PREFACE

The literary scene the world over is fast changing, or rather has changed since the 1970's with new critical theories offering new approaches to understanding literary texts. The post-colonial and the post-Structuralist orientations have uprooted the long practised and existing literary conventions and questioned the literary hierarchies resulting in reordering of canonical literature. The shift therefore has been from mega genres such as poetry, drama, fiction to other forms of writing. The travelogue, biography and autobiography among others, have gained in literary status and moved up the ladder of literary hierarchy. This is borne out by the fact that several monographs and books have been published in recent years on the art of autobiography. In his book *The Language of Autobiography* John Strurrock (1993) mentions the fact that a certain scholar read hundreds of autobiographies to write a theory of autobiography. Therefore we may imply that over the centuries hundreds of autobiographies have been written and it is only in recent times that they received critical attention.

In India comparatively speaking the number of autobiographies is not many and whatever autobiographies we have were written in the post-colonial period. Of the few autobiographies available in print many of them were written by politicians, statesmen, and public servants. Unlike the Western autobiographies which are philosophical, metaphysical, psychological reflecting the intellectual mettle of authors, the Indian autobiographies are less personal, less private, less metaphysical and more social, political and historical. The
Indian rooted as he is in the philosophical tradition is more detached, self-effacing and expansive in his understanding of life. Nehru’s *Autobiography*, in the words of Prof. C.D. Narasimhaiah, is “indeed unsurpassed by any autobiography coming out of the heat and dust of public life anywhere in leaving history especially as it draws attention to a whole generation engaged in a nation’s struggle against apprehension” (Common Wealth Autobiographies, 1996). It is a landmark in Indian autobiographical literature. Compared to Nehru’s Gandhi’s autobiography has a limited appeal since it deals with spiritual aspects of Gandhi’s life. These two biographies have a historical importance and have become progenitors for Indian autobiographies. They dictated the form and content for the future autobiographies in India, to be more public and less private.

It is interesting to note that many Indian Muslims who were in the forefront of the Indian Freedom Movement and who were ardent nationalists wrote their autobiographies. To my knowledge there are as many as 23 autobiographies in English and I suspect that there may be many more written in Indian languages. It is remarkable that the autobiographies I have chosen for my study deals with the author’s understanding of a certain period in the Indian Freedom Movement. Though all of them focus on major figures and events, the perspectives differ and together they complement each other. Therefore it looks possible that the lives of individuals and the life of the nation can be reconstructed on the basis of perception and insights offered in their autobiographies.

It is now an established fact that there is a body of literature in India which is being called Indian Writing in English. The writing focuses on writers such as
Of late there have been voices seeking recognition especially from other cultural, racial groups. In these days of ethnicity and multiculturalism, this is a very genuine concern that writings of ethnic groups are ignored. A critic like Prof. G.S. Balarama Gupta wonders whether what one has all along been studying is 'Indian Writing in English' or 'Hindu Writing in English': “I am afraid consciously or unconsciously, we have all along been studying Hindu Writing in English rather than Indian Writing in English. In other words, our focus has been singularly unilinear. We have concentrated our attention on Hindu writers and marginalised writers belonging to other faiths - Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Parsee, and so on. It is always Anand, Narayan, Raja Rao and Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya and Nayantara Sahgal, or Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu, Ramanujan and Parthasarathy, or Nehru, Gandhi and Chaudhuri. We tend to prescribe them, and go on repeating their prescription, with, at best, slight internal changes. It has not occurred to us that we should perhaps at least for a change, bring in writers like Ahmed Ali, Humayun, Kabir, M.C. Chagla, K.A. Abbas or V.V. John”. There is some truth in the above comment and this dissertation partly responds to his despair. If one goes by the literary activities in India today, it is heartening to note that Post-Colonialism and Post-Structuralism have affected them. There have been several seminars on autobiographies conducted by the universities, the Sahitya Akademi, by Scholars like Prof. C.D. Narasimaiah. In 1996 Prof. C.D. Narasimaiah organised a seminar on ‘Common Wealth Autobiography’ whose proceedings have been published in book form. Recently Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi conducted a National Seminar. Prof. Satchidanandan, in his inaugural
address said, "The seminar on Autobiography, the first seminar on the genre being organised by the Sahitya Akademi, is perhaps the first seminar on the theme ever organised on this scale involving scholars and researchers from all over the country. The seminar being held at a time when autobiography has become a major subject of research and debate, and a site for raising several questions about the construction of the self and its technologies, the nature of the subject, the nature of the language, the relationships between the reader and the writer and their relationship with time, and the way autobiography helps the reader's own self knowledge and knowledge of man and the world in general". (Sahitya Akademi Quarterly News letter January - March 2001, page 18).

In the context of the above this dissertation gains in relevance.

The 'Introductory' chapter of this dissertation gives a historical perspective on autobiography summarising its origins in the West, its growth and development and its spread to other countries including India. In Chapter II, M.R.A. Baig's In Different Saddles is discussed. Published in 1967, this is an interesting autobiography and offers pen-portraits of the famous men of his time. Chapter - III deals with K.A. Hamied's A life to remember: An Autobiography, published in 1972. Convinced that moral law is the key to human happiness and peace, Hamied writes about his own life which was governed by values. In Chapter - IV M.C. Chagla's Roses in December: An Autobiography (1973) regarded as one of the compulsive books in Indian Writing in English, containing an impressive record of men and events before and after Indian independence is analysed.
In Chapter - V.K.L. Gauba' *Friends and Foes: An Autobiography* (1974) highlights about an unusual lives. This autobiography of K.L. Gauba deals with the last years of British Raj, the partition, the emergence of Bangladesh and the authors trials and triumph of life. Unlike the autobiographies mentioned above the autobiography of Abbas *I am Not An Island: An Autobiography* (1977) has an aesthetic appeal coming as if does from a man who began his career as a journalist and ended in the glamorous and romantic world of Hollywood. This autobiography is discussed in Chapter VI.

In the Chapter "Conclusion" the findings of the thesis are summarised.