CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION
The study of autobiographies written by Indians who served in the Civil Service helps one in solving certain vexed problems regarding autobiography as a literary genre and it also points out to an entirely new way of appreciating an autobiography.

Though autobiography has been accepted as a piece of literature, its legitimate province in the field of literature has always been a question of doubt with literary critics, historians and theoreticians. As G.M. Trevelyan points out, "both for student and for the general reader, it is impossible to draw a clear dividing line on one side of which all is history while on the other side all is literature." The main difficulty in including biography and autobiography as legitimate literature is the emphasis laid on the factual nature of the subject-matter of these two forms of literature. If literature is to be defined purely as an imaginative rendering of fictitious subject-matter, then biography and autobiography do not find a place in the province of literature. The pride of place goes to poetry, drama and novel and only a border-line provision can be made to the so-called factual documents like history, biography and autobiography.
As a result, these forms of literature are considered the most useful and inevitable fields of information for historical research or sociological research. The facts supplied by a biographer or an autobiographer are used as pieces of evidence in historical or sociological research.

The present study tries to break a new ground by attempting to study a group of autobiographies not for validating their factual content but to study them as literary discourses closely allied to the historical novel. Such a possibility becomes feasible especially with a collection of autobiographies by Indian Civil Servants.

The Indian Civil Service has had a chequered history. It was one of the unique institutions introduced to India by the British. It is called the Steel Frame of India because of the rigid discipline and code of conduct and its strict service conditions. Before the start of the I.C.S., administration in India was carried out by the British Assistants. The service was known for its many distinguished features. It was an independent and an all-India service. They held a variety of posts. "It required that key posts were reserved in central government for the I.C.S. men...." It attracted the best men because of its pay and other service conditions. "The I.C.S. offered security of job and an opportunity to serve the country at the grass-roots level."
The Indians who entered the service were the products of English-medium educational institutions and sons of educated parents. They received further education in British Universities and underwent training during their probation period in England. When they got posted to India, the real training was given to them by the District Magistrates and they were properly shaped by them. "Shaping began immediately on arrival in India." While in service no equality existed between the British and the Indian I.C.S. men. There was "'a complete social separation of the Indian and the British Officers in the Civil Service'". Further, they were suspected both by the British and the nationalists. From the beginning, they suffered from this dilemma because they had to be loyal to the British and at the same time had sympathy for the nationalist movement. Key posts were denied to Indians. During the struggle for independence, the Indian National Congress opposed both the Raj and the I.C.S. But when they came to power, they realised the importance of the service and retained it. After independence, Indian I.C.S. men rendered their service wholeheartedly without any divided loyalty. Enjoying full political and national confidence and support, they played a vital role in the making of modern India. Under the guidance and direction of national leaders, these civil servants tackled many problems like the refugee problem and their rehabilitation, integration of princely states, communal clashes, and the
issue of citizenship to Indians abroad. They were also closely associated with the drafting of Indian constitution and in resolving disputes between the Central and State governments in a spirit of give and take. The improvement of the tribals drew much attention and they did much to their progress. Academic pursuit was their unquenchable thirst, and as Vice-Chancellors of universities, they rendered memorable service to the cause of higher education. For improvement of irrigation and agriculture they left no stone unturned. In formulating the foreign policy of India, they played their part well. "Nehru was the architect of India's foreign policy. The officials were but artisans. Yet in working under him, we felt that we were more than artisans". As India's representatives in various countries abroad, they did their best to improve the relations of India with those countries and tried to project the image of India.

Though it is incontrovertible that every one of these autobiographies deals with actual experiences undergone by some single individual, while reading them as a collection, one can easily submerge the individual personalities and the individual's experiences in the collective personality and the collective experiences of the improvised hero 'The Indian I.C.S.'. In other words, at one level A.S.P. Ayyar's autobiography is a factual document dealing with unique
experiences. At another level, A.S.P. Avvants autobiography is just a chapter in the fascinating story of the I.C.S as an institution and the Indian Civil Servant as the typical hero who manned this institution. What the study suggests is the possibility of considering autobiographies a kind of fiction, though the characters involved and the experiences they had undergone are real.

When we study these autobiographies as a kind of fiction, it helps us understand the time-spirit of an age that is dead and gone and the image of an institution which has become a thing of the past. That is to say, a collection of autobiographies as the present one, dealing with a common institution, a common ethos and a common code of conduct and role-playing etc., loses its factual intensity and reads like historical fiction. This is not to deny the factual side of these autobiographies. This is only to point out how an autobiography, however valid its factual content may be, becomes as interesting as a fictional document during the efflux of time. If a historian of France is interested in Rousseau's Confessions as a historical document, a student of literature or psychology may approach it quite validly, but for a different purpose.

It must also be noted that every one of these autobiographies is consciously literary. Each one of these
authors because of their exposure to English language and literature uses consciously several literary techniques in order to make these books as enjoyable as a fiction or a piece of literature. It is said of Macaulay that he wanted to write the history of England in such a way that the latest novel on the reading tables of ladies would be replaced by his history. Macaulay says, "The materials for an amusing narrative are immense. I shall not be satisfied unless I produce something which shall for a few days supersede the last fashionable novel on the tables of young ladies." There are ways of writing a history, a biography or an autobiography. One way is to make it a dry-as-dust study of mere presentation of facts. Another way is to consciously embellish these facts with literary flavour, pack them with flesh and blood using anecdotes, similes, episodes, conversations and making the whole eminently readable. This element of conscious literariness validates an approach to an autobiography as a piece of fiction without caring much for its truth-value.

This particular collection of autobiographies has a common theme and a common hero. The theme is the services rendered by the I.C.S. as an institution in the development and progress of India both prior to and after the Independence. A corollary of this theme is self-justification by a group of officials who were forced to
serve under the British during the pre-Independence period and also under the Indian leaders during the post-Independence period due to historical circumstances. The second corollary is the constructive part played by these officials in the making of modern India and in solving her myriad problems and guiding her both in the national and international affairs, thereby vindicating their love for their motherland.

The hero of this inspiring drama is the Indian Civil Servant, a composite personality derived from a study of the individual personalities of all these officers. He is a more-than-average and very often precocious child, born in a middle- or an upper-middle-class educated professional family who rises in the world in status and position through intelligence, hard work, discipline and an iron code of conduct, who will uphold the institution even at the risk of his personal private life.

He is not only extraordinarily brilliant in his academic career but also good in sports and games and extra-curricular activities. He is an excellent athlete and a talented speaker. Endowed with a sense of humour, he is not a mere cut and dry bureaucrat. He is a man of artistic feelings patronising and practising fine arts such as dancing, music and literature. He tours extensively both at home and
abroad and blossoms into a man of the world, a true cosmopolitan in his views and attitude to life. His love for his mother-land is intense and real. He sympathises with the national movement and worships national leaders like Gandhi, Nehru and Patel. The British Government is well aware of his nationalist feelings and anti-Imperialist stand. But while executing his duty as a Civil Servant under the British Raj, he never wavers. He never allows his private feelings to conflict with his public office. During the Second World War he has made every effort to help the British Government by collecting war funds from the public and appealing to the able-bodied men to join the British army. Badr-ud-Din Tyabji says: "I was wholly in favour of India playing as prominent a part as possible in winning the war. I whole-heartedly began canvassing support for the war effort both in the matter of recruitment and collection of war funds". He indirectly tries to help the national movement as much as he can without violating the rules of the service. "It was not unusual during the period of national ferment from 1930 to 1947 for the political leaders to be in close touch with some senior Indian civil servants who, within the limits of the discipline of the service did their best to further the national cause". He is not afraid of physical sufferings and tribulations. He displays courage and guts both in personal and professional life. "A huge man V.K.B. Pillai (I.C.S.) was a hero to the
Indians because at the European club he hit a police officer who was rude to Indian officer's wife. In proof of his personal courage, S.K. Chettur narrates an interesting episode of how he disciplined a rowdy sweeper by threatening to kill him. "In one camp in a certain district the sweeper was a local rowdy.... who never turned up on time." Nobody was able to discipline him and so S.K. Chettur says "I seized him.... by the throat.... swore to kill him.... if he did not come on time in future.... it worked like a magic and he was extremely punctual and regular thereafter." His honesty, integrity and impartiality are well-known. Fair with all people while dealing with them, he never yields to any kind of pressure. He metes out justice without fear or favour. Personal enrichment is unknown in his professional career and life. Completely free from corruption he tries to eradicate corruption as much as he can. He is a sociable man. He maintains his relations and contacts with his fellow officers. He hates all kinds of discrimination, of race, religion, and colour. He has a genuine love for the English language and literature and attains mastery over the language. In fact he is used to "speak in English at home, dream in it, scold their children in it, make love in it." His services are contributed not to one field alone but to the entire range of the country's administration. He is courteous and kind to his subordinates and receives their co-operation and enjoys their
confidence and trust. Regarding his assistant, Paramanand Khanna, E.N. Mangat Rai observes "I nicknamed Khanna Pericles, and it was the beginning of a life-long respect and association". 14 K.L. Mehta says "There was a well-established hierarchy among the 'Haveli' servants. Some who were old, and often, whose fathers and grandfathers had earlier served in the Haveli, were treated with respect". 15 While remembering his father's domestic butler, Badr-ud-Din Tyabji says "In the jumble of memories of those days that well up in me, the ever-smiling, benevolent, intelligent face of Thambu, our Tamil butler stands out clearly". 16 K.P.S. Menon employed many ayahs to look after his children. One maid-servant called Nani Amma was in overall command. He says "Nani Amma, now 94, has served our family for three generations". 17 Further "She made herself the head of all our servants". 18 He takes pleasure in hobbies. Gundevia is good in mimicry. He says "I was always reputed to be a good mimic". 19 Once he mimicked Kamaraj, the then Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu as "'You tel Nehru. Mai pipple verygood....Get-into little boat. Go back Ceylon'". 20 Nehru enjoyed it very much. He hides nothing in his writings and discloses even the diseases he suffered from. S.Y.Krishnaswamy says, "It was in Vizianagaram that I had an attack of amoebic dysentery". 21 They make use of recorded evidences like diaries, letters, press comments, radio talks and official communications while
reconstructing their past experiences. But their writings are largely based on their memory—a non-verifiable source. The personal side of the autobiographer is not given much importance. In fact personal elements are perfunctorily treated. All the twelve autobiographies devote much time and space to the narration of their official careers as civil servants. The main theme is their service to the Indian nation and society. In order to create a nostalgic impression for an age and an institution that is no more, they use the technique of selection and arrangement of anecdotes, episodes, stories, myths, conversations and verses. They construct their autobiographies with these materials while writing about the service, they highlight only the brighter side of it. Their English is simple, clean, precise and lucid. In general they have a flair for literary English. They provide many quotations, both oriental and occidental. References to myths, legends, history and modern scientific thoughts are in abundance in their autobiographies. They stand together for the unity of India and retention of English in India because they view English as the only unifying factor at least among the educated in India. Their love of English has in no way affected their appreciation of the vernacular.

These autobiographies do not belong to the category of great and permanent literature. Nor do they belong to the category of pure literature. Though they are not books for
all times, they are interesting books of the hour. They represent a very fascinating chapter in the history of India, but they do this not as a history text book will do it, but as a book with pretensions to literature will do it. These autobiographies humanise history, give to the otherwise skeletal outline of historical facts the much-needed literary warmth, literary nearness and a literary flavour. These are books of a consciously literary kind in an area where pure literature can not have her sway.

These autobiographers who served in the I.C.S. are certainly influenced by such masters of English prose as Carlyle, Addison, Burke, Gibbon and Macaulay. In fact they seem to endorse Macaulay's vision of a perfect historian. "The perfect historian is he in whose work the character and spirit of an age is exhibited in miniature. He relates no facts, he attributes no expression to his characters, which is not authenticated by sufficient testimony. But judicious selection, rejection, and an arrangement, he gives to truth those attractions which have been usurped by fiction". Like Macaulay these writers aspire to vivacity of presentation and like Macaulay these writers are not willing to make their books entirely fictional. They try to achieve something complex, the uniting of truth with art in the production of an image of the character and spirit of a past which will speak directly to the emotions and imagination of the reader.
These I.C.S. men are very good observers of life and manners. Innumerable characters people their autobiographies. In the art of characterisation the reader once again notes a bridge between two kinds of narrative—between the seventeenth-century historical writing and the eighteenth-century novel. Some of the characters are merely types, while some others are highly individualised men and women who reveal themselves progressively in their actions, words and feelings just as a character would be developed in a novel. It is in the description of characters and situations that a reader is reminded of the influence of Addison, and Gibbon.

The autobiography must be considered as a kind of sub-genre of the narrative essay. It is a merging of history and biography, the biography being that of the writer himself and the history being the history of his own times. In doing this the autobiography tries to strike an effective balance between the patterns of a man's life and the changing course of public events.

The autobiography tries to show that the irony is the history, and the structures of drama and romance can be combined fruitfully through proper arrangements, perspective, illustrations and style. The origin of an autobiography is to be associated with a desire to make a man's past seem relevant to a contemporary audience.
For instance, even as recently as February 1983 the contribution made by the I.C.S. men is a question of contemporary relevance in India as the following two quotes from The Hindu will show.

"Colonial ghosts fill our babu-land and the Raj syndrome of I.C.S. overlordship is inherited by the successors. This is felt not only in the Establishment at the top but remained percolated down to the Tahsildar level".  

"Even Nehru's decision to keep the Indian Civil Service, despite its having been the prime tool of colonial rule, gained acceptance, because the I.C.S. enjoyed a matchless reputation for integrity".

Literary genres such as history, biography and autobiography belong to a debatable land. They are under the jurisdiction of two hostile powers shared between the two rulers, Reason and Imagination. Therefore the territory is often ill-defined, ill-cultivated and ill-regulated. They can also be considered as G.M. Trevelyan considers literature and history, as "twin sisters inseparable". Sometimes they become a dull record of facts and events. Sometimes they are illuminated by the light of imagination and become fascinatingly readable. The autobiography is built on a double vision, vision which allows a vivid and sympathetic
evocation of the past to be continued with praise of the present which grew out of the past. It belongs to the belles-lettres category which, according to The Oxford English Dictionary, refers to "the lighter branches of literature", and according to Webster refers to "light entertaining literature often of a facetious or sophisticated nature". It is a hybrid form where literary devices serve to entertain the reader while historical facts serve to instruct him.
NOTES


2. David C. Potter, p.25.

3. T.N. Kaul, p.34.


10. B. Sivaraman, p.5.


12. *loc. cit.*.


15. K.I. Mehta, p.15.


17. K.P.S. Menon, p.103.

18. *loc. cit.*


20. *loc. cit.*
21. S.Y. Krishnaswamy, p.64.


