

Autobiographical Novels

Total history of a man's life since his birth to the time of writing by the man himself is known as autobiography. In such descriptions the writer is directly present throughout and there is no ambiguity about his identification. There is no suggestive way, there is no indirect method of putting things which point towards the presence of the writer and there is no effort on the part of the reader to relate the incidents described in the book with his personal writings in the diary and the intimate talks with his relatives or his friends in order to find out the man. For example there are 'Autobiography' by Jawahar Lal Nehru, 'Autobiography of a yogi' by Paramhans yoganand, Bertrand Russell's 'Autobiography', 'Autobiography' of Dr. Hariwanish Rai Bachchan etc. These writings faithful accounts of the writer's life, either complete or in parts. These writings may reflect

the writer's comments, attitudes, philosophies etc. but they lack the imaginative part which comes into play from the ~~the~~ author's side. There is another way of writing about one's own life - writing in the form of a novel which suggests the presence of the writer because the life account given by another man tallies with the protagonist of the novel. Names are altered, places get a fictional name and the events described. The life story is not told directly but through the medium of a hero, there is a story element, the writer's imagination too comes into play, the form of the novel is maintained with a conscious plot construction. The account of life remains faithful with certain alterations told through the medium of fiction. We may call it fictionalised autobiography. They then take the name of autobiographical novels. There are autobiographical references

in almost all the novels one reads but that does not make every novel autobiographical one. Autobiographical novels must reflect the total personality of the writer with, if not complete, then at least, the major important events and incidents of the writer's life.

The first novel which comes to everybody's mind is Dickens' 'David Copperfield' ~~the~~ though there are autobiographical references in 'Oliver Twist' also. But unanimously the former novel has been taken to be a novel with many autobiographical references. In addition to the story element, autobiographical novels contain the social aspects of the time and the predicament of the hero or the heroine amidst prevailing conditions. Autobiographical novels give more stress on plot construction and characterisation because it has already been said that they are fictionalised life account of the author.

Pure autobiography may be boring and may not attract the common reader but life sketch presented through the medium of an interesting story attracts the majority. No one can leave David Copperfield unfinished nor can a man forget David, Miss Betsey, Trotwood, Peggotty, the maid servant, William, the waiter etc. By writing autobiographical novels the authors serve three purposes - (i) they bring forward their qualities as a novelist (ii) they fulfil their desire to let their life known to the reading public and (iii) they immortalise the characters, good or bad, they have met in their life.

George Borrow - he is also taken to be an autobiographical novelist. According to Hudson he had produced two autobiographical novels entitled 'Lagengro' and 'Romany Rye' but Legouis terms them as "snatches of

autobiography or travel notes rather than novels" and included his two other works 'The Bible in Spain' and 'Wild Wales'. Even if they are the author's life sketches in parts, they are autobiographical in character.

Samuel Butler - The son of a clergyman he was also a great writer. He emerged on the scene after George Eliot and George Meredith. Samuel Butler was a rebel. Originally he was destined for the church but rebelled against the clerical discipline. His posthumously published novel entitled 'The Way of All Flesh' is a kind of autobiographical in which we find the evils of 'ecclesiastical upbringing' and the author's attack on the family life.

Thomas Hardy - He is very famous and last novel 'Jude the Obscure' is also, to some extent, autobiographical in

character because some of the details of his life tally with the details of his biography written by his private secretary Florence Emily Hardy who later on became his wife. Many of the details of that book had been dictated by Hardy himself.

~~the~~ Mark Rutherford - whose real name was William Hale White, came very late in fiction. He was fifty when his first novel 'The Autobiography of Mark Rutherford' was published in 1881. It is his own story and "a poignant account of loneliness both spiritual and material. 'The Autobiography' is moving because it is a lament for an heroic tradition from which the glory has departed!"

The end.

Munee Bhushan Sinda
Deptt. of English
S.S. College, Jaheerabad