CHAPTER - VI

K.A. ABBAS'S : I AM NOT AN ISLAND
Abbas's autobiography, _I Am not an Island: An Experiment in Autobiography_, (1977) as the publisher's blurb says, is the life-story of "an omnibus personality," because he was an author, journalist, columnist, film-producer and film director and he "writes frankly about his childhood, his years at Aligarh University, his journalistic apprenticeship, his contact with the leaders of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Maulana Azad and Shaik Abdullah, and the impact they made on his life". The blurb also states that, although the work is an autobiography, it is also political history of India up to the proclamation of the Emergency.

In the preface to his autobiography, Abbas states that he wrote it at the instance of a friend who insisted that many people would be interested in the varied interests of a man who had dabbled in several fields like politics, literature and films ([vii]).

Abbas follows the chronological line through the major part of the autobiography and switches over to thematic narration towards the end. There are several digressions in the course of the narrative, the majority of them of a cataphoric kind, referring to later developments. Abbas also provides many footnotes which provide additional information and often refer to later developments.
At the opening of his autobiography, stationing himself at the age of sixty, Abbas takes a bird's eye view of his life up to that point of time and says that his was the only Muslim family of Panipat among the thirty thousand Muslims of Panipat to choose to remain in India and not migrate to the newly-created state of Pakistan; that the family lost most of its possessions, including his birth certificate, when they had to leave for Delhi in a truck with an armed escort sent by Jawaharlal Nehru; that, when he went back to Panipat to salvage something out of the wreckage of their home, he found little of value as most of the things had been looted or burnt; that his childhood and the days of his youth were lost with that house; that, now, he does not relish the idea of being reminded that he is sixty; that he has, for sixty years, lived fully, experienced the richest emotions, witnessed the exciting events of his times, and, participated in the great drama of human existence; that he has been in close touch with Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Sarojini Naidu and Maulana Azad; that he has gone round the world; that he does not feel his age of sixty; that he reached sixty—without acquiring the wisdom, the dignity, the sobriety, the mature judgement, the judicious expression or the conservative taste that generally go with this age; that an emotional shock at the age of nineteen made him a skeptic, an agnostic, a socialist, a writer, and, an ally of causes devoted to the building of new values in a new society; that this phenomenon might be called "inertia, paralysis, death, but it is also life, loyalty, even some sort of eternity"; that, perhaps, his being a journalist has something to do with his youth fullness, since a journalist is always at the centre of all the dynamic things happening in
the world; and, that, perhaps, the tension and the thrill of the film world has also something to do with his irrepressible youthfulness ([1] – 10).

Abbas says that his ancestor, Abu Ayb Ansari, was one of those who helped the Prophet Mohamed when he was forced to migrate from Mecca to Medina; that one of the descendants of Abu Ayub Ansari, named Khwaja Malik Ali, migrated from Afghanistan to India and was appointed Qazi of Panipat by Sultan Ghyasuddin Balban and given a jagir which comprised almost one-fourth of the land around Panipat; that the descendants of Malik Ali lost the lands in the course of the violent confusion of later times, ending in British supremacy that one of his ancestors, Mir Mohamed Husain, was a junior police official who always sympathised with the poor people and was therefore forced by the British to retire; that his grandfather Khwaja Ghulam Abbas was an overseer with British engineers and contractors, but was too honest to last long with them; that, in the run-up to the Mutiny of 1857, when the maulavies came to Panipat, 50 miles from Delhi, to harangue the people to a Jehad or holy war against the firanjees or British, Ghulam Abbas was stirred by their talk, but the women of the household prevented him from enlisting in the revolutionary force by marrying him to a girl; that, however, when the Mutiny failed and the British sent spies to ferret out revolutionaries hiding in Panipat, Ghulam Abbas saw to it that not one of them was caught; that the frustrated British arrested Ghulam Abbas and he would have probably been blown from the mouth of a cannon but for the intervention and plea of the entire town to the commanding British General; that another ancestor of his, Khwaja Altaf Husain, was a poet who wrote under the name of Hali and was a staunch advocate of English education; that Hali's son

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Sajad Husain was one of the first four graduates of the Anglo-Oriental College, which later became Aligarh Muslim University; that his grand-father Ghulam Abbas, heeding Hali's advice, sent all his sons to college; that his grandfather believed in and practiced social reform; and, that his father Ghulam-us-Sibtain married Masroora Khatoon, the daughter of Sajad Husain ([11] – 22).

Abbas states that his father was averse to the ostentation and expenditure accompanying all Indian marriages; that, when the women of the household, despite his father's known views embarked upon expensive preparation for the marriage of his father's orphaned niece, his father carried him, though he was only a few months old, to an empty house and barricaded himself in it; that he opened the door only after the women had promised on the Holy Quran that they would avoid all extravagance and ostentation in the marriage; that, in effect, he involuntarily offered satyagraha for eighteen hours and still carries scars of it in the form of certain medical disabilities; that, within months of his birth on 7 June 1914, the First World War broke out; and, that one of his earliest recollections is that of the water-vendors at the railway station selling Hindu Paani and Muslim Paani, the distinction that became the bane of India ([23] – 29).

Speaking of his primary school, Abbas digresses to narrate some legends about the Sufi saint Bu Ali Shah, since his school was located in a mausoleum attached to the saint's tomb; he observes that the legends relating to the Sufi saints are similar to those relating to the contemporary saints of the Bakti cult in other parts of India, for instance, Sant Tukaram; that Bu Ali Shah had both Muslim
and Hindu devotees whom he treated equally and with no distinction; that one of the legends indicates that he probably practised yoga; that, to him, such legends are just poetic parables with a symbolic significance and were the ancients way of teaching ethics; and, that his reformist father regarded the rituals associated with the annual Urus of Bu Ali Shah as un-Islamic ([30]-35).

Abbas relates that, in his childhood, he first wanted to be a railway engine driver, then the guard of a train and later a circus acrobat; that, after watching his first film, he became fascinated with the medium, but was disillusioned after seeing a roll of film; that, at a school inspection, he offended the British Inspector of Schools by speaking of Gandhiji's imprisonment by the British; that his father appreciated him for the gesture; that he hated being made to stand on the side of the highway in the blazing sun to watch the military might of the British Raj march by, as school children were forced to do everywhere; that, one day, his father confined him to a room for abusing a servant's son and would not let him be fed until he had apologized to the boy; and, that, with his father's enlightened views, he began to read newspapers even while still a schoolboy ([36]-44).

Abbas narrates that he first saw Gandhiji when the Mahatma came to Panipat after the Jallianwala Bagh massacre when he was six years old; that Gandhiji made such an impression on a neighbour, Grandmother Hakka, an old and poor weaver and a favourite story-teller and humorist with the young and the old, that she gave away all her ornaments when collections were made for the Swaraj Fund at the end of Gandhiji's speech; that, since Gandhiji's visit, she
became a devoted disciple of Gandhiji and aspirant for swaraj; and, that, the last piece of cloth she wove on her handloom was Khaddar shroud for herself ([44]-49).

Abbas recalls that the greatest influence on him in his adolescence was his first cousin, Saiyidain, whom he called Bhaijan; that Bhaijan's academic career was a series of triumphs; that he crowned it all by opting to become a teacher at the teachers' training college at Aligarh; that Bhaijan distinguished himself by opposing communal organisations and called upon Muslims to work together with the nationalists of other communities, opposing, in the process, such great figures as Jinnah; that it is to Bhaijan that he owes his secularism, humanism, intellectual curiosity and taste for literature, drama and the arts; that Bhaijan was passionately devoted to the cause of education; that, at the same time, he was not a pedantic snob, but had a delightfully infectious sense of humour; that his earliest literary compositions were corrected by Bhaijan; that, with his last breath, Bhaijan broadcast a moving appeal to Pakistan over the un-Islamic genocide in East Pakistan; that Bhaijan's death was mourned alike by Muslims and Hindus; and, that Bhaijan, as a teacher, made critical as well as creative contribution to the evolution of Mahatma Gandhi's scheme of basic education ([50]-56).

Abbas records that, in the middle school at Aligarh, playing a minor part in a play, he sensed the power of histrionic performance; that, while in the Intermediate College, he produced a handwritten paper, the exact name of which he cannot now recall; that he used to publish news of the class war erupting
everywhere, which was blacked out by the Lucknow-based Pioneer, but could be had from the Bombay Chronicle, which he got by post; that he and some other students regularly conducted social studies of the villages around Aligarh; that they did social service in these villages; that the Principal learnt of the handwritten paper and gently persuaded him to stop it; that, however, his interest in politics persisted and was heightened by the news of the murder of Sanders, the British police officer who had rained lathis on Lala Lajpat Rai, boldly carried out by some young men in Lahore and the throwing of a bomb in the Assembly by Bhagat Singh and B.K. Dutt; that Jawaharlal Nehru hoisted the flag of freedom at the Lahore session of the Congress in 1930; that he and other youngsters were much shaken by the hanging of Bhagat Singh on 25 March 1931, despite the fact that Gandhiji had signed the Delhi pact with the Viceroy, Lord Irwin; and, that he consoled himself by writing an article on what Bhagat Singh and his death meant to him (57-62).

Abbas says that, after passing his matriculation, he studied biology for an eventual medical career, in deference to his father's wishes, but gave it up as he could not bring himself to dissect animals; that he took up engineering next, only to be frustrated by mathematics; that he changed to the study of English history and logic; that he planned to become a journalist; that, during his freshman year at the university, he cultivated pen friends and became the correspondent of newspapers for the university; that the university uniform made it difficult to adopt khaddar, but that students overcame the difficulty very cleverly; and, that he and his friends engaged in several mischievous pranks,
including regular midnight visits to the railway station to catch a glimpse of some fair face or two (63-67).

Abbas relates that, after appearing for his B.A. examination, while waiting for his results in Delhi, he was tempted to try his luck in journalism with J.N. Sahni's newspaper the National Call; that his father was against a career in journalism and suggested that he study law; that Sahni allowed him to work as an unpaid apprentice during the holidays; that he learnt reporting, sub-editing and writing, working about twelve hours a day; that he was one of the first people to read Jawaharlal Nehru's long article, Whither India, which became his controversial "manifesto of socialism" and concretized what many Indian youngsters vaguely thought and felt; and, that, at the end of three months, having passed the B.A. Examination, he had to go sadly to Aligarh to study law (68-73).

Abbas reports that he returned to Aligarh in October 1933 to study law; that he had many friends; that he and some friends launched an independent weekly called the Aligarh Opinion to provide news about nationalist activities and fight communalism which was spreading, thanks to official British patronage; that it involved a lot of writing, cycling and other work for him; that he once shamed a known communalist stooge of the British, Sir Mohamed Yaqoob by asking a long nationalist question which actually denounced the British White Paper on constitutional reforms, which the man had acclaimed on communal grounds; and dramatically tore a copy of the White Paper to pieces; that this incident was already printed in the National Call, of Delhi; because they had already planted
it as was their occasional habit; that the news was also published in the *Aligarh Opinion*; that he was summoned by the British Pro-Vice-Chancellor and threatened with expulsion; that he responded by saying that he would welcome it; that the Vice-Chancellor, Sir Ross Masood, on the contrary, received him warmly and introduced him to the famous American author, Louis Bromfield, who wanted to meet some nationalist students for a new novel; that Sir Masood told him that he could continue at Aligarh and also continue to publish the *Aligarh Opinion* provided he supplied a free copy to the Vice-Chancellor; that, when he went to Panipat for the Christmas vacation he found that he was being trailed by a policeman on instructions from the Deputy Commissioner at Karnal, the district headquarters; that meeting with the Deputy Commissioner ended the C.I.D. surveillance in Panipat; but that the U.P. Government and the Central Government still suspected him; that, as a result, he could not get a passport to go to Afghanistan with his fellow-students on a trip; and, that it was all because he was suspected of communist leanings ([74]-85).

Abbas says that he saw Jawaharlal Nehru in a newsreel and fell in love with him at first sight; that it was largely because of Nehru's youthful appearance and dynamism; that the presidential address delivered by Nehru at the Lahore session of the Congress became the Bible of the youth of India; that it was a challenge, not only to imperialism, but also to its two allies, the Indian capitalists and the absentee landlords; that, one day, he and his friends managed to get into the railway compartment by which Nehru was travelling and talked with him till the next station; that Nehru told them that they could bring about a revolution in the country only by bringing about a revolution in their minds, which, in turn, would
be possible only if they insisted on asking questions without believing anything, whatever its source; that Nehru advised them to observe history in the making, instead of merely studying past history and to visit villages around the university and ask the villagers questions about their life; that Nehru wrote "Live Dangerously" in his auto-graph book; that he had occasionally written to Nehru since the age of fifteen and that Nehru had replied to him; that the students at last got Nehru to address them at Aligarh, though the Vice-Chancellor made Nehru his guest and isolated him from the students; that Nehru exhorted the students to dream, but in relation to reality; that he denounced fascist Italy and Hitler's Germany, but praised Communist Russia; that he called on the students to join the course of the freedom struggle; and, that speech influenced him greatly ([86]-96).

Abbas records that he went to Bombay in 1934 to work temporarily with the Bombay Chronicle, along with his friend Ansar Harvani; that they lived poorly in a chawl and worked long hours, living frugally on their slender means; that one day, he shared a breakfast table with Nehru at the house of the editor, Breivi, where Nehru ate non-vegetarian food, probably to show off his unorthodoxy and rationalism; that he and Harvani stayed on to witness the Congress session in Bombay in October; and, that he attended the inaugural session of the Congress Socialist Party which was held there at that time ([97]-105).

Abbas says that, in his second year in LL.B, his life was dominated by a girl called Jehan Ara, with no parentage and no residence except his; that they were very close; that he wrote a long letter to newspapers in her name,
pleading for opportunity for higher education for Muslim women beyond the Intermediate class by opening degree classes; that many liberal-mined men supported the demand; that, in the furore the article created, he also pleaded for discarding the purdah; that he went on a month-long all-India trip on the U.P. Universities debating team; that he always enriched his speeches with some local colour; and that, like all young men, while at Aligarh, he eyed women, stole from the dining car of passing trains, and vandalised symbols of imperialism (106-16).

Abbas reports that, as he left Delhi for Bombay at the end of his education, he was an agnostic; that the poetry in religion appealed to him, but not the outward manifestation of religious differences; that communalism, the intrusion of religion in politics, was anathema to him; that, influenced by Nehru's Autobiography, he secretly resolved to battle against Muslim communalism; that several influences moulded him, that he was convinced that capitalism did not originate in the west, but in the greed of the Indian trader class; that, reaching Bombay, in the first three months, he nearly drove himself crazy working for the Bombay Chronicle at poor rates; that he never looked for any other avenues of employment despite the uncertainties; that, at the end of three months, Brelvi ended the uncertainty by appointing him on fifty rupees a month; and, that he was elated at this turn of events (117-24).

Abbas says that, as he became a member of the regular staff of the Bombay Chronicle, the world saw the rise of fascism in Italy, Germany and Japan; that Nehru, despite his wife's serious illness, participated in political conferences with leaders of anti-fascist forces, and explained nationalist India's stand; that
Nehru's wife died; that Nehru, on his way back to India, refused to see Mussolini, the butcher of Abyssinia, that Nehru blessed the All-India progressive Writers Conference at the Lucknow session of the Congress; that the printed material received about the Progressive Writers struck a responsive chord in him; and that the Progressive Writers Movement became his home, his school, his workshop and his library and its members his friends and comrades (125-29).

Abbas records that, being hard up for money, he thought of writing film publicity for some studios; that after some initial rebuffs, he got a good contract to write film publicity part-time; that he was moved by the adoption, in 1936, of the new Constitution of the U.S.S.R., representing the flood tide of socialist thought and Communist ideology in the world; that the abdication of King Edward VIII of Britain for the love of a woman also stirred progressives and the youth; particularly because of rumours that the King had socialist leanings; that the Socialist Congress Party, at the Faizpur session of the Congress, declared the solidarity of the Indian people with the people of the U.S.S.R.; that Nehru, in his presidential address, refused Indian support for Britain's war effort and assured the Spanish people of solidarity with them in their struggle for liberty against fascist forces; that he started making money by writing short stories and articles for newspapers so as to be able to go abroad; that, at last, in 1938, he got a passport valid for all countries except the U.S.S.R.; and, that, after he had bought a ticket for a round-the-world trip, his bank crashed and his savings disappeared (129–36).
Abbas reports that he travelled by steamer via Colombo, Singapore and Hong Kong; that there were people of several nationalities on board; that the Chinese nationals dominated over the others; that Shanghai, in 1938, not only had an international settlement, but also a real international citizenry; that Shanghai was then the world's leading city of sin; that he met many journalists of note in Shanghai; that he carried anti-Japanese newspapers and posters into Japanese territory by using them as wrappers for shoes and other things; that, reaching Kobe from Nagasaki, he witnessed relief work going on in the flooded city, with Japanese volunteering in thousands; that he saw how easily Indians in Japan were influenced by the fascist and militarist propaganda of the Japanese; that he saw how industrious the Japanese were; and, that he reached America via Canada ([137]-48).

Abbas says that his first impression of America was quite shocking; that he was greeted by a bedraggled American correspondent in Seattle; that he saw crippled ex-soldiers begging in the streets by the traditional method of selling matches and slum children with hollowed cheeks working as shoe shine boys; that he was impressed by the natural wealth and the scenic beauty of America; that anti-Communism was strong in America; that he visited many Hollywood studios; that, in a radio talk, he criticised the anti-Indian posture of many Hollywood films; that he met Upton Sinclair, one of his favourite authors, who resembled Gandhiji in many respects; that anti-fascism was so strong in Hollywood that Mussolini's son, Vittorio Mussolini, had to leave without completing the fascist film which he had come to produce; that he participated in the youth rally in New York and in the Poughkeepsie Youth Congress for Peace at Vassar
College for nine days; that, at the Conference, he declared that the greatest threat to peace was from imperialism; that he had his first introduction to yoga in Los Angeles, where he found half a dozen swamis "busy saving the souls of Americans"; that, in New York, he met a man who "seemed to think that yoga could be made into a business proposition"; that there were signs of impending change in the Negro situation; and, that he repeated his earlier notion that imperialism was at the base of all forms of injustice ([249]-158).

Abbas relates that, on his voyage across the Atlantic, amongst rumors of the commencement of World War II, the American writer, Ernest Hemingway, was his fellow-passenger and spoke much about the Spanish civil war, but refused to speak about literature; that, when they reached Paris, the city was coming under war tension; that, however, Hitler’s much-awaited speech held no threat of war, thereby relieving the tension; that Paris was a paradox; that he went on to Geneva and was disgusted at the callous conduct of the delegates to the League of Nations; and, that he met Jawaharlal Nehru there ([160]-65).

Abbas adds that he went on to Milan, the hypocritical showpiece of Italy, and Venice, in all its poverty; that he had to rush back to Paris, as the borders were likely to be closed at any moment; that he went on to London; that, like everyone in London, he got a gas mask; that he was surprised at the lack of reaction in Britain to the annexation of Czechoslovakia by Germany; that there were fascists in Britain too, who were opposed to the Communists and the Jews and who called Hitler a lover of peace; and, that he met the socialist and pacifist Ethel Mannin ([166]-71).
Abbas recalls that, before leaving India, hearing that Nehru was contemplating a European trip, he had tried to go along as his secretary, but had failed; that he could only get invited by Yusuf Meharally to attend an anti-fascist youth congress in New York, but with Nehru’s suggestion that he could return via Europe and meet Nehru there; that, meeting Nehru in a lift at the League of Nations in Geneva, he got an appointment to meet Nehru later in the day; that he reported to Nehru about the Poughkeepsie Conference and was commended for his part in it; that Nehru deplored the French policy of non-intervention in the Spanish civil war; that Nehru received the first copy of the National Herald from India, which carried an article Abbas had sent from Paris about the war scare in Europe; that he had dinner with Nehru and the host family, the Zilliacuses; and, that, after the dinner, Nehru and the Zilliacuses drove him to his hotel and left him there, moved to tears ([172]-78).

Abbas says that, taking his cue from Hitler’s famous phrase “Drang Nach Osten” (the drive to the East), he decided to move East, despite warnings by friends, because adventure always called him; that, he entered Germany by train and encountered his first Nazi greeting of “Heil Hitler”; that, at Munich, he met a group of Pro-Nazi Indian students; that, on his way out of Germany, he visited occupied Vienna and saw anti-Semitism in action; that he visited Budapest and found that Hungary, like India, was a land “of landlords and landless peasants, of feudal luxury and appalling poverty”; that he saw that Hungary was very much under the influence of Italy and Germany; that Rumania, with its wheat fields, resembled Punjab, that the peasants were poor and ill-clad.
in Rumania; that the Rumanian wheat and the Rumanian oil wells seemed to be enough temptations for Hitler; that he went on to Istanbul when the Turks were mourning the death of Kemal Ataturk, the father of modern Turkey, with its secularism and Latin script; that he met an Indian named Mahmud who had long ago moved to Turkey and become a Turkish citizen; that the Turkish capital, Ankara, was a modern city, and life there was equally modern; that he travelled by train into Syria; that he travelled by road where there was no railway and crossed into Iraq; that he resumed railway travel where the railway began again; that Baghdad was a dusty town; that, being nearly at the end of his monetary resources, he took a train to Basrah; and, that he boarded a ship at Basrah for Karachi, travelling deck class ([179]-94).

Abbas says that, upon his return to India, he was confirmed as a film critic of the Bombay Chronicle; a position he held for three years; that the editor allowed him absolute freedom only advising him to use abstruse words when he wanted to be very critical; that he saw some three hundred Indian and foreign films a year; that some producers complained about his reviews; that he then wrote a seven-column review of Shantaram's famous masterpiece, Admi, praising Shantaram sky-high; that Shantaram thanked him in a letter and suggested a meeting; that they met and became friends; that Baburao Patil asked him to contribute to his magazine Filmindia; that he and Patil carried on a campaign against anti-Indian films; that some other writers joined them and that they formed the first Film Journalists Association with Patil as the President; that a reader called Sathe protested in a letter that he was partial to Shantaram, but soon became a lifelong friend and a collaborator in writing film-scripts; tht he
wrote a first editorial of Shantaram’s Padosi for the Bombay Chronicle because its theme was emotional integration and national unity; that he achieved his ambition of publishing a film review on the first page of the Bombay Chronicle with the film The Great Dictator, starring Charlie Chaplain; that the Indian Communists seemed eager to justify whatever the soviet Union did, as when Russia entered into a ten-year non-aggression pact with Germany; that the Viceroy of the India declared India to be at war without consulting a single Indian leader; and, that, at this dramatic turning point in the history of India and the world, it seemed ridiculous for him to be reviewing films (195-206).

Abbas narrates that a group of Muslims once tried in vain to entice him to start a magazine like Filmindia with a lakh of rupees, since they felt that Filmindia was pursuing a pro-Hindu policy; that a veteran producer once tried to bribe him with three thousand rupees for a story; that he started a lifelong friendship with N.G. Jog when he found that the latter had no communal prejudices; that he advised Jog not to convert to Islam just in order to marry his cousin, but find a country where cousins were permitted to marry; that he was tempted with the post of film critic of the Times of India at a salary four times what he was getting at the Bombay Chronicle and declined the offer, not only because his politics differed from that of the Times of India but also because trade union ethics forbade him to take a job which was being taken away from a colleague, in this case Clare Mendonca; that film producers were so enraged by his reviews that they threatened to stop all advertisements from the Bombay Chronicle; and, that the proprietor was so alarmed at the threat that the editor kicked him upstairs, making him assistant editor of the Sunday edition of the newspaper (205-16).
Abbas relates that, as part of his and Jog's efforts to give a face-lift to the Sunday edition of the Bombay Chronicle, he began to write the celebrated "last Page", first in collaboration and then all by himself; that, when the "Last Page" moved to the Blitz in 1947, the pseudonym of "Chronicler" was replaced by his own name; that, after setting the Bombay Chronicle Weekly on its course, the thought of scenario-writing for films in his spare time; that he wrote the screenplay and the dialogue for the film Naya Sansar, which became a Silver Jubilee hit; that the success brought him the friendship of Inder Raj Anand; that he was one of the first members of the Bombay branch of the Progressive Writers Association; and, that he was one of the founders of the Indian People's Theatre ([217]-29).

Abbas narrates that his father suffered a stroke and was admitted to a hospital; that, when he went to the hospital, his father was all praise and gratitude to the nurses; that his father asked him to look into the last page of the accounts book listing the loans given to several people and then tear it to pieces; that his father died soon after that; that he covered the failure of the Cripps mission on his way back from his father’s funeral at Panipat; that the people's theatre movement convinced him of the need to use histrionics for the entertainment, instruction and inspiration of the masses; that the movement spread all over the country and helped to revitalise several local cultural art forms; that the untimely death of his youngest sister Zehra shook him terribly; that he thought of joining the non-violent struggle for freedom and courting imprisonment to lift the depression from his life and give him a purpose and direction in life; that he discovered that
many of his colleagues were also of the same mind; that Gandhiji, through Brelvi, commanded that no journalist should leave his post and court imprisonment; that he became busy covering the 1942 session of the Congress which passed the historic Quit India resolution; that, early in the morning of the next day, Gandhiji and all the other leaders of the Congress were arrested; that he alerted Bill Fisher of *Time* about the developments and Bill was the only foreign correspondent to get the story past the censors; that the story was printed in an issue of *Time* carrying Nehru's portrait on the cover; that the issue was not allowed into India; that a protest meeting was announced for the evening, to be addressed by Kasturba Gandhi at Shivaji park; that the police mustered all their strength and used every tactic to prevent the meeting; that Katurba did address a meeting and was arrested; and, that he was injured in the lathi charge and given first aid by a Hindu matron ([230]-45).

Abbas reports that, towards the end of 1942, he married his cousin Mujtabai Khatoon (Muji) in a simple ceremony at Panipat, with his best friend Sathe in attendance; that, returning to Bombay, he completed his play *Zubaidah*; that participated in the activities of the underground Congress Radio, broadcasting new bulletins; that he interviewed D.C. Joshi, the famous Communist, for his "Last Page"; that he wrote in his "Last Page" about the death of Dr. Dwarakanath Kotnis, a member of the Congress Medical Mission sent to China by Nehru; that, later, he wrote a book on the medical mission and Dr. Kotnis; and, that he and Sathe wrote a screenplay for *Shantaram* for his famous film on Dr. Kotnis ([246]-59).
Abbas relates that he travelled thousands of miles to see Lin Yutang, who was visiting India and was one of his favourite authors; that Lin Yutang himself went to Allahabad to pay his respects to the spirit of Nehru who was unapproachable behind prison bars; that he found Lin Yutang to be a simple man but a great intellectual, always relaxed; that Lin Yutang obliged him with a preface to his book on Dr. Kotnis; that he saw Indira and Feroze Gandhi at Allahabad railway station; that Indira Gandhiji invited him to spend the night at the Nehru mansion, Anand Bhawan, along with Lin Yutang and he accepted the invitation; and, that they were all treated to a Manipuri dance by Indira Gandhi's cousin, Nayantara ([260]-63).

Abbas says that, in late 1943 or early 1944, he visited Calcutta in the midst of its notorious famine and saw the horror of the human suffering it caused; that such hunger existed side by side with luxury hotels; that the horror produced a tribe of ferocious and hate-filled angry young-sters, the future Naxalites; that the sensitive middle class intelligentsia became acutely aware of the issues involved in the tragedy, as reflected in the plays Nav-Anna (The New Harvest), and Antim Abilasha (His Last Desire) and Krishan Chander's immortal story Anna Datta (The Bread Giver), that all these three went into the screenplay of Dharti Ke Lal the film he later made about the Bengal famine; that he covered the political talks taking place in Simla; that the People's Theatre produced the film Dharti ke Lal under difficult circumstances, with him as producer director; that the film touched leaders and journalists when exhibited at Simla during the visit of the Cabinet Mission; and, that the film was an artistic success ([264]-75).
Abbas records that, from the close of 1945 to August 1947, Bombay was rocked by communal riots, generated by fear and dividing the city into Hindu Bombay and Muslim Bombay; that he saw a Hindu stabbing to death another Hindu, mistaking him for a Muslim because of his dress and then realizing his mistake; that he saw similar riots in Punjab; that, on 3 June 1947, the proposed partitioning of India was officially announced over the radio by Mountbatten, Nehru, Jinnah and Baldev Singh; that, in his next installment of his regular column, “Last Page”, he held Britain and the communalists guilty of the killing of India; that, as Independence approached, the riots were replaced by massacres and mass murders; that his cousin’s family in Delhi was saved by an old Sardarji when the RSS boys came to slaughter them; that, in a meeting of a local self-defense committee, he came face to face with the ugliness of communal mistrust; that he succeeded in bringing about reconciliation between his predominantly Hindu locality and the neighbouring predominantly Muslim locality after a period of mutual mistrust and suspicion; that the experiment led to a massive procession for harmony and cordiality between the two communities all over Bombay; that, on 15 August 1947, he joined the joyful crowd celebrating the dawn of Independence; and, that, later that day, returning home, he saw a telegram from Panipat saying that his family was in danger there and required help to reach Bombay ([276]-92).

Abbas says that he was not happy with the compromises that Nehru had made, like agreeing to partition and asking Mountbatten to stay on as Governor-General of India; that, amidst all the madness, Gandhiji showed his humanity and Nehru his courage; that he sent Nehru a long wire about the predicament of
his family in Panipat; that, after a week, he received a letter from his mother saying that the family was safe in Delhi thanks to Nehru's help; that his friend Manmohan went to Delhi and arranged the departure of his family to Bombay by air; that he thanked Nehru through a long letter; that he decided to bring back from Pakistan at least some intellectuals who belonged to Indian areas but had been somehow persuaded to migrate to Pakistan; that, though he had left the *Bombay Chronicle* and moved to *Blitz*, when Gandhiji was assassinated, he found himself working at the office of the *Bombay Chronicle*, updating an obituary on Gandhiji prepared three years earlier when it was feared that he would die of fasting; that it was Maharaja Hari Singh's dillydallying, bargaining with both India and Pakistan, that led to the problem of Kashmir; that he went to Kashmir by special permission by plane; that he met a group of writers in Kashmir and visited various battle fronts; that he told D.P. Dhar that, if a plebiscite was to be held in Kashmir, it should be done soon because the people were largely against Pakistan right then; that he said so to Shaik Abdullah, who, however, left it to Nehru to decide on the question; and, that Nehru insisted that a plebiscite would be held only after peace had been restored in Kashmir as he had said before and he would not break his word ([292]-311).

Abbas recalls that his writings agitated Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs in turn; that his story *Sardari* was patently misinterpreted in some circles to be anti-Sikh; that he was accused of being a Muslim Leaguer; that communal organisations of Hindu and Sikhs passed resolutions against him; that enlightened and reasonable Sikhs perceived the truth; that an army of progressive writers lined up to defend him; that Mrs. Naidu said that the story was misunderstood because of a lack of
sense of humour; that the old man who had been responsible for a legal case, after listening to a reading of the whole story, embraced and kissed him and withdraw his complaint; and, that he was finally indicated when Khushwant Singh included an English rendering of the story in a Collection of Punjabi short stories ([312]-28).

Abbas says that he is often described as a communist or at least a fellow traveller by many people but not by the Communists themselves; that, actually, he was even expelled from the Progressive Writers Association and the Indian People's Theatre Association; that any association with him was frowned upon by the Communists; that the Communists denounced him for his preface to a humanist novel by Ramanand Sagar; that the Union Home Minister, Morarji Desai, considered him a Communist; that Nehru did not consider him a Communist; that he admires the sincerity, the single-mindedness and objectivity of the Communists, but will not join the Communist Party because he is not prepared to sell his intelligence and his conscience to the collective wisdom of the Party; that, though he is a Marxist he believes more in science than in Marxism; and, that, several years later, when the Communist Party of India made a somersault, he was readmitted to the progressive group ([329]-37).

Abbas narrates that he was selected member of a goodwill delegation to visit China and was overjoyed, as he had always longed to visit Russia and China; that, however, Morarji Desai had his passport cancelled; that he appealed by telegram to Nehru and got his passport; that he went to Delhi and met Nehru, who was keenly interested in the revolution going on in China; that he
was treated as a V.I.P. at Hong Kong airport thanks to the influence of the Government of China; that the barrier at the border between Hong Kong and China was specially opened for him by the commander of the British garrison; that he was transported by a special train to Canton; that, since his train had arrived too early, he had to wait for the reception committee to assemble and receive him; that, after the reception, he was taken to a hotel where he received princely hospitality; that he was flown by a military plane to Peking; that he participated in the grand banquet given by Mao Tse-tung and shook hands with the legendary leader; that peasants and workers shared Mao's table at the banquet; that he witnessed the six-hour-long parade to celebrate the second anniversary of the People's Republic; that he was impressed by the strict discipline observed all over China though he was also troubled about the possibility of a new cult of personality ([338]-50).

Abbas relates that he and Karanjia interviewed Madame Sun Yat-sen, who professed friendship with India; that Chou En-lai professed peace and mutual respect towards China's neighbours, swore by a total socialist economy, denied all imperialist designs, and, vowed that China would never start aggression against others; that he interviewed an old female revolutionary who reported that Chairman Mao had talked to her at length about Indo-Chinese friendship; that he found the Chinese to be prosperous, when compared to Indians; that all the people attributed their prosperity to Chairmen Mao and the Communist party of China; and, that the whole Indian delegation received the impression that "the Chinese were modest, liberal, tolerant and intelligent revolutionaries who were grateful to the Soviet Union, and who were anxious to befriend India" ([351]-59).
Abbas records that, after his return from China, he found himself at a loose end; that he was tired of politics, even disillusioned with Nehru, who, he felt, had forgotten his earlier progressive and socialist pledges; that he wrote a series in Blitz called “Jawahar Writes to Nehru” about his feeling; that he wrote a story on his favourite theme of heredity versus environment, which was filmed as Awara; that, when it was premiered, the people from the industry received it as a flop; that, however, the next day, it turned out to be a popular hit; that he wrote another story on the same theme and directed and produced Anhonee, which was a moderate success; that he filmed Mulk Raj Anand’s novel Two Leaves and a Bud; that the British planters agitated against the film and wanted the Prime Minister to ban it in India, but that Nehru refused to oblige them; that the film lost him money; that his next film Munna was not a great success, but was regarded as good for children by some Bombay educationists; that, therefore, he wrote to Nehru about the film; that Nehru wrote to him to bring the film to Delhi and screen it at the Rashtrapati Bhawan; that Nehru enjoyed the film and invited the whole of his group for breakfast the next day; and, that Nehru sent a letter praising the film ([360]-71).

Abbas says that the film Awara, for which he wrote the story, the screenplay and the dialogue, was a hit in the Soviet Union when it was dubbed as Bodaya; that, in 1954, he led the first film delegation to the USSR; that the members of the delegation were welcomed everywhere as citizens of the country of Nehru, the man of peace; that the screening of Awara raised raves of admiration and made the Russians crazy; that the Russians paid him a fat
Abbas relates that, for the next three years he was very much involved with the Soviet Union, particularly because of the co-production of Pardesi by Mosofilm Studio of Moscow and Naya Sansar of Bombay; that Jawaharlal Nehru and the Russian translation of Nehru's Autobiography were very popular in the Soviet Union; that his own novel Sein Indie was also popular in the Soviet Union; that, learning of his wife's cardiac asthma, his hosts sent them to a sanatorium in Crimea; that Nehru helped him to get a state loan to produce the film; that Nehru appreciated the film when he saw it; that nasty questions were asked in Parliament about the loan; that a crook tried to borrow a photograph of Nehru and himself for some corrupt purpose; and, that he refused to part with the photograph ([386]-400).

Abbas narrates that he planned his next film, Char Dil Char Rahen, with the famous Meena Kumari playing the lead role of the Harijan girl Chavli; that Meena Kumari was extremely cooperative during the production; that it was declared that his wife must undergo heart surgery; that, as she left for the hospital to undergo surgery, she hinted that she might not come back home; that she became a very popular patient of the general ward during her pre-surgery stay; that, on the eve of the surgery, she asked him to go home and write a letter to her so that she could read it before she became unconscious; that he wrote a very reassuring letter and delivered it to her in the morning; that the surgery
performed by Dr. Sen was success; that the period he spent in the hospital revealed to him the sorry state of medicare in India and prompted him to write about it; that his wife insisted that she be called Sonya after her virtual rebirth; that, six weeks after the surgery, she was shifted to a nursing home for rest and recuperation; that, a few days later, she suffered an attack of influenza, which developed into pneumonia; that, after a few days, she died; and, that, for that week's issue of *Blitz*, he wrote about her battle for life in his regular column "Last Page" ([401]-18).

Abbas relates that, when he started shooting his film *Shehar aur Sapna*, Dharmendra came to him asking for a role, but he could not oblige him because he had already fixed Dilip Raj for the leading role; that Dharmendra left saying that he would one day act in a film of his; that, however, when he later offered him a lead role in a film by sending him a story, Dharmendra returned it with apologies and without reading it; that the film distributors saw no market value in the story; that, when his resources were exhausted, the film had to be stopped because the Film Finance Corporation refused to give the much awaited loan; that he campaigned for Krishna Menon against Kripalani, though he had no liking for Krishna Menon but was sufficiently against the parties of the right; that once he was wrongly dropped at a meeting of the Jana Sangh, and, by their leave, spoke for Krishna Menon, denouncing all parochial elements including the Muslim League; that Krishna Menon won the election; that Satyajit Ray on a visit to Bombay, saw the incomplete *Shehar aur Sapna* and appreciated it; that, encouraged by this, he raised money through loans from friends; that the members of his unit undertook to expect no payment till the film was completed.
and sold; that, when the film was ready at last, there were no buyers; that his hope of winning a state award for the film was frustrated by jealousies and animosities; that Prime Minister Nehru informed him that he could interview Shaik Abdullah who was being held in Jammu; that Shaik Abdullah asserted that he had never betrayed India and would never do so; that Shaik Abdullah was saddened by Nehru believing Bakshi Ghulam Mohamed's report that Shaik Abdullah was a traitor; that Shaik Abdullah said that he could not play any role in national politics until he was cleared off the charge of treason; that Nehru's face brightened upon reading his report; that on Nehru's advice, he delivered a copy of his report to Shastri, who had been entrusted with additional responsibility because of Nehru's indisposition; that, upon Shastri's query, he said that it would not be very dangerous to release Shaik Abdullah; that, in less than a week, Sahik Abdullah was unconditionally released; that, consequent upon his representation to the Chairman of the Film Awards Committee, his film Shehar aur Sapna was specially sent for and viewed; that the film won the gold medal for that year; that hardly any member of the film industry took note of the achievement at first; that, going to Delhi for the awards ceremony, he called on Nehru, who was very ill, and told him of the award and obtained an invitation for his unit to call on the Prime Minister the day after the awards ceremony; that on the day of the award, Nehru came to present the award though he was deemed to be too ill to do so; and, that, the next day, the whole unit called on Nehru to receive his blessings ([419]-43).
Abbas recalls that, early in the morning of 27 May 1964, R.K. Karanjia, the editor of Blitz, told him that Nehru had a second stroke and summoned him to the office of the newspaper at once; that he rushed to the Blitz office and got to work on the proposed report on Nehru's demise entitled "Nehru Lives"; and, that, at one minute past 2 p.m., the teleprinter announced that Nehru was dead ([444]-45). Abbas eulogises;

At 2 p.m. on Wednesday, 27 May 1964, each one of us, four hundred and fifty million Indians, died, as the great - hearted Jawaharal Nehru, who was the heart of the nation, breathed his last, A solemn hush of silence descended on the nation. The farmer in the field, the worker in the factory, the clerk in the office, the housewives at their hearths, the children in schools- each and everyone felt the sudden chilly spasm of death, "Who Lives If Nehru Dies?" (446).

Abbas declares that Nehru lives on in the waters of the Bhakra Dam and in the din and bustle of the steel plants at Bhilai, Durgapur and Rourkela; that Nehru was not just an able successor of Gandhiji, but a rebellious and radical leader in his own right; that it was Nehru who projected the national movement in a new dynamic and revolutionary idiom, that it was Nehru who laid the foundation of socialist India; that Nehru was chiefly responsible for India's planned economy, state-owned heavy industry and modern mechanized agriculture; that Nehru was equally and genuinely opposed to imperialism, Nazism and Fascism; that Nehru consistently and staunchly supported peaceful coexistence and independence for the colonized peoples of Africa and Asia; and, that Nehru
did have some defects like gentlemanliness, gullibility, loyalty, partiality for the smarter and modern-minded princes, tolerance, all to such a degree that they militated against Nehru himself (446–52).

Abbas records that the Government of India entered his film Shehar aur Sapna at the Karlovy Vary Festival, where it was appreciated; that, in order to fulfill a promise he had made to Nehru to make a film for children on the theme of national integration, he produced Hamara Ghar; that he had a tough time with the thirteen children who acted in Hamara Ghar because they were thirteen little devils; that, however he could not help becoming fond of them; that, when the film was completed, he was quite sure that it would win the Prime Minister’s gold medal; that, however, the Committee even refused to recognize it as a children’s film; that he served as a member of the jury that spotted the talent of the documentarist Sukhdev Singh; that Indira Gandhi was effective and impressive as India’s Minister for Information and Broadcasting, at least in matters relating to the film industry; that Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri greatly enjoyed seeing the film Hamara Ghar; that Shastri felt lonely without his friend, philosopher and guide Jawaharlal Nehru; that Shastri subscribed to all the policies of Nehru and wished to continue them, including secularism and Hindu–Muslim unity; that Shastri admired the courage and the patriotism of the Soviet people; that Hamara Ghar was financially a failure, but won a prize at the International Festival of Children’s Films in Czechoslovakia and also in Spain and the U.S.A.; and, that his next film Aasman Mahal promised to be a hit but turned out to be an utter flop ((453]-70).
Abbas relates that he went to Berlin to serve on the jury of the Berlin Film Festival; that, while in Berlin, he wrote the script of *Bombai Raat Ki Bahon Mein*; that the film, when completed, was admired by his friends, but did not enthuse the distributors; that he served on the Khosla Committee on Censorship; that he clashed with the Chairman over political censorship; that he produced a film called *Char Shehar Ek Kahani* to prove his point that political censorship did exist; that he refused to make the minor cuts demanded by the Board of Censors; that he created a situation which made it impressive for the film to be screened before the Judges of the Supreme Court; and, that the Supreme Court held that the Government should give clear guidelines on censorship ([471]-81).

Abbas records how the famous Amitab Bachchan came to act in films; he was looking for a tall young man to play the role of the Muslim boy in his film *Saat Hindustani*, when Amitab arrived from Calcutta, having resigned a good job; that Amitab was quite willing to play the role; that he first got the permission of Amitab's father, who was a friend; that the story that Amitab got the role because of the recommendation of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi was not at all true; and, that the picture won the award for national integration ([482]-91).

Abbas records that his friend Inder Raj Anand suffered a heart attack in March 1974, but recovered; that he took him to the Finance Minister, T.T. Krishnamachari, to obtain foreign exchange to go to Beirut and New York to do research on Kalil Gibran, his favourite subject; that he spoke to Krishnamachari and Prime Minister Shastri about the water scarcity on the Indo-Pak border in Rajasthan; that Shastri then suggested to him to make a film on the great human
drama of the Rajasthan Canal which was being built to quench the thirst of Rajasthan; that this later became the subject of Do Boond Pani; that, while preparing to shoot the film in the desert, he lost his way at night and almost crossed into Pakistan; that Amitabh Bachchan refused to play the role of the tall engineer in the film and so Kiran Kumar was given the role; that, commercially, the film was a flop, and, that the film won the national award for national integration (495-508).

Abbas provides rather exaggerated accounts of some travel accidents in his life (509-16).

Abbas ridicules the obsession of Americans, especially American ladies, with fads, cults, gurus and yoga; he questions the spirituality and mysticism of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh; he admits the humanitarian traits of Baba Muktananda of Vajreshwari Ashram, but asks why only rich people gravitate to him (517-26).

Abbas describes three visits he made to Pakistan, two in Air-transit and one to attend the marriage of his niece from Pakistan to his nephew from India and how during the third visit, he addressed Karachi journalists and called for closer and friendly relations between the peoples of Pakistan and India (527-35).

Abbas gives a rather light-hearted account of his fracturing his left at the time of the National Emergency and then suffering a paralytic stroke. While describing the latter, however, he refers to a vision he had of Bu Ali Shah Qalandar, Guru Nanak and Baba Muktananda and wonders what or who cured
him. Finally he declares that the only conclusion he could reach was that he was involved in mankind and main kind was involved in him ([536]-42).

As a work of literature, Abbas's I Am Not an Island is not a great piece. Its orientation is predominantly ideological. Abbas seems bent upon projecting himself as a humanitarian and a progressive thinker. At the same time, he wishes to emphasise that he is not a Communist. The reader is perplexed by Abbas's extraordinary infatuation with the Soviet Union and China, his CIA fixation, and, his compulsive reiteration of the fact that he is a teetotaler. On the whole, the autobiography is too egotistical even for an autobiography. His observations on men and matters are often flippant, except in the case of Jawaharlal Nehru. The publisher's claim in the blurb that Abbas describes "his journey into the interior of his country - and his people" is not borne out. There are very few reflections on events and issues and those made available are mostly partial. Sometimes the autobiography dishes out trivia that can be of no interest to the reader.

The autobiography can boast of no great literary merit. There is hardly a memorable passage, excepting Abbas's eulogy on Jawaharlal Nehru (446). There is hardly any attempt at literary embellishment. Abbas seems to have composed his autobiography with the same dispatch with which he dashed off his weekly column "Last Page" for Blitz. The language has an easy flow, but it is the flow characteristic of journalese. Hemendra Singh Chandalia, in Ethos of Khwaja Ahmad Abbas: A Study in Social Realism, states that Abbas was aware of the criticism that his style was journalistic, but, "instead of attempting
any clarification or planning a counter attack he accepted the charge and asserted that journalism and literature are not watertight compartments" (244). However, it must be pointed out that Abbas's style, which is appropriate in a play like his Barrister at Law: A Play about the Early Life of Mahatma Gandhi, written in collaboration with the Gujarati dramatist Pragji Dossa, does not quite suit an autobiography. Abbas's language in his autobiography is occasionally marred by infelicities of grammar and diction and by several errors of spelling in the printing.