SIXTH CHAPTER

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS

The basic purpose of an autobiography or autobiographical writings is to tell the story of one's life. It is essential for such writings to have a projection of totality. Mere narration of some interesting episodes of life may have some pleasant reflections, but such pieces cannot be called autobiography. An autobiography is to depict one's life with special reference to the development and evolution of one's mental and spiritual life. It is not that all autobiographies normally satisfy these two criteria. Sometime, an author may stress more on his material background, and some one else may be devoted more to depicting underlying current of his mental evolution. Depending on priority attributed to one of these two aspects, an autobiography may be just matter of fact, or depiction of a spiritual journey through a zigzag course. We have accepted the notion that basic inspiration of literature comes from one's desire to express his or her inner feelings. Quality of writings depends on author's purpose, style of presentation and serenity of the theme. It is a common knowledge that whenever we decide to avoid ordinary way of expression, the presentation demands something special- using of some techniques and suggestions having artistic attributes. Like other works of literature, an autobiography also demands such special attributes. That fact is to be admitted under all circumstances, almost all authors are actually aware of his responsibility in this regard and that awareness helps conferring literary qualities in autobiographies. Where self-advertisement becomes prominent and self-realisation takes a backseat-quality of an autobiography suffer. Moreover the ideas and sobriety of expression are not less important. Autobiography of Benvenito Chelini has occupied a special position in
autobiographical literature of Europe. Judging by antiquity, it’s position next to the
autobiography of St. Augustine. Chelini’s expression is bold, not devoid of ideas, but
his narration lacks in seriousness. The life, as depicted in this book of the great
European artist of his age was full of adventures befitting the life of the hero of a
detective novel. But still in spite of utilising all dramatic events of his life, the author
could not create desirable effect on a reader’s mind. Cheiini failed only due to a
lack of proportions.

For the same reason, Satyendranath’s अमृत बाल्यकथा o Bombāi Frabār
cannot be regarded as a good autobiography. In this book, fragments of events and
interaction with personalities occupy a major portion, which falls far short of the
expectation that an autobiography should at least offer us a glimpse of the total life
When this minimum requirement is fulfilled, then only the literary merit of the book
can be examined. There are some memories where the authors dealt some particular
aspects or experience of their lives like Hemendra Kumar Ray’s यूनर देखिये,
Amiyanath Sanyal’s स्मরित अटले, Pratima Thakur’s निर्वाण or Maitreyee Dev
Mampte Rabindranāth. By any stretch of imagination, any of these works cannot
be classified as an autobiography. Authors there dealt with other individuals as
observer. Their own life is reflected there only in-connection with those people
nothing more than that. Thus dwelling on memories concealing or subduing one's
own self cannot be called an autobiography. The author himself is the central figure of an autobiography; there is no scope for self-effacement even for the sake of modesty.

An autobiography requires presentation of life in its totality and it should manifest a motive force behind it. Adding up of mundane happenings of everyday life, ignoring continuity of living experience running beneath the surface level, which may be termed as inner life, is our normal practice of depicting life. But here lies the basic difference between a diary and an autobiography. In a diary, happenings of each and everyday is recorded, thereby making it static where each day is an end in itself. Any glimpse of totality of life cannot be discernible in such works. An exciting affair of a particular day may be incorporated in every detail in a diary covering a lot of space, but in the context of living experience of the lifetime, such an incident may be quite insignificant. An incident that may immensely infuriated a person today, may be forgiven and forgotten few days later. Rabindranath was quite clear in his perception when he wrote:

Only some incidents cannot help writing a biography, because mere incidents suffer from inherent limitation and foreclosure obstructing imaginative creation. Dumping of series of incidents cannot depict a life proper; since incidents are static once they happened and by itself cannot offer any scope to deploy one’s creative genius to enrich it. Thus these static happenings are unable to manifest the dynamism that makes human life meaningful.
Incidents which seemed to me to last a life time have taken only few pages; intervals that seemed thousands of years of suffering and pain, and through which in sheer self- defence in order to go on living, I emerged an entirely different person, do not appear at all long here.

But it should also be remembered that depiction of life in its totality may not by itself can became a worthy literature. Narration of matter of fact accounts may make the text enough dull to render it unless as a piece of literature. Depiction of outer existence does not make a narration worth reading, it shines only when some inner truths are ingrained in it. These limitations are more discernable in the text of autobiographies written by ladies:

No woman has ever told the whole truth of her life. The autobiographies of the most famous woman are a series of account of the outward existence, of petty details and anecdotes, which gave no realisation of their real life. For the great moments of joy or agony they remain strangely silent.

But it would be unfair to single out woman authors for such limitations. A number of narrative history, life stories and diary like autobiographies come under this category. The fact is to be accepted that literature is not about photographic representation of life’s happenings. In literature life is to be recreated-Tagore in the first essay of his *Atmaparicay* did not present the dates and details of his publications, rather he depicted the experience perceived at a higher plane that harmonised his creative genius. In other words he tried to get nearer to ‘*Baro Ami*’or his higher self through his autobiographical writings.
When Gorky wrote a biography of Tolstoy, he tried to depict incidents of Tolstoy’s life indiscriminately as they appeared in the public eye. Might be he depicted all facts but there was an essential necessity for selection and rejection. Because all these were not helpful to bring about the greatness of Tolstoy. By avoiding this kind of prudent rejection, Gorky actually did injustice to Tolstoy’s genius and the biography written by him could not deliver the desired effect. Tagore’s thoughtful observations may be quoted here:

It is desirable to be aware of the fact that an autobiography is an attempt to recreate oneself and here it differs from a diary or a travelogue.

The success of a biography depends on collection of facts, but it is not facts but realisation of oneself that gives autobiography, it’s distinctiveness. One who does not have a deeper insight to transcend the limitation of trifles of everyday life cannot be a successful author of an autobiography. One can observe the material world from a distance and depict the development of a man from his childhood to manhood that can be good biography. A poet, a reformer or a man of action can be portrayed.
keeping in background his environment, human relations and associates and
evidences in support of them can be collected from his letters, diaries etc. and that
way a good biography can be produced. But often such biographies failed to project
the inner personality of the subject concerned. His greatness may remain elusive in
spite of collection of mass of data and facts. It is doubtful whether Prabhat Kumar
Mukhapadhyay would have succeeded in depicting Tagore with such mastery if he
was not aided by Jiban smriti or Aimaparicay.

A biography normally tends to explain the facts of life; on the other hand an
autobiography is more concerned with explaining the essence of one’s life itself. It
wants to stress more on the ingredients that work beneath the surface to build up one’s
mindset, cross current of intellectual waves that contributed to one’s personality and
the way one responds to the challenges around him and ultimately to enlighten a
reader as to the making of innerself of the narrator to the extent depiction is possible
Thus an autobiography is to be appreciated not by intellect alone, but some amount of
emotional bondage with the author has to be developed by the reader for fullest
appreciation of an autobiography. To a certain extent a good autobiography can be
equated with a mystic creation where the inner cord of the reader must be tuned to the
demand of the narration and mindset of the narrator.

An autobiography is not history and has nothing to do with the chronological
account of life. Otherwise quite insignificant episode may be more significant to the
making of a person’s inner self than a major incident of life. Suppose, to the
biographer of Tagore’s life, a sunrise on a particular morning in his childhood is a not
at all something that deserves any mention, but to Tagore himself, that sunrise not
only occurred in the blue sky, but also in his consciousness. To a biographer, this
sunrise was of no importance, but for the autobiography of Tagore, it was a major landmark in the development of his creative consciousness.

A major difficulty that hinders the appreciation of an autobiography is that often the narrator cannot control the temptation of self-publicity. At times this tendency appears even without the conscious effort of the author. But fact is that the purpose of an autobiography is simply foiled if self-publicity occupies the field. But at the same time some kind of self-proclamation should be there in an autobiography, otherwise it becomes directionless. Self-proclamation is the testament of one’s commitment and ideological stance, and the narration of the man loyal to his ideal gives his autobiography a special significance. In short, truth of one’s inner life reveals itself in such autography. In the writing of Dwijendranath Tagore or Sibnath Sastri revelation of such truths actually endowed their self-portrayal with rare excellence. Tagore in his self-portrayal did not go for beating his own dream and confined himself in revealing sources of his creative inspirations. On the other hand, the autobiography of Rajnarayan Basu is boastful and full of self-praise and that major limitation completely marred the aesthetic merit of the work. Balance and objectivity are two great attributes of a good autobiography and their absence totally mar the merit of the narration in spite of high moral stance; the text might try to project. We are fortunate that in most of the autobiographies written in Bengali, the author are prudent enough to maintain this balance and objectivity and thereby they have created a genre of literature of which we may feel proud.

Autobiographies are written out of varieties of impetus and incentives. Some are written to satisfy friend’s overtures, some under pressure of editors of journals, some other just for nostalgic pleasure. The structure and character of an autobiography often depends on the particularity of inspiration that acts behind the
initiation of the work. The autobiography of Pramatha Choudhury was written the pressure of well-wishers and hence the reluctance of the author rendered the text listless. Satyendranath Dutta's Āmār Bālyakathā O Bombāi prabās was written to meet the demand of a monthly magazine and the text is often devoid of continuity and fragmented. But at times the account is livid and graceful. Apan kathā of Abanindranath Tagore is an outcome of self-inspiration and the artist in Abanindranath is in his best form while depicting some hazy memories of his childhood. The autobiography of Devendranath Tagore is the manifestation of his self-introspection and of a very high standard. There are some other instances where initial impetus may be trifling like that of Darwin.

I have thought that the attempt would amuse me and might possibly interest my children or their children. I have attempted to write the following account of myself as if I were a dead man in another world looking back at my own life. I have taken no pains about my style of writing. 6

The autobiography of John Stuart Mill is the narration of his gradual mental growth towards self-realisation. There was little scope for depiction of his personal joys and woes. Infect his autobiography represents the journey of a nineteenth century individual to appreciate the change in the consciousness and understanding under the changing circumstances. Besides a few sentences, where he focused on her wife, there is no expression of emotion in his work. Devendranath’s work also falls under the same genre, but there rationalism was not the major factor, rather a deeper touch of selfrealisation enlivened his text. These two autobiographies are examples where contents are guided by the objectives of the author.
Depiction of only private affairs cannot create interest in the mind of a reader and likely to be unpopular. The autobiography of Rajnarayan Basu is an example of this kind. Pramatha Choudhury’s autobiography is free from self-publicity, but still it lacks in encompassing the totality of life’s essence and hence cannot satisfy or inspire a reader in this respect, Atmacharit of Sibnath Sastri, Sibansmriti of Tagore, Yatri of Soumyendranath Tagore and some others are exceptional products where life and experience intermingle to offer a higher platitude for a reader.

A historian collects materials from outer sources and write history of a period that has a value of it’s own. On the other hand, there are artist, thinkers, reformers & great men who play significant roles in shaping the course of history and thereby they become historical personalities. When they write on their experiences, we get something new not covered by routine history that had to depend on outer materials. The historical personalities, through their autobiographies, inform us of the inside story behind the epoch making episodes and there by we get a new insight to develop a better understanding of the forces that would history. Thus by going through the autobiographies of Sibnath Sastri, Debendranath, Rajnarayan and Krishna Kumar Mitra, we get the essence of the Brahma movement which is not discernible from any history on the subject. Here lies the historical importance of autobiographies. Bengali poets of the middle age through the passages of their self- introduction gave us some important information. We are fortunate that most of the writer of the autobiographies in Bengali were aware that they were representing their age and their writings were tuned to that objective. The most aware of this objective was perhaps Sibnath Sastri, who could deal with the small joys and worries of individual life and place them effortlessly in the context of social history and broad perspective. Autobiography of
Acharyya Prafullachandra is also an example of similar kind. When an author is aware of his historical perspective, it also saves him from self-boosting.

Autobiographies have a long prestigious tradition in western literature. St. Augustin's *confession* was written in fourth century A.D. In Indian literature the trend was different, the poets and authors were reluctant to narrate their own life in their works. Indian artist were more concerned with their creative art and did not want to mingle individual affairs with their creation. The painters of Ajanta did not leave even their names anywhere. A number of poets of ancient Indian literature did not leave behind any self-introduction besides only their names. In medieval Bengali literature self-introduction of poets are there but these were incorporated as part of the main text only just to depict how the concerned God or Goddess blessed the poet. However some historical truth are available from such texts as Mukundaram's depiction of feudal afflictions. It is apparent that the impetus for writing autobiography in Bengali came under the influence of the west.

Some salient features regarding Bengali autobiography needs to be mentioned. Most of the autobiographies are works of Brahma leaders, amongst whom Debendranath, Sibnath Sastri and Rajnarayan Bose are prominent. Rammohan Roy did not write any autobiography, his self-introduction to a limited extent available from his letters. Vidyasagar's autobiography is incomplete, only introduction was there from which we do not know what would have emerged. The autobiography of Rasasundari Devi is pleasantly readable but it has not created any impact on the social life. Thus we may regard the abovementioned three works of other Brahma leaders as the specimens of early autobiographies of Bengali literature. Though three of them belonged to same religious order, they were distinctive in their thought, expression, outlook and approach. Here we find diversities and varieties that made
nineteenth century Bengal so meaningful to the future mould of the society. They were thoroughly influenced by the western intellectual ideas and hence they sponsored women liberation, women education and widow marriage as well progressive social reforms of other varieties. They used European rationalism to adjudge social system but at the same time they did not surrender completely to the western value system but had reasonable respect for traditions routed in Indian heritage. Devendranath in his autobiography concentrated on religious introspection, Rajnarayan on working of Brahma Samaj at the district level and Shibnath Sastri with his pan-Indian mindset stressed more on his travels throughout the length and breadth of the country. They were sure that their account would go a long way in attracting people toward their new creed. Their commitment guided them and that made their accounts authentic.

In the nineteenth century, Bengali mind was reawakened through its contact with western ideas and thought. The educated Bengali received enough intellectual guidance to get out of shell of conservatism. The new environment also helps developing individuality for persons who received western education. This individuality sought for self-assertion as well as self-expression. Autobiographies are the product of this desire for self-expression. Also there was inspiration galore that required to be expressed. Actually the nineteenth century was the age of reason and neo-Bengali intelligentsia, under the influence of the west, were eager to appreciate and understand the situation around them with rational yardstick and that gave birth to polemics of different verities. Inspiration for autobiographies did not have any direct relationship with these polemics, but many of the intellectuals thought it prudent to recreate their childhood to manhood just to identify the background of
which they were the products and that self-realisation was necessary for knowing the foundations on which they stood.

We have left behind from this discussion a number of other autobiographies though some of them are quite important. But our purpose is to identify the trends and not to write an elaborate history of Bengali autobiographies. For our specific purpose, in other words for laying foundation for a discussion on the autobiography of Meer Musarraf Hussain, further details is not necessary. Meer Musarraf Hussain wrote four autobiographical books. Chronologically, arranged according to time element of subject matter, these are *Udāsīn Pathiker Maner Kathā*, *Āmār Jibānī*, *Gājī Miār Bastānī* and *Bibi Kulsum*. The first book, that covers a time span around 1860, gives an account of his childhood, depiction of the character of his father and mother. In *Āmār Jibānī*, there is the description of his boyhood and adolescence, covering up to 1865 when his first marriage was performed. In *Gājī Miār*, we find depiction of his adulthood, approximately covering 1884 to 1894. During these ten years he came to Delduar with his second wife and third issue through this wife along with other members of his family, and he left Delduar in 1301B.S. following the birth of his tenth offspring. *Bibi Kulsum* vividly depicts his conjugal life in details involving Kulsum Bibi whom he married in 1873 and who died in 1910. The book was written in the same year, i.e. 1910. Taking into account the total time-span covered, these four books are sufficiently capable of throwing vivid light on life, time and environment of Meer Musarraf Hussain.

His *Udāsīn Pathiker Maner Kathā* was published in 1890. It does not bear the name of the author in the cover or front page of the book. Of course in the front page, Meer Musarraf Hussain was mentioned as the copyright holder of the book. At the end of the preface the authors name came as a pseudonym ‘Udāsīn Pathik’. In fact
this literary pseudonym was used by him in some other writings also. He had a desire of writing a second volume of the book but the idea did not materialise.

The book is composed of 42 chapters. All these chapters were termed as 'Tarang' (wave) by the author and each Tarang is named subject wise like Niltuthi, Dwitiya Tarang, Meer Saheb Ke, Tritiya Tarang, Pyarisundari etc.

In Udāśīn Pathiker Maner Kathā, there are two parallel episodes running together. One concerns with the atrocities of B.I. Carry, the indigo-planter of Shalgha Madhwa and bold protest on behalf of the oppressed peasants by zamindar Pyarisundari. Second, concerns with the family affairs of Meer family—worries and happiness of father Moazzem Hussain and mother Daulatennasa. These two courses runs at times parallel, at times intermingled.

In Udāśīn Pathiker Maner Kathā, the author dealt with the peasant movement that developed against the indigo-planters in Bengal and Bihar between 1859-1862. The name of Carry, the indigo planter, is widely mentioned in the official records concerning indigo-plantation and names of both Pyarisundari and Bhauri babu are also known to historians of that period. The atrocities of these planters not only made the lives of these peasantry miserable, but also attracted the attention of newly emerging Bengali middle class. In fact, the reactions of the peasantry against these indigo-planters had left behind a deep impression in Bengali literature. In fact, Michael Madhusudan Datta, Dinabandhu Mitra, Kaliprasanna Singha and Bankim...
chandra, all were involved in one way or another in venting their protest against the crimes of the indigo planters.

Being a resident of Kustia district, Meer Musarraf had direct knowledge of the atrocities of indigo-planter and his exposure is authentic. His knowledge on the subject was so thorough that once he desired to write a history of the Indigo movement.

It is not necessary to examine how far Bankim himself was truthful to his assertion, but the fact remains that through his pen the model objective of literary pursuits as perceived in the nineteenth century was forcefully expressed. And it is gratifying that the most of the literary creations in Bengali of this period were written with some kind of social objective. *Nil Darpan* of Dinabandhu Mitra is the most significant example of this genre. Musarraf Hussain may be regarded as his rightful successor.

There is some difference of opinion as to the classification of *Udāsīn Pathiker Maner Kathā* as a piece of literary work. Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay in his *Sāhitya Sādhak Caritamāla* places this book in the category of novels. Munir Choudhury treats the book as an autobiography. From critical view point the book can neither be categorised as a successful novel, nor as a faultless autobiography, it is a somewhat hybrid formation of a novel and an autobiography.

Though the author depicts details of life in his passages, it does not fulfill the requirements of a novel. There is no structural strength, no continuity of plot, no
objectivity and no deeper query as to life and these limitations rendered the text not to be considered as a good novel. Otherwise there is a potentiality for a novel particularly centering on the conflict between Carry and Pyarisundari. That would also enhance his natural caliber for depiction of plight of the downtrodden. However, he did not proceed through that path, and opted for vivid depiction of his family affairs. Thereby, possibility of creation of a good novel was lost.

However, it goes to the credit of the author that he could methodically incorporated stories and characters of varieties of men and women in his text. These are the elements that make a novel successful, but here these elements did not serve the purpose since the author was not bent upon writing a novel. And in the case of autobiography, so many diversions are not in conformity with the need of the work. Hence the quality of autobiography suffered.

The author himself was concerned with a different kind of apprehension. He thought that incorporation of too many subjects might do some harm to the continued and appreciation of the basic theme. In fifteenth chapter, he writes:

The appeal was not necessary. Basically the text of the book is easygoing simple and no pretension is there:
May be the temperament of the author was not suitable for writing history. May be he was not objective enough to be a novelist. Thus his book became a mixture of novel and autobiography doing justice to none.

In this book, at times, there are some dramatic elements as in *Bisādsindhu*

> সাংসার! লোভ! তোর অসাধ্য কিছুই নাই। এ অর্থে! জনিদিনি! তোরা না ঘটাতে পারিস এ গড়তে এমন কোন কু-কার্যহই নাই। মায়া, মমতা, বেহ, দীর্ঘ ধর্ম, সকলই সারের নিকট পরাত।

> (সম্প্রে তরঙে ঘর জামাই)

Musarraf depicted the indigo-planter Carry as a villain, but he did not equate the planter with the British administration. In *Udāsīn Pathiker Maner Kathā* there is detailed account of the honest attempts made by the British Commissioner and Governor General to restrain the planters and do justice to the subject people. To him, the Indigo movement was against some individual planters, not a struggle against imperialism. The author could not discern the hidden relationship between the plantation and colonial administration. Perhaps his limited understanding of social reality prompted him to use his pen for accusing the indigo planters and the same time bestow praise on the colonial administration. For example:

> মাননীয় হর্ষন্ন পালাকুর ভারতীয় সিভিল সার্ভিস অফিসের পূর্ব-জ্যাকার্ডের, পূর্ব-কলেক্টরের পূর্বগৃহের দেখা দিয়াছেন। প্রজার দূরশ্রা দৃঢ়কে দেখিয়েছেন। প্রজার আর্টবালে বন্ধনের আসন পর্য্যন্ত ঠিকিয়েছে।
Along with this praise for the colonial masters, the author also manifests his sincere love for his motherland.

Musarraf was also aware of the necessity of joint endeavour based on Hindu Muslim unity. From Carry’s word, we came to know that the cleavage between Bengali Hindu and Muslims, at least partially was resolved during the anti Indigo movement.
For self interest, some people of this country sided with the planters. The author expressed his hearty desire to find means to get rid of this vice that had plagued Meer contemporary society. The planters also wanted to take advantage of the division that existed between the Hindus and Muslims. The author tried to remain neutral while describing this phase, but could not succeed in his effort. His preference was vividly come out when he depicted Pyarisundari as the vocal protagonist of the cause of the peasantry. In the words of Pyarisundari, the author informed us that the English planter did not bring their supporter from their land; they could gather them from Indians. The author was convinced that the necessity of the hour was Hindu-Muslim unity and hence Pyarisundari said:

Also there are some descriptions of contemporary administrative system of British India.
However, in the absence of a totality of social vision Meer Musarraf could identify only the individual planters, as oppressor could not see behind the scene operation of this colonial power. Here his predecessors also influenced him. Dinabandhu Mitra in his *Nil Darpan* depicted then oppression of the indigo planter and the plight of the Bengali peasantry. His depiction is more vivid and elaborate. In there, too, Dinabandhu categorised those atrocities as the deeds of some particular planters. That the colonial rule by itself had an oppressive character and the situation in plantation region could not be devoid of atrocities because oppression was essentially a component of such is a fact that was completely ignored by Dinabandhu. Practically this attitude to separate the British oppression with British administration was the general social trend of the period and Musarraf was guided by this trend.

It should be mentioned that the basic theme of *Udāśin Pathiker Maner Kathā* is not a plight of the peasantry, but to depict his family life and his own role in society. Thus it is not desirable to make a thorough comparison between *Nil Darpan* and *Udāśin Pathiker Maner Kathā*. However it needs to be told:

> ‘उदासीन पतिकेर केदार कथा’ लेखक तारे पतिकार्थिक समाज के उदासीन के, तिनी पतिकार्थिकी ‘पतिकार्थिक’ में ऐ जीवन और समाज के एक अंग आगंतुक के निर्धारित दृष्टिकोण में देखने। उदासीन के निर्धारित दृष्टिकोण में जीवन और समाज के एक अंग आगंतुक के निर्धारित दृष्टिकोण में देखने।

In another work, Meer Musarraf tried to depict social realities of his time in the light of his own experience. We are speaking of *Gājī Miśr Bastānī*, which was published on 1899. In two volumes of the book there are twenty-four chapters we...
twenty in the first and four in the second. About sixty percent of the content was accommodated in the first volume and forty percent in the second volume. Except four chapters of the second volume, there are other sections, namely ‘Gājī Miśr Ātmāparicay’, ‘Bastāni Prāptir Bībarāṇ’, ‘Apar Haste Arpaṇer Kāraṇ’, ‘Pariṇām’, and lastly ‘Gājī Miśr Bīḍāy’ that were included. It is somewhat curious that this second volume was not published as a separate book but was accommodated in his Āmār Jībanē as the part-II of the book. In the first volume, name of Musarraf was not there, even as the copyright holder the name of ‘Udāśīn Pathik’ was used. This pseudonym the author used in some other writings also. With the depiction of about fifty characters, the author exposed the darker side of social life full of fraud and depiction—a major treatise on the contemporary life.

From structural point, the book to a certain extent follows the model of Ālāler Gharer Dulāl (1888). And as a portrayal of contemporary society it can be placed in the category of Hutam Pyācār Naksā (1862-63) and Kamalākānter Daptar (1875). However the deep insight into human existence, which is the basic hallmark of Kamalākānter Daptar is absent in Musarraf’s book. Some other elements of these three books are partially present in Gājī Miśr Bastānē. In ‘Hutom’ these are fragmented but humorous description of Calcutta’s city life, in ‘Alal’ there is a real life account though fell short of the demand of a novel and Kamalakanta deals with everyday life with jest and humour. All these attributes are partially present in Gājī Miśr Bastānē.

Gājī Miśr Bastānē is one of foremost autobiographical writing of Musarraf Hussain. Which was written about his matured adulthood, its style is sarcastic and at times caustic. This helped attracting a larger section of readers. Also for the sake of self-protection the author effected changes of names of characters as well as places of
occurrence. The use of these changed name is not in conformity with standard autobiographical literature, however one who has enough knowledge of Musarraf’s personal life would not find it difficult to discern real identities of those characters. The theme of the book centers around his station of work, that is Delduar, which is termed as Jamdwar, his employer Karimunnessa Choudhury is mentioned as Poyjarunnessa and Gaji Mia and Vera Kanta the author himself.

The narration starts with description of Bholanath, the magistrate of Arakajpur and Begum Saheba of Kunjaniketan bringing out their relationship. The names of the zamindars are Sablot Choudhury, Payjarunnessa, Sonabibi and Monibibi etc. The henchmen of Sablot Choudhury are Kala Roy, Kota Lahiri, Alkatra Sannyal, Ghorbhanga Sannyal and others. The supporters of Sonabibi are Dagadari, Beakkal, Dharibaj and the supporters of Monibibi are Mathapagla Roy, Dhamadhara Sarkar etc. Different place of names are Arajokpur, Jamdwar, Kunja Niketan, Nachharpur etc. Name of the police station is Hatpata. The naming of Arajokpur and kunja Niketan gives a predominance as to the episodes to be followed. Where truth has no value and efficacy is Arajya, the place where man and woman maintains secret illicit relation is Kunja Niketan. This kind of presentation is used in English allegorical novels.

It is apparent that the book was written by Musarraf Hussain depicting his bitter experience while serving as the manager of Delduar estate of Tangail, Mymensingh, owned by Karimunnessa Choudhury. Earlier writings of the kind like Nababābu Bilās, Ālāler Gharer Dulāl or Hutam Pyācār Nāksha deal with only Hindu characters, whereas Gājī Miār Bastanī encompasses both Hindus and Muslims. To a certain extent the book was influenced by Bankim Chandra’s Kamalākānter Daptar, but Daptar has its inspiration from Thomas De Quency’s confessions of an opium
eater or Charles Dicken’s *Pickwick Papers* but Musarraf’s book is not that imi
akin to *Kamalākānter Daptar* with regard to structure and content. True that Bankim identified himself completely with Kamala Kanta, Musarraf also identified himself with ‘Veṛakānta’ and ‘Gājī Mia’, but Kamala Kanta’s mastery over sarcasm, wit and humour was absent in ‘Gājī Mia’. Moreover Kamalakanta narrated only some selective experiences of his life, whereas the narration of ‘Gājī Mia’ has continuity.

Three women Muslim zamindars were involved in the theme. The semi-comic naming of characters and place names add a different dimension to the theme. Besides the names already mentioned, some other interesting names are Lai A,Jwalatnnessa, Chandbadani, SiklikataTeay, etc. Here two parallel themes set together. One concerns with Paijarnnessa, Bholanathbabu (the magistrate), another with Sonabibi and Monibibi. Joydhak the son of Sonabibi is the son in law of Monibibi. The narrative theme mainly proceeds around the character of Joydhak who was entangled in a problem of acquisition of property and over which Sonabibi and Monibibi came in to conflict. On the other side, there were the activities of Paizerunnessa. All three Muslim women zamindars of the story are widows.

Perhaps the author was not inspired by any higher emotion when he wrote *Gājī Mia Bastaṇi*. The fact is that while serving at Delduar, he was subjected to varieties of insult and mischief and the author wanted to retaliate through this book. It appears that here he had lost much of his earlier appreciation for the British Administration. He also commented sarcastically over the futile clashes between Hindus and Muslims. The book throws detailed bright on the age as to its system of education, female education, notions and superstitions, place and status of women.
While presenting the life of a Muslim women zamindar, the author incorporates a number of other allied and non-allied subjects and episodes to make his presentation vivid and diverse. Here we find the fraud and theft of the employer of zamindari, the tale of abduction of a housewife by Muslim zamindar, the attempts to rob poor from their minimum belongings etc. He showed how the magistrate and lawyers always favoured the wealthy, how common were cheated in spite of paying bribes, how a friend was betrayed in his days of need, how corrupt were the police, jail employees high and low, how truthfulness and principles were completely abandoned and some other vital ills of the society and situation. The author also offered a faithful depiction of mentality of Muslim zamindars and condition of Muslim common masses.

One of the major female character Sonabibi, is presented by the author as an example of the state of woman education in Muslim society:
At times ‘Gāžī Mia’ or the author became a bitter critic of the social system without mincing words. In a review published in monthly Pradip:

At times ‘Gāžī Mia’ or the author became a bitter critic of the social system without mincing words. In a review published in monthly Pradip:

But the social observation of the book is not always objective. The characters of the book are taken from real experience, and as such the author’s personal relationship at times vitiated his vision. He had been an employee under Karimunnessa Choudhurani with whom his relationship deteriorated at the fag end of his services. That change of relationship made him to depict Karimunnessa in the guise of Paisurennessa as a woman with uncontrolled lust for physical pleasure. Muhammad Abdul Hai in his preface of Gāžī Miār Bastānī edited by Ashraf Siddiqui says that Musarraf was a fearless critic of the social evils. He neither spared himself nor his wife where question of propriety was concerned. But Munir Choudhury holds a different view:
The fact is that from *Gajprints Mir Bastani* there is a sea change in the thought process of Meer Musarraf. The crisis in him started while writing *Udasin Pathiker Maner Katha* and it culminated around 1882, when he had a lull of creativity for ten years before he penned down *Gajprints Mir Bastani*. In initial days of his literary activities, he was liberal and non-communal, but reaching the second stage of his literary career, he displayed a completely different attitude. He then preferred to life’s crudity to lives wealth and he lost his zeal for fighting communalism, rather himself become of victim of the same vice.

At the fag end of his life Meer Musarraf Hussain wrote two books, *Amar Jiban* and *Amar Jiban Jiban Kulsum Jiban* that deserves special mention. Besides literary merit, these two books retain enough materials for understanding the contemporary time and situation. *Amar Jiban* was published in 1910, number of printed copies 1000. It is an unfinished autobiography, though the author was anxious to complete it. He could not do so because of the death of his beloved wife Kulsum. He abandoned writing his own autobiography and preferred to write a life sketch of Kulsum. After paying his tribute to his beloved wife; he did not get time to complete his autobiography since he died in 1912.

The nineteenth century was the age of regeneration of Bengali language and culture and number of Bengali autobiographies were product of this period. But this new spirit and enthusiasm that marked the speciality of this period did not influence...
Meer Musarraf to any considerable extent. One reason for that gap was the fact that Meer Musarraf avoided living in the proximity of urban life. As a result:

The book covers a period from 1865 to 1874. It gives accounts of ancestors and his own life sketch from birth to his youth when his first marriage was solemnised. In this book the author tried to be truthful and authentic in relating his own life to the maximum possible extent. Even he exposed his own moral degradation, indulgence in forbidden vices and secret of his unsanctioned lone life. He spoke truthfully without any fear of consequences.

In the chapter 'Atmakatha-prarthana' of the book he appeals to Almighty:

It sounds like a holy humbly submitted oath taken before a confession:

Before the readers he

The book starts with a prayer to Almighty so that he could complete his autobiography in spite of his ailing health The narration of Amur jiban may be divided into following parts: 1) Genealogy and family history, 2) His education and, 3) His first marriage and its tragic fallouts. He starts his genealogy from ancestors.

The book covers a period from 1865 to 1874. It gives accounts of ancestors and his own life sketch from birth to his youth when his first marriage was solemnised. In this book the author tried to be truthful and authentic in relating his own life to the maximum possible extent. Even he exposed his own moral degradation, indulgence in forbidden vices and secret of his unsanctioned lone life. He spoke truthfully without any fear of consequences.

In the chapter 'Atmakatha-prarthana' of the book he appeals to Almighty:

It sounds like a holy humbly submitted oath taken before a confession:

Before the readers he

The book starts with a prayer to Almighty so that he could complete his autobiography in spite of his ailing health The narration of Amur jiban may be divided into following parts: 1) Genealogy and family history, 2) His education and, 3) His first marriage and its tragic fallouts. He starts his genealogy from ancestors.
Sadullah and from his grandfather Abrahim his account deals with details. Next he spoke of his own parental family.

This autobiography offers interesting reading. He knew that the strength of this kind of work depends on truthfulness of the author and he was sincere in this respect. He raised the question আমার জীবনের পাঠক কে? (Who are the readers of this autobiography) and submitted his own version of the subject:

In this context, while speaking about his own life, Musarraraf quoted a couplet of Kabir:

চলন্তী-চাক্তী দেখ কার দিয়া কাহীরা রে;

dে পাঠিন কে চিন্তে সাবেক গিরা না কে। ......

কাবীর বাহী-বন্দরে সহিত পৃথিবী আর আকাশের তৃপ্তি দিয়া কারিয়া ঐ কথাটা বলিয়াছেন। বন্ধা-আকাশ

আর পৃথিবীর মধ্যে আসিয়া কেহই অক্ষ শরীরে বাহির ইহিতে পারে নাই। কেহ অসুর-পশিত, কেহ এক-বারে পশিত ইহিয়া বাহির ইহিয়াছেন। কাবীরের বচনের সমর্থন কারিয়া আমার ও বলিয়াছি জগতে আসিয়া কেহই অক্ষ শরীরে বাহির ইহিতে পারেন না। কিছু কিছু ফ্রত ইহিয়াছে, আর না হয় কিছুৎ দাঙ্গ

বাহির ছায়া আমার জীবনীর ভূপথী, যাতে জীবনের অক্ষ শরীরে বাহির ইহিতে পারেন না।

কাবীর তিনি পৃথিবীর নামে-নামাঙ্গী !

পাপীর জীবনকাবিনী গুনিতে অনেকেই ইহা ইহিতে না। লোকচে ঔনিতে বিহূত চরিত, পূণ্যের আকার

কাবিয়া জীবনকাবিনী গঠিত করিতে আমারা ইহেক নাই। বাহির সত্য আহার আমাদের আচায়। হুমক তাহাতে
An autobiographer is a normal man, he is not free from earthy vices and shortcomings and Meer Musarraf always kept this fact of life in mind and tried his best to rise up to occasion to fulfill this basic requirement of an autobiography.

The author's assertion that he was not a holy man but a sinner is the attitude that deserves to be appreciated. Nabin Chandra Sen's autobiography *Anjali* more or less written with the same conviction. The similarity is visible in Musarraf's statement of objective of the book and the pleasant narration of his first love. What is most important that in this fag end of his life, his creative genius was on the wave, Musarraf showed unusual capability in depicting some portions, which were full of high literary flavour. The self-portrayal of a man with flash and blood, with his follies and limitation attaches a special lively content to the text. Let us quote some portions

Where as the book exposes social realities of Bengal side by side with the self-portrayal of the author, it also deals in a way with history of rural Bengal for
more than hundred and fifty years. Some information regarding Muslim zamindar family and upbringing of Muslim young men who were the sons of zamindars are also available. We also learn that some kind of slavery was prevalent.

The Muslim society has been depicted in the following manner:

It is learnt from Amār Jibārī that:

Bibi Kulsum is his second autobiography, though presented in the form of a life sketch of the author’s beloved wife. It covers the time span during 1874 to 1910, the period between Kulsum’s marriage with Meer and her death. Of course some references went beyond 1874.
Bibi Kulsum is the mirror of Meer Musarraf’s conjugal life. A conjugal life full of happiness comes to an end with the death of Kulsum. This last work of Meer Musarraf emerges from an emotional upsurge and hence the text is full of emotional expression. However, the author succeeded in striking a balance between his emotional mood and restraint of a litterateur. Thus though the author did not try to contain his emotion, artist in him endowed him with proper language to depict those feelings. A number of tidbits of daily life, some of which were otherwise would have been treated as sacred appeared in the book because of the special mood under which the book was written.

The book is a memorial dedicated to his wife. Musarraf had no word to express his gratitude to second wife Kulsum. Actually following his marriage with Kulsum he could free himself from the moral vices that afflicted his life to a considerable extent. He felt gratified and glorified with the sincerity, respect, love and constant pleasant company that he received from Kulsum. Hence in his preface of the book he ascribed holiness on the day, which Kulsum left him for her eternal home. Because the day coincided with the birth day and day of death of Hazarat Muhammad (Fatea-Dohaz-Dam). The day was chaitra 11, 1316 B.S., Friday. Next year, on the same day he released the life sketch of Kulsum Bibi.

Like Amar Jibanī the life sketch of Kulsum is also immensely readable. The author used his dramatic style while describing his courtship and subsequent marriage. After the death of his mother, Musarraf used to pass through the road in front of Kulsum’s house while visiting on horseback Thomas Kenny, a friend of his father. For four years nothing happened, then:
This book may be credited with a number of virtues. The text is sincere, depiction of facts truthful. The author has a mastery over creation of characters. That virtue provided him the capability to enlivened his deceased wife through his pen. A reputed man recreated his intimate life with its central character sparkling with utmost ease and that makes the book a rare specimen. The most significant attraction of the book is the way the feeling of an old man on the death of his wife was expressed and manifested. There is emotional outburst, but outburst is authentic:

The episode, experience and understanding expressed here all are from real life—here there is a magical mingling between the man and the matter.
NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Somendranath Basu, Bāmlā Sāhitye Ātmajībānti, p 2
2. Rabindra Racaṇābali, (V.B.) 19th vol, Yātrī, p 383
3. Isadora Duncun, My life, p 408
4. ibid, p 12
5. Rabindra Racaṇābali, (V.B.) 19th vol, Yātrī, p 382
6. pp 1-2
7. Preface by Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, Meer Musarraf Hussain
   Raćaṇā Sangraha, edited by Bishnu Basu, p 24
8. Bankim Racaṇābali, Bāmlī Nabya Lekhakder Prati Nibedan, Vol-II,
    p 272
9. p 41
10. p 54
11. Selim Jahangir, Meer Musarraf Hussain: Jīban O Sāhitya, p 179
12. Preface by Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyay, Meer Musarraf Hussain: Raćaṇā
    Sangraha Vol-I, edited by Bishnu Basu, p 25
13. Sirajuddin Ahmed, Meer Musarraf Hussain, p 48
14. Selim Jahangir, Meer Musarraf Hussain: Jīban O Sāhitya, p 202
15. 5th Year, 1st edition, Paus 1308, p 39
16. Meer Mānas, p 95
17. Munir Choudhury, Meer Mānas, p 182