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**Call for Papers for a Language in India www.languageinindia.com
Special Volume on
Autobiography and Biography in Indian Writing in English**

Editors of the Special Volume

Pauline Das, Ph.D.

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Autobiography and Biography in Indian Writing in English

Autobiographies and Biographies occupy an important place in Indian Writing in English for various reasons. Indian leaders communicated their worldviews to Indian people using this genre. Gandhi's *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* is an excellent example. *My Truth* by Indira Gandhi is yet another example of communicating the message of an individual to a larger world. *Jivansmriti* (Reminiscences) of Rabindranath Tagore narrates his early years of life, while in *Toward Freedom: the Autobiography of Jawaharlal Nehru* Nehru writes to his "own countrymen and women." Nirad C. Chaudhuri's *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian*, published in 1951, stands apart as a great master-piece, combining personal life experiences with a strong motivated worldview ("the conditions in which an Indian grew to manhood in the early decades of this century" [20th century]).

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Pauline Das, Ph.D., K. R. Vijaya, Ph.D. and C. Amutha Charu Sheela, M.A., M.Phil., M.B.A.

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Invitation to Scholars from South Asia

As we share a common heritage in many respects, Language in India www.languageinindia.com invites scholars from South Asian nations to contribute their papers with focus on important autobiographies and biographies in all of South Asia. Please avoid polemics and let us join together to build a better understanding of our heritage through the authors of autobiographies and the biographies of eminent people.

Rationale and Justification for Writing Autobiography

The leaders have also debated on the need or otherwise for writing such works.

Jawaharlal Nehru writes in his *Autobiography*: "... this account is wholly one-sided and, inevitably, egotistical; many important happenings have been completely ignored and many important persons, who shaped events, have hardly been mentioned. In a real survey of past events this would have been inexcusable, but a personal account can claim this indulgence."

Gandhi justified writing an autobiography with these words:

But a God-fearing friend had his doubts, which he shared with me on my day of silence. 'What has set you on this adventure?' he asked. 'Writing an autobiography is a practice peculiar to the West. I know of nobody in the East having written one, except amongst those who have come under Western influence. And what will you write? Supposing you reject tomorrow the things you hold as principles today, or supposing you revise in the future your plans of today, is it not likely that the men who shape their conduct on the authority of your word, spoken or written, may be misled. Don't you think it would be better not to write anything like an autobiography, at any rate just yet?'

This argument had some effect on me. But it is not my purpose to attempt a real autobiography. I simply want to tell the story of my numerous experiments with truth, and as my life consists of nothing but those experiments, it is true that the story will take the shape of an autobiography. But I shall not mind, if every page of it speaks only of my experiments. I believe, or at any rate flatter myself with the belief, that a connected account of all these experiments will not be without benefit to the reader.

Language Medium for Major Autobiographies and Biographies

Indira Gandhi's work is a compilation of her writings in a manner that the book has an autobiographical format. Nehru wrote his *Autobiography* in English. Gandhi and Tagore wrote their autobiographies first in their mother tongues (Gujarati and Bengali respectively) and then

they sort of translated or recreated their works in English. Nirad Chaudhuri wrote his celebrated work in English.

Biographies in Indian Writing in English

There are many biographies written by Indian authors. These biographies cover many personalities from every field: politics, science, sports, cinema, drama, religion, literature, etc. Indeed, biography writing is a very popular pursuit among Indian writers in English and other Indian languages. Sahitya Akademi has brought out a number of biographies of varied quality.

Controversial Nature of Biographies and Autobiographies

Both biographies and autobiographies may raise controversies of various types: political, social, familial, regional, religious, etc.

A recent biography-like book on Muhammad Ali Jinnah by Jaswant Singh (*Jinnah: India-Partition-Independence*) raised a hue and cry among Jaswant Singh's own party members. Earlier in recent times, actor Om Puri's biography *Unusual Hero* by his wife created strong and deep controversies. Such controversies arise out of revelations in public of private personal acts and thoughts that may involve others and thus hurt the feelings, careers and interests of people referred to. It looks like that the biographer or the autobiographer never asks the permission of others to narrate the incidents which involve these "friends", etc.!

Autobiography and Biography versus Fiction Writing

Writing an autobiography or biography is quite different from writing a novel or short story or any type of material that aims at catering to the literary sensibility of its readers. Facts and the related, relevant and appropriate interpretation of facts and events become the hallmark of autobiography and biography, in some sense.

Narration is usually straightforward following the course of events and implications presented in these works. Authors of fiction have greater freedom and employ many techniques of presentation in their narratives. Hidden and explicit metaphors, lack of any explicit didactic conversations, creating curiosity to look forward to the next event, conflict, confrontation, resolution, etc., play an important role here. Characterization and characters follow a different course in fiction than in autobiography or biography. Actually, most events narrated in biographies and even autobiographies are already public knowledge. On the other hand, fiction offers a progressive revelation of unknown events, etc.

In what way does a first-person narrative fiction differ from an autobiography?

However, autobiographies and biographies have their own aspects difficult to master. Even the authors of these works are burdened with the responsibility of ensuring that the readers are with them and are comfortable with the journey they choose to undertake with the authors.

The Goal of This Special Volume

The goal of this Special Volume is to make a survey of some of the major autobiographies and biographies written in English in India and other South Asian countries, by Indians and other South Asian authors. It is assumed that these authors, like Nirad C. Chaudhuri, are products of a system that taught and nourished Indian Writing in English through the teaching of English by Indian and other South Asian teachers. They may have been greatly influenced by their education and living abroad, but their language is, for its better part, derived from Indian Speaking and Writing in English. Their world is typically India and South Asia.

What Is Expected from Contributors?

1. Choose an autobiography or biography.
2. Describe the content briefly.
3. Focus on the structure of the chosen autobiography or biography: introduction, chapterization, language and style, narrative techniques, idioms and metaphors, their justification for writing the autobiography or biography and how this justification is revealed in their works, clarity of language and thought, effect on readers, readability of the text, gaps in information, gaffes, etc. This is only suggestive of what you can do. You need to be creative and imaginative to work on your plan of research, description, analysis and interpretation, conclusion, etc.
4. You may also make a comparative or contrastive study of two or more autobiographies or biographies available in Indian Writing in English and in other Indian languages.
5. All quotes should be properly cited following either MLA or APA format. All sources should be acknowledged where these are used in the text of your paper. No bibliography is to be added. You need to have only a list of references. Your paper should be predominantly your own work, not a compilation of comments, etc., from other sources. You need to read the autobiography or biography in great detail and write your paper with adequate understanding.
6. It is tentatively proposed to publish this special volume in the April or May 2011 issue of Language in India www.languageinindia.com. A formatting fee of Indian rupees 500 is payable to Language in India www.languageinindia.com by the author/s for every paper accepted and published.

Please write to the editors of this special volume for any clarification you need. You may also write to M. S. Thirumalai, Managing Editor, Language in India www.languageinindia.com, languageinindiaUSA@gmail.com.

With best wishes

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