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## **GENESIS AND EARLY HISTORY OF INDO- ANGLIAN AUTOBIOGRAPHY TILL 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

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# Genesis and Early History of Indo-Anglian Autobiography till 19<sup>th</sup> Century

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***“Autobiographies are the most entrancing of books; and sometimes they are works of art”- Bonamy Dobree***

***Abstract – The Genre of Autobiography, particularly in Indo-Anglian literature, has not received its due attention by critics as well as Research scholars. Despite the best of writers with their rich harvest of autobiographical output, barring a few critical works, no one has seriously attempted to work upon this theme. In this article, I have tried to trace the beginnings of the genre of autobiography in Ancient and Medieval India and later in British India till the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century. However I wish to enlarge my scope of writing and critically examine the genre of autobiography by making a special study of select autobiographers under the title “ A Critical Evaluation of Indo-Anglian Autobiography – A select study”***

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Owing to the impact of English and cross- fertilization of ideas, Indian writers have inaugurated a new species of writing now familiarly known to be “Indo-Anglian literature.” Among various types of genres, critics seem to have paid scant attention either about its genesis, technique or style of writing. Before one learns about its birth and growth in Indo-Anglian Literature, it is desirable to trace its origin in ancient and Medieval India. In fact, many critics point out that Indians by temperament and philosophical outlook tend to ignore writing about them. They wish to remain incognito and are fond of anonymity. This trait of self-abnegation is conspicuous among ancient writers, painters and sculptors. However one cannot categorically express that the ancient writers are totally indifferent to the genre and charm of autobiographical writing.

In the sacred Vedas, particularly the Rig-Veda, one comes across quite a good number of autobiographical pieces. The noted among them is “Danastutis” Where the Rishi lavishes his praise on the King of the land for his generosity and gives the details of the king as well as his ancestry. Another hymn relates to a contrite gambler who records his aching feelings and repents about his callous attitude towards his spouse. Thus certain hymns in the Vedas reveal about their own lives tersely. However the noteworthy autobiographical pieces are the inscriptions of the Emperor Ashoka on rocks and stone pillars. The life and events of Ashoka engraved on the pillars with the first person narrative form the basis for the genre of autobiography in Ancient India. In Indian classics also, the details of writers are given in the “prologue” through “sutradhara.” We come across many autobiographical details in the plays of

Aswaghosh, sudraka, Banabhatta, Bhababhuti, Bilhana, Kalhana and Sriharsha. It may be conceded that autobiography has received its full attention during Moghul Period. Even though written in Persian, the genre of autobiography has been fully exploited by Moghul Emperors recording the significant events and their profound inner feelings.

The first slender volume is “fatuh-at-I- Firoz-shahi” of Firoz Tuglak. His motive of writing the autobiography is to record his achievements in battles, administration and religion. In this book, he narrates how he helped the poor and dispensed with torturous punishments. On reading his autobiography, one concludes that he is a benevolent despot.

The most reputed autobiography is that of Babur, the founder of Moghul Empire. The noted book is written in Turki, “Babur-Nama” or “Tuzuk-i-Baburi”. Babur’s autobiography deserves to be complimented for its narrative excellence and adherence to truth; the qualities of a good autobiography are embedded in his book. His sensitive nature, commendable leadership qualities and ring of sincerity are discernible in his writing of autobiography. Again his daughter, Gul Badan Begum’s “Humayun-Nama” may label her as the first woman autobiographer in medieval India. Among other writers are Mohammed Haider Dughlat’s “Trikh-I- Rashidi,” “Al Badaoni’s” “Mantakhabu –I- Tawarikh” who recorded the events of the day as well as battles fought during those times.

Another Moghul Emperor, Jehangir” Tuzuk-I-Jahanghiri” is not akin to Babur’s in the matter of narrative technique or adherence to truth for it is

replete with trivial details and filled with glowing terms about himself concealing his vices and weaknesses. In Hindi, Banarsidas "Arthakatha or Half story" is significant and admirable for its adherence to truth and sincerity. With the advent of the British, English has gained its supreme position as the lingua franca of the educated class. A new fervour marked the beginning of Renaissance. Most of the writers attempted Poetry, Prose Drama and even Novel. Most of the early writers of autobiography were Bengalis. At the request of his friend, Mr. Gordon, Raja Rama Mohan Roy became the first Indo-Anglian Autobiographer and later to be followed by Kasiprasad Ghose in 1853. Both of them wrote their lives in Epistolary form. However, the first to write full Autobiography in English was Lutfullah in 1854. Other autobiographies of this period are Rakhala Rasa Halder's "The English Diary of an Indian student" (1861-62). Most significant autobiography is Lal Behari Day (1826-1894) Captioned "Recollection of my school days" Before the close of 19<sup>th</sup> century appeared two more autobiographies. They were "Reminiscence of German university life" by Nishikanta chattopadhyaya and towards the close of the century in 1898, Maharshi Devendranath Tagore (1817-1905) wrote his autobiography in Bengali and it was translated into English in 1909. It exercised a profound influence on the course of Indo-Anglian Autobiography. Thus the Nineteenth century gave birth to the genre of Indo-Anglian Autobiography which paved the way for eminent writers of 20<sup>th</sup> century to bring out their lives in the form of Autobiography and later they have been hailed as classics in Indo-Anglian literature. To conclude with, in the words of Prof.R.C.P.Sinha " The development of autobiography in India constitutes perhaps the most significant part of Indo-Anglian Literature."

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