of his life story.

Thus, autobiographer has to perform a twin role of a historian as well as a litterateur.
CONVINCING POWER:

A story depends upon its convincing sincerity whether a story or a life-story. Each story has its well managed harmonized and consistent world. That is to say it has its individual reality. It has its own rules to be followed. Therefore, the imaginative truth of literature appears convincing.

The truth of autobiography is not created or probable truth. It is based on the real-life experiences of the author. We can say that an autobiography is a ‘revised and corrected version’ of the writer’s life. Therefore, an autobiography
“Can not be a pure and simple record of existence, an account book or a log book; on such and such a day at such and such an hour, I went to such and such a place… A record of this kind, no matter how minutely exact would be no more than a caricature of life: in such a case, rigorous precision would add up to the same thing as the subtlest deception”.14

For an autobiographer the factual truth is subordinated to the imaginative truth. More than being a mere historical record it is work of art. The literary value of an autobiography is far more important than its historical or objective function. For instance, Amrita Pritam narrates her dream relationships in more realistic way. Her imagery is more powerful than her realistic pictures.
NEUTRALITY:

“An autobiography is by its nature an exercise in egoism but unless the author can reduce his ego to a little ‘i’ the reader will not find him tolerable.”  

Autobiography is far more different from other literary genres in its narrative technique. Here the author himself is writing his own story. Hence, the author has to maintain a kind of balance between his own self-praise and narration of other persons, events and places. There is every chance for an autobiographer to sound egoistic. Obviously, all the activities of man are centred around his ‘I’ but an autobiographer has to express himself through little ‘i’. He/She should be very neutral about the positive as well as negative side of his temperament. An autobiographer is a judge who has to give judgement for his own case. He is an actor and the spectator himself. Hence, he has to be very judicial.

While writing an autobiography, the writer has to dissolve his ego in the narration of other individuals and places. The great critic Erick Link later remarks in his autobiography The man on My Back, that his aim is

“….to reduce my ego to a little ‘i’ with whom I could live and never notice it.”

SELF INTROSPECTION:

The Taittirya Upanishad (600-500 B.C.), the Manduka Upanishad (500-400 B.C.) and the Mahabharata’ (1 A.D.) have glorified man and the self. Man has been considered as the highest creature in the chain of living beings on the earth”

“Guhyam brahma taddam vobrivimi na manusat sreshthataram hi kincit”.
That is to say, “I tell you this, the secret of the Brahman: there is nothing higher than man”. The Upanishads persuade man to know his true self, “know thy-self” (Atanabam Vidhi) and the Socratic ideal ‘know thy self” also becomes the ideal of the Indian philosophy. Most of the religions of the world support the concept that God dwells in man. Hence, the moral duty of a man is to realize his own self. An autobiography is not only a record of several personal events and character-sketches. An autobiographer is bound to reveal his/her spiritual and mental struggles. He has to draw a chart of his journey from a man to spiritual self.

Mahatma Gandhiji’s autobiography candidly analyses Gandhiji as a man, leader and seeker of truth. It is a vital record of his self-search and self knowledge. Here we come across a naïve boy who smokes cigarettes and the same boy gifting us the concepts of self-control and addiction-eradication. Thus, Gandhiji’s autobiography is a nice self – introspective piece.

**Contemporaneousness:**

The autobiographical form requires dedication to internal as well as external events. Robert F. Sayre supports this view point and remarks:

“Autobiography is an examination of the self as both a sovereign integrity and a member of society. In fact, the self is at all times both these things and autobiography is an endless stream of demonstrations of their inseparability.”

The autobiographical form concerns the self and not the external forces of the world. However the external world is taken into account as the self hood is shaped and moulded by these external forces. Autobiography is also a work of art influenced by the writer’s race, milieu and the moment. While narrating the progress of the self the author also relates his experiences with the progress of his national and
contemporary times. The western style of an individualistic and assertive personality is out of place in Indian context. Community life helps in the establishments of the individual’s self identity. Analyzing Gandhi’s ‘My Experiments with Truth’ Naipaul says that, to Indians,

“The outer world matters only in so far as it affects the inner. It is the Indian way of experiencing; what is true of Gandhi’s autobiography is true of many other Indian autobiographers, though the self-absorption is more sterile” 18

Though written ironically, Naipaul’s views echo that Indian autobiographies are much more influenced by the contemporary social, religious, political and even economic conditions of a nation. Most of the women autobiographies also depict the contemporary socio-religious or socio-political conditions of the nation. Nayan Tara Sahgal’s autobiographies ‘From Fear set Free’ and Prison and Chocolate Cake also focus more on the freedom movements of India and the role of her parents in them.

**Conflict:**

Conflict is the soul of any literary form and it gets proper expression through autobiography. There is a vast difference between conflict expressed in fictitious literature and the one which is expressed in autobiography. In fictitious prose the person experiencing conflict is placed in the imaginative world of action. In autobiography, the author himself is at the centre of the conflict. All the mental, physical, moral, religious, spiritual and social conflicts of the author get expression in autobiography. Autobiographer himself is the actor as well as the spectator.

As an autobiography is a life-story, author’s mental conflict obviously gets expression through it. However, while writing
autobiography also the writer experiences conflict related to expression. The very thought of writing autobiography creates conflict in the author’s mind. Autobiography arises out of conflict.

Nehru has written his autobiography in order to pass his tedious leisure in Jail. He has reflected his views on his visit to Russia in the present work. He wanted to think over the future direction for India. Moreover, he was disturbed by the question: “What next?” He had to maintain a balance in that situation. He has depicted his dreams about India through this work. Thus, autobiography also expresses the dreams and desires of its author. Moreover, Amrita Pritam’s autobiography is a candid record of the writer’s conflict between social norms and individual thinking. For Amrita Pritam life has two fostering factors: 1) Pen and 2) Love. ‘The Quest for love’ is her individual necessity. In order to search true love she had to suffer a lot. However, she candidly narrates her conjugal conflict, urge for true love, love failure in Saheer’s case and at last self-contentment in Imroz’s love. Thus, Pritam’s autobiography is in the real sense a revenue stamp on all her relationships and her inner feelings.

**Memory:**

The autobiographical form concerns the self and not the external forces of the world. However, the outer world is taken into account as the self-hood is shaped by these external forces. The autobiographical process takes place with the help of the autobiographical memory. Recollection of the past is dependent upon a creative memory, “that apes and reshapes the historic past as in the image of the present, making the past as necessary to this present as this present is the inevitable outcome of that past”. 19
An autobiographer enters the cave of past with the search light of memory. In order to write an autobiography the author must have a powerful memory. Through his powerful memory an autobiographer may dive deeper into his farther past and recollect his fragile emotions. Through his memory the autobiographer recollects the memories related to particular time and place and relives the tender moments of the past.

The autobiographer whose memory is very powerful in recollecting childhood moments can portray most of the events of life very remarkably. Tolstoy is one of such writers. He recollects the wooden bath tub and its smell in which he used to bathe as a child. He is able to recollect the nurse, her novel impression. He feels the heat of the bath-water, his play with it and even the tender touch of the tub at his bottom. Thus, memory plays an important role in exposing the moments hidden in our subconscious. Memory often recollects something shocking. Prabakar Machvey has rightly said:

“Memory is a convenient sieve. It retains only the poignant precious and painful”

The above sentence is quite a debatable one. Memory can capture ‘poignant’ and ‘painful’ but can it capture ‘precious’? Whether memory can judge, what is precious for the person? ‘Precious’ can be understood only by reasoning, whereas ‘poignant’ and ‘painful’ can be caught by heart.

Memory cannot be retained in its original form. It is a mingling of many foregone events. Many a times memory comes in much transformed form of a wish or a thought. Therefore, memory depicts not what was but what ought to be. Thus, memory diffuses and dissipates in order to recreate. Memory not only depicts whatever is useful to the autobiographer. Along with time, character, emotions and facts lose their
significance. Along with time several characters and events grow larger than life and others even become smaller than life.

**Truth:**

“Truth is the hero of my tale” the above slogan given by Tolstoy must be the motto of an autobiographer. Autobiography is not a fictitious story. It is a real life-history of a writer. Hence, truth is the spinal chord of the autobiography. Autobiography is an expression of truthful experience.

Truth in itself is knowledge. Truth is God. Gandhiji has confessed in his autobiography that in order to search the truth he would like to abolish his own self. Let truth alone prevail! Absolute truth is beyond time. Often an artist tries to attain the absolute truth through his diction. However, truth expressed by an autobiographer is an ornamented truth. Main objective of the autobiographer is to realize and to recreate the self. Hence, the factual record of time and place seldom expresses the truth of the writer’s self. The depiction of truth is very difficult in autobiography.

The autobiographical process is not the mere depiction of the author’s personality, but rather a recreation of his personality. The autobiographical act is a reconstruction of the writer’s self and is viewed from a distance in life. The recomposition of life is termed as ‘a second reading’ by Georges Gusdorf, which he claims to be truer than the first. It is a search of self through his/her history. However the autobiographer emphasizes the past ‘I’ to be different from the present ‘I’. Hence, autobiography, as a literary art ought to present imaginative or created truth rather than the original truth about the author. Here the self is constantly being remade. Cassell’s has rightly observed:

“There is a different sort of truth in autobiography, not primarily historical or even psychological, but existential, the part discovery, part assertion of a spiritual personality of a pattern in a life, of self-fulfilment”. 21
Expression based features:

**Candid/confessional tone**

An autobiographer is always assumed to be candid by nature. However, autobiographer may not express cent percent truth by his/her candid nature. For instance Gandhiji’s autobiography creates an impression that Gandhiji was an average student as a child. However his documents and progress cards suggest that he was a scholar. Hence, one can’t say that Gandhiji has not portrayed his childhood candidly. Here Gandhiji has expressed his impression about his childhood very candidly.

An autobiographer should be confessional and candid but he should be at first modest. Honesty in expression does not imply immodesty. Self-restraint is also necessary while expressing the truth about himself. Gandhiji has also expressed his basic instincts and carnal desires through his autobiography but he has maintained a perfect balance in the narration. His depiction does not cross the limits of decency. On the other hand, Gandhiji has confessed frankly his explorations with the whores and his attempts to steal the golden bangle and smoking the ‘beedis’. Thus, he is very truthful and confessional in tone.

On the other hand, Kamala Das has not maintained any standards of decency in expressing her basic instincts. Her so called candidness is not candidness in the real sense of the term. She wants to spell bound the society by depicting sensational stories of her physical instincts. On the other hand, Amrita Pritam expresses her extra marital relations and her quest for true love in a very candid yet decent manner. An autobiographer has to maintain a balance between under writing and over writing.

**Inconclusiveness:**

The incompleteness of time and order is a peculiar characteristic of an autobiography. It is an elaborate form of essay. Hence it is never
complete. Even after the creation of autobiography the river of life keeps flowing. Life never ends. Autobiography is an account of life, which begins with the beginning of the memory and ends with the creation of autobiography. Hence, we have writers who have written more than one volumes of their autobiographies like Amrita Pritam’s *Revenue Stamp & Shadow of Words*. Dom Moraes’ *Never at Home* and *My son’s father*. Nayan Tara Sahgal’s *Prison and Chocolate Cake* and *From Fear set Free*.

An autobiography can never be complete. It can never have a conclusion like other literary genres/ R.K. Narayan asks in his autobiography, *My Days*, “How can any autobiography have a final chapter?” As long as the biological life of the writer continues, the autobiographical process remains incomplete. Thus, autobiography is that literary genre which maintains a sense of curiosity even if it reaches to its conclusion. It has the conclusion which is never concluded. Marlene Fisher remarks:

“Since no autobiography can be finished ‘the life or the progress through life that any such text purports to represent can only be one that is in the making and therefore a fragment of a life”.*

Thus, autobiography is unfinished and inconclusive literary genre.

**Style:**

“Style is the Man” (Francis Bacon)

Style is that aspect of writing which gives artistic touch to autobiography. Literature is an art of diction. In this genre of literature the artist expresses himself in the most meaningful terms. Generally, autobiography is considered as a history of life. This history of life is turned into art of life by the impressive style of the author. For instance, Amrita Pritam through her artistic style presents a picture of a blue-eyed
child emerging from a Rose plant. Style is the key of the autobiographer’s mind and heart.

Auto biographer’s style depends upon his mood and mode of narration. The autobiographer may employ narrative, dramatic, descriptive or story-telling method for the expression of his/her innermost feelings. The more intense the feeling the more impressive the expression. The language of autobiography should be simple, lucid and clear. It must have dignity of utterance. However it should not be too much ornamented. The language should cultivate an intimate rapport with the readers.

**Reconstruction of Life:**

An autobiography is a recreation of life through recollection. It is a reconstruction of life in its entirety. An autobiographer is in search for himself through the history. The autobiographical process is not the mere depiction of the author’s personality, but rather a recreation of his personality.

During the Romantic period, the autobiographical form was transformed from an objective memoir to a personal subjective remembrance, the attempt to connect by retrospective reflection, disparate and discontinuous experiences and states of mind into a self conceived almost solely in terms of a maturing consciousness rather an embodiment.²³

Thus, the autobiographical act is a re constitution of the writer’s self and is viewed from a distance in life. The reinterpretation of life helps the autobiographer to get a clear cut perspective of himself. The re- composition of life is termed as ‘a second reading’ by Georges Gusdorf. This second reading has been considered by him as truer than the first. It is like having an aerial view of a fortification or a city, revealing the
important lines which the viewer had failed to notice formerly in himself. It gives him a clearer view of himself.

The great critic Paul De Mann often uses the metaphor of ‘murder’ for biography and suicide for autobiography. That is to say, while reading an autobiography we only read ‘a life’. We read a book. However the literary genre, the autobiography does not exhibit “The Death of an Author”, the ‘I’ of the autobiography determines the ‘bios’ or the life. It is however, the third element the ‘graphe’ or the act of writing which is of real importance.

The autobiographical writing helps the autobiographer in establishing his true identity and helps him to present an accurate picture of himself.

**Factual Selection:**

As the autobiographer has to express meaningful vision, he has to make his record factual. ‘Fact’ is the base of autobiography. The autobiographer has to select facts from the infinite complexities of life. He has to be quick enough to present those facts of life which might have influenced his personality. The autobiographer has to abandon his likings for the presentation of the facts which he adores. The autobiographer has to take the “advantage of art’s shaping powers in the effort to transmute the incoherence of a life into the regularities of a story.” 24

Thus, autobiographical writing involves the process of selection, rejection, proper distribution of facts, and emphasis on certain aspects of life. Thus, the autobiographer has to depict those facts only which are helpful in the evolution of his self.
Magnitude:

Our life is full of innumerable inconsistent events. When the autobiographer reconstructs life, he has to do so in its whole. This whole must have a certain kind of magnitude. When the autobiographer relives his past, the inconsistent, disorderly events are reshaped. His narration depends upon memory, but he has to rebuild his memory in such a way that all the events of his life appear symmetrical and orderly.

The self defines itself from minute to minute amid the confusion of the external reality and as a security against the hurl-burly, which exists in the outside world. A work of art is a representation from the inner realm into its embodiment as an external form. It then achieves consciousness of itself: Autobiography constantly returns to the elusive centre of the self which lies in the unconscious. The self is forever in the process of making itself. It never takes a complete shape but whichever shape it gets must appear logical and unified.

Interrelation between the past and the present:

Autobiography is a reconstruction of the past. The autobiographical act is a kind of a link between the present and the past of the writer. Georges Gusdorf thinks that ‘integral resurrection of the past’ can seem meaningless due to its complete relation to the present. The autobiographer is faced with a complex situation in revisiting his past. Gone is child, the young man and the mature man of yesterday. The man of today knows the end of his story. The writer has to overcome the time gap between the life lived in the past and its depiction in writing. It is imperative for the writer of an autobiography to seek the genesis of the present condition. Autobiography is not merely a recapitulation of the past but also an attempt by the autobiographer to reconstruct himself in connection to the present.
“Confession of the past realizes itself as a work in the present: it effects as true creation of self by the self.” 25

Memory and the present reality bear a reciprocal relationship: the now, shaping the memory, just as the present moment, the now, is shaped by the memory. While trying to remember the past in the present, the autobiographer imagines himself to be another person and lives in another world of existence.

“It is an interesting fact to note that the autobiographer emphasizes the past ‘I’ to be different from the present ‘I’. The narrator describes not only what happened to him in past but also how he became out of what he was what he presently is. Thus, the autobiographer bridges the gulf between the past and the present of the writer. Roy Pascal has rightly said:

“Autobiography is then interplay, collusion between past and present; its significance is indeed more the revelation of the present situation than the uncovering of the past”. 26

Historical Consistency:

In Autobiography the past and the present are interrelated. Hence, the autobiography begins in the end and ends in the beginning. Roy Pascal Says:

“If I have so stressed the fact that the beginning is in the end, it is necessary to stress also the corollary that the end is in the beginning”. 27

Thus, we find a special kind of consistency between the beginning and end of autobiography. This is historical consistency. An autobiographer has to present a consistent graph of his life right from his childhood to the present times.

For an autobiography, historical consistency implies as Georges Gusdorf calls, “a document about a life”. The autobiographer does not try
to repeat the scene but gives it a new perspective. It is an enactment of the
drama of the life of a man who tries to reassemble himself at a certain
time in history.

**Self discovery/Quest:**

The ultimate aim of education in man’s life is the realization of the true inwardness. The self of man is very important and if individuality is gone the humans will become ‘bankrupt’. The true self has been called the ‘Brahman’, the Atman being the supreme self. Autobiography unravels the dark recesses of our being. It helps us to discover the intuitive non-mediated experience of the self. Prof. M Hiriyanna explains the two terms, ‘Brahman’ and ‘Atman’, the first is ‘prayer’ and the primary cause of the universe. While the ‘Atman’, he says is ‘the inner self’ of man”. Autobiography helps us to realize this inner self, distinct from the physicality of man. The exceptionality in man was emphasized by Tagore in Sadhana:

“I am absolutely unique, I am I, I am incomparable. The whole weight of the universe cannot crush out this individuality of mine. I maintain it in spite of the tremendous gravitation of all things”.

The world never ends, it is always old and always new. And the self has to know that it is born new every moment of its life. One has to always ask, “Who am I?” Nothing could be closer, more personal than a person’s ‘I’. The autobiographer has to ponder over this question and establish his identity. He has to answer the question, “How did I become what I am today?” Thus, self is like a lamp when it illuminates and holds the light high, it reveals itself.

Thus, all the above characteristics of the autobiography have been tabulated from the studies of different autobiographies until now. Scholars of autobiographies may include or discard some of them in
future. They are flexible to changes. However they are a valuable aid in understanding the structure, design and pattern of autobiography.

- **Who can write an autobiography:**

Each human being wants to express his/her innermost feelings. Autobiography is the literary genre which provides vent to the innermost feelings. Autobiography expresses very private emotions and passions of a person. The great critic Chopin has rightly said:

“There is no joy in the world like the expression of oneself, of one’s ego, in whatever medium you choose”. 29

A man never wishes that the fruit of his long-cherished dreams dwindle away all the way. He wishes to become immortal anyhow. Autobiography is the evidence of man’s efforts and deeds in life. Autobiographies of great figures like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Abdul Kalam and many more have been proved as literary assets. Society has learnt an art of living from the lives of such great figures.

The main aim of autobiography is to introduce ourselves to the self of the writer. It does not aim to delight. Hence, one question arises at the outset that “Is an introduction necessary to any layman?” Is each man’s life story liable to expression? Autobiography of Gandhiji or Tolstoy may be of great value to the society but how much helpful can be the life-story of a thief or a rogue? What is the purpose hidden behind the common man’s life?

Dr. Shanti Khanna has presented the solution to this problem in his thesis. He says:

“An autobiographer can be literary, political or religious or any kind of figure but it is essential that he should be well-known and renowned figure of the society”. 30

Another Gujarati author Kaka Kalelkar’s opinion differs a lot from Dr. Khanna’s views. Kaka Kalelkar opines that, it is not necessary that an
autobiographer must be an elite figure. Any common man can write autobiography. The most important aspect of an autobiography is the individuality of the experience and expression.

A person passes through a variety of enterprises in life. This enterprising life should be life-enhancing and touched with emotions. Many a times a person may search invaluable emotions from the trivialities of life. Mundane realities do have a classic fervour. For instance, Amrita Pritam relishes the taste of life out of smoking the cigarette butt-ends smoked by the lover Saheer.

Thus, the individuality of experience and expression goes for the success of an autobiography. Hence, it has been rightly said: To have led an interesting life is a definite advantage but to be interested in life is real essential”.

The preface of an autobiography focuses on the proposed objectives of the autobiographer. These objectives may differ from person to person.

It happens that an incessantly flowing river of life suddenly changes it course because of a sudden event. Suddenly a thief turns into a saint. Thus, motivated by a sudden change in life a person ought to write an autobiography.

When a person achieves extraordinary success in life, his ambitions are satisfied to a great extent. He would like to share his innermost feelings with the public at this juncture. Hence, he expresses these feelings through autobiography.

All are not fortunate enough to be successful in life. One has to be contented with failures also. However, people like to make others precocious about the future problems. Through his autobiography a person shares his successes and failures with others and helps others in problem solving.
Sometimes a person’s life is not justified by his own kinsman and society. In such a case a person may demand justification of his life through his autobiography. Thus, self justification may be considered as one of the objectives behind an autobiography.

Many a times a person is leading his life aimlessly. A sudden sickness or a long illness may lead a person to travel in his/her past. This nostalgic mood may tempt the person to write an autobiography. The person who has passed his dawn and noon of the life and entered into the twilight (middle age) may write an autobiography steeped in the memory of his past.

The same events of the same period may be described by different individuals in a variety of ways. This is because of the special motives of the author. Taking into consideration this special motive, the writer may write his autobiography. A person may have a special vision of looking particular incidents of his life in a special way. We get special delight in reading such special autobiographies having special insight.

Thus, all the above objectives of autobiographies do not imply that only a celebrity can write an autobiography. A novel can be written on a king or a beggar. Similarly an autobiography can be written by a celebrity as well as by a common man. The only condition is that he/she must have a proper command over diction and its expression. Carlyle has rightly said:

“A Well-written life is almost as rare as a well-spent one”.

1.6 Other Related Forms:

Biography:

Biography has been defined by *Oxford English dictionary* as under: “The history of the lives of individual men as a branch of literature”.
Thus, biography is a relatively full account of the facts of a man’s life which attempts to set forth his character, temperament and milieu, as well as his experiences and activities. In seventeenth century John Dryden defined biography as “the history of particular men’s lives”.

English biography proper appeared in the seventeenth century. Isaac Walton’s *Lives* (of John Donne, George Herbert, Richard Hooker and others), was written between 1640 and 1678.

In the eighteenth century the theory and practice of biography as a special literary art was greatly advanced. The same century gifted us with Dr. Johnson’s monumental *Lives of the English Poets* (1779-81) and James Boswell’s *Life of Samuel Johnson* (1791).

Today also, biography has become one of the most popular of literary forms.

The only difference between autobiography and biography is that autobiography is the life-story written by the person himself whereas biography is the life-story of a person written by another person. Thus, biography is that form of literature in which a person’s life is viewed and judged by another person. In autobiography a person’s life is judged and viewed by himself. Thus, autobiographer has to depend upon his memory to depict his experiences of life. The biographer has to collect the material from outside to depict the experiences of another person. The great critic Longfellow has rightly said: “Autobiography is a product of first hand experience, biography of second-hand knowledge”\(^{34}\).

Thus, in biography the central character is at the mercy of the biographer. There should be plausibility in the depiction of the biographer. The hierarchy to which Rousseau calls ‘chain of feelings’ is related to the person himself. It is established by memory only. The biographer surpasses memory and keeps a check on memory and depicts the improved version of memory and events. A biographer may portray a
person as per his affinities and likings. If a biographer has a fidelity to the facts then he may depict truthful account of a person. Otherwise he may depict an altogether different picture of a person. For instance, writers/journalists of 1960’s and 1970’s have presented us with crunchy life-stories of Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi. If we gather together all these life sketches then we may get quite integrated images of Nehru and Mrs. Gandhi. In autobiography the author has not to depend upon the account of others. He is autonomous enough to portray his/her feelings. The more truthful he is, the more authentic his autobiography is. Thus, we can say that biography and autobiography resemble much with one another. So far as basic characteristics are concerned. However, they differ a lot so far as their intrinsic structures are concerned.

**Memoirs and Reminiscences:-**

A literary genre which expresses individual experiences based on memory can be called a memoir. Here the author expresses his thoughts related to a particular person or event or a place or of time-span.

Autobiography also expresses a person’s memories related to persons, incidents, places or time-span. Hence, autobiography can be called a memoir. Formerly autobiography was considered as a memoir only. In 1809 Sir Robert Southey termed the word ‘autobiography’ for a memoir. Hence, it is very difficult to draw a boundary line between autobiography and a memoir. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* has remarkably distinguished the two forms as under:

“These (Memoirs) are autobiographies that usually emphasize what is remembered rather than who is remembering; the author instead of recounting his life, deals with those experiences of his life, people and events that he considers most significant”.
Thus, memoirs depend much on recounting those events, places and persons which are important for the person himself. In autobiography the person who remembers is important. In memoirs the process of recollection is important. Autobiographical work ought to be devoid of prejudices and partiality. Memoirs ought not to be so. An autobiographer is expected to be impersonal and objective in self portrayal. Memoirist may sound more personal and subjective.

An autobiography is the story of the self. Memoir is the story of the memory. One celebrates the self, other memory. Autobiography uses memory as a tool to recreate the self. In a memoir memory itself is an end.

Autobiography and memoir both depict external incidents of life. However, memoir is more associated with the objective world. Autobiography is a recreation of the self through the interactions of the self with the external world. Hence, external life serves as a background to the self-depiction in autobiography. Autobiography is introvert and self-introspective. Hence, it depicts a new ‘self’ through the search of the ‘self’. Memoir is also related to the life-story of the self. However, discovery of a new ‘self’ is not expected in it. It aims at the depiction of persons, incidents, time and circumstances. Political memoirs become more interesting because of its deep connection with the contemporary times.

A person who is an onlooker of life and has absorbed life in all its colours may promote a greater interest to his memoirs. The great critic J. T. Shipley has rightly distinguished memoir from autobiography in the following manner:

“Autobiography and memoirs though the terms are often used as if interchangeable are properly distinguished by the relative emphasis placed on character and on external events. Memoirs customarily give
some prominence to personalities and actions other than the writer’s own; some are hardly more than accounts of historical occurrences …”.  

In English literature there are two classes of memoir:
1. Memoir
2. Reminiscence.

Roy Pascal has distinguished these two forms as under:

“One could distinguish memoir from reminiscence by saying that memoir concerns itself with public events, reminiscence with private relationships. The difference is primarily one of the content and does not affect the manner of composition or writing”.  

The great poet Laureate Ravindranath Tagore gifted us with his ‘Reminiscences’ of life. It is a marvellous record of his literary muse and aspirations.

**Diary:**

In its preliminary stages diary was considered a literary genre created not for publication. Diary implies a day-to-day record of a person’s mundane realities.

Diary provides raw material for autobiography. Encyclopaedia has defined diary as under:

“The book in which are preserved the daily memorandums regarding events and actions which come under the writer’s personal observation or are related to him by others”.

Further more ‘Modern reference Encyclopaedia defines diary as:

“A day by day chronicle of events usually of a personal and intimate nature kept by an individual”.

All these definitions imply that a diarist keeps a record of his day to day experiences of life. He also records whichever information he gets
from others. Whether important or trivial, these incidents definitely exhibit the intensity of their effectiveness upon the writer.

It is not necessary that a diarist records his feelings regularly. He may put down his account on page after a day or two. Sometimes he may consume the time-span of a week or two. Thus, a diary may be written with irregular regularity. Nevertheless whatever he writes exhibits the impact of various incidents of life on his mind.

Sometimes a diary may be written in the form of quotations. Sometimes it is written with a precision of report. Occasionally it is written so elaborately as if the writer wants to present the history of each breath of his life. Diary acts as a search light for the person. It is not only a record of person’s past and present but also a map for his/her future plans. Gandhiji considered diary as an instrument of self purification.

Diary serves a proper purpose of catharsis and acts as a true friend of a person. One can pour down one’s innermost feelings in one’s diary. Diaries portray the reality of the authors. ‘Diary of a young girl’ is an example of a diary in which an adolescent girl Anne feels lonely and friendless. She considers diary-writing as an act of friendly communion. This diary is a live record of a girl entering adolescence with all her physical and mental changes. How a girl is transformed from a small blossom to a fully grown flower – has been marvellously depicted.

Autobiography is written by an onlooker of life, therefore, it depicts some special moments of life. Diary is a hierarchy of moments. Both the literary forms resemble as both depict the history of self.

Autobiography is written at a neutral stage whereas diary is a form written along with time. Diary is a spontaneous picture of the person’s response to an instant of time. Autobiography loses this spontaneity as it is written at a particular stage of time.
A diary may be proved an invaluable aid in its discourse with the self. It is a complementary and obligatory form to autobiography. Having achieved the result, autobiography depicts the procedure. While depicting the procedure diary reaches to the result. Autobiography is a retrospective report whereas a diarist often misses the chance of introspection.

**Journal**

Journal resembles much with diary. Journal lacks the emotional touch and insight of the diary. Diary appears more intimate and private. In diary the writer maintains a discourse with the self. Journal appears precise and objective. ‘Modern reference Encyclopaedia’ considers journal as another form of diary and defines it as under:

“A journal is a form of diary but tends to be more detached, more detailed and more reflective”. 40

It is very difficult to distinguish a Journal from diary. Journal expresses various incidents of life but a journal writer also judges those incidents in the light of other experiences. Journal reflects the thoughts of the writer but does not reflect the realistic background of those thoughts. Hence we do not get the idea about the reality of the writer. Diary exhibits the reality of the writer. The diary written by the great poet Rabindranth Tagore in which he has depicted his China-Japan tour is written more in the form of a ‘journal’ rather than diary. It does not narrate his day to day life. It reflects more the thought process of the writer during that journey. Journal is more neutral and objective in its depiction.

J. T. Shipley has remarkably distinguished the ‘journal’ from ‘diary’ in following words:
“The two terms identical in derivation and in primary meaning have acquired a slight differentiation, ‘journal’ being used for a more detached or reflective record than diary”. 41

Autobiography portrays the mental state of the writer along with his materialistic life. Hence, autobiography is also related with a journal. As an autobiography is different from diary so it is different from journal. Autobiography depicts chronological record of the writer’s mental state, whereas journal does not give a chronological record. It has spontaneity of record.

Journal depicts regular development of the thought process of the writer. In autobiography incidents are important. In journal thoughts are important. Journal is more related to the mental thought process of the writer. Autobiography is more concerned with external realities as well as mental states of the writer.

Current Trends in autobiographical writings:-

It has been rightly said: “Necessity is the mother of invention”. Due to vast exposure to computers and availability of internet, people started periodic web logging from which gradually the word ‘blog’ has been derived. The term ‘blog’ was coined in the late 1990s from the word web logging. People kept blogs long before the term was coined, but the trend gained popularity with the introduction of automated publishing services. ‘Blog’ helps us to reach the globe. It provides us with a wide range of information in a very compact form. It keeps us updated.

A blog is type of website maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, description of events or other such material as graphic or video. There are various types of blogs like personalblog, artlog, photoblog, sketchblog, vlog, mp3blog, podcast, etc.
Personal blogs can be rightly called the innovative step in the area of life narratives. It is an ongoing diary or commentary by an individual. The form of a blog is dependent on the individual who keeps it. They depict what is happening in a person’s life and what they feel about the world around. Thus, blogs are a kind of hybrid diary and guide.

Blogs often become more than a way to just communicate. They also have a sentimental quality. Personal blog is also referred to as ‘microblogging’ which is extremely detailed blogging as it seeks to capture a moment in time. Sites such as Twitter, helps bloggers to share thoughts and feelings instantaneously with family and friends. This form of social media is a click away for the tech savvy new generation to maintain a human touch and step beyond their humdrum lives.

Apart from the above literary forms notebook, letter, travelogues, personal essays and even autobiographical novels resemble much with autobiography. However an autobiography as a literary form occupies a distinct place in the realm of literature. It is a kind of linking chain between literature of knowledge and literature of power. It is not only a historical record of a person’s life but an artistic incarnation of life story.
References:

27. Ibid, P. 11.