



Inculcation of Life Skills through reading Autobiographies

Mohammad Shoaib, Researcher, VNGIASS, Nagpur

Abstract:

Literature is the mirror of society which generally serves two main purposes one is to give enjoyment and other is to instruct or inculcate some skills. There are various forms of literature such as Poetry, Drama, Novel, Biography and Autobiography etc. It is believed that each literature i.e. ancient and modern play a key role for social transformation and establishment of educated society. In English literature there were various forms of instruction in ancient and medieval times such as Epics, Essays, Dramas etc. In Modern times learning instruments are changing such as Novel, Autobiography of ideal persons, movies, motivational lectures and so on. There were many stalwarts who wrote their own autobiographies to explore their life journey. Reading of popular autobiographies is also believed that it inculcates and enhances the skills and competencies among its readers because it depicts the journey of these stalwarts through life situations. The accounts of such journeys influence the readers and they learn through the experiences of the writers. This article emphasis on the inculcation of life skills through reading autobiographies.

Keyword: Life skills, Autobiography, Inculcation

Introduction:

Autobiography has been a popular form of literature. Its readership is wide and from all walks of life. In an autobiography author writes about his life experiences and personality. It is a successful representation of a personality and the period which he belongs. Autobiography is different in form from Memoir, Biography and History. In Memoir author focus on the people and events that he has encountered. Biography as an art form is the description of life by another person.

Dr. Johnson preferred Autobiography to Biography. He further said that everyman's life is best written by himself. Author knows about motives and hopes which prompted him at decisive moments. (Prasad 236)

Autobiography is the representation of one's personality, achievements and experiences which is most useful for learners. Humans from time immemorial look for situations from where they can learn something, they look towards the personality of author and their achievements which inculcate some skills which are useful to face day to day challenges of life. Generally to talk about oneself is spontaneous and natural to

human beings. Apart from professional literatures, popular personalities belonging to different field such as education, politics, theatre, sports, armed services or business, have used autobiography as the medium of expression of their experiences and impressions of life and times. APJ Abul Kalam, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Nelson Mandela, Booker T Washington, Dalai Lama are some popular personalities who wrote about their life experiments through autobiographies. Author writes about his journey with truth and he better know which situation compelled him to take that particular action.

W. H. Longfellow said, ‘autobiography is the first-hand experience and biography is second hand Knowledge.’ And Stevenson also said that there is no truer sort of writing than what is to be found in autobiographies.’ (Prasad 237).

Autobiography is indeed historical in its basic form because both share factual details of life experiments, yet it is different from history as it involves a personal commitment and various sub-genres like the diary, letter, memoir, are generally subsumed into autobiography. This point is underlined by Dunn:

Of recent years - notably since the beginning of the nineteenth century - autobiography has come to be regarded as a distinct literary form with characteristics and requirements peculiar to itself. It is indeed closely related to what in general we call biography, yet it is definitely separated from it. Its independence within its own realm is secure and permanent. (Dunn, English Biography (London: Dent, 1916) xvii.)

Characteristics of Autobiography:

An Autobiography is the constitution of three basic elements personality, history and literary.

1. Elements of Personality

Autobiography rotates around the personality of the author which describe author’s abilities and challenges he faces.

2. Elements of history

Autobiography and History are closely related to each other and both are factual type which take into account facts and realities. But autobiography involves in the recording of experiences of one’s life by oneself.

3. Literary elements

Literary element distinguishes Autobiography from history. It is marked by aesthetic pleasure. In all popular autobiographies, arrangements of parts make some aesthetic effects. And this particular quality distinguishes him from other literary forms.

Autobiography no doubt assures facts, readers read with a sense of faith in the personal account of the writer. In an autobiography the author writes the story of his own life and achievements. It aims at successful

presentation of personality in its context and time to which the author belongs. It is often written by successful people at a point of time in their life when it appears in the form of collective wisdom at individual level. Hence readers normally go for such books with many intentions in their mind. They consider their experience of reading such books none the less than acquiring skills to be used in their personal life. It is largely believed that such books inculcate various skills among the readers using which they get ready to meet the life situations. They are popularly known as 'Life Skills'

Life Skills:

Skill is an ability to do something well and life skills are the abilities to live a fruitful life. Life skills are a group of psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people make informed decision, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathise with others and cope up with and manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner. Life skills may be directed toward personal actions to change the surrounding environment to make it conducive for health. (WHO)

Life skills are defined as “the abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individual to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.”

(WHO, *Life skills education school handbook*,2020.

Yarham (1919) defined Life Skills as “the personal competence that enables a person to deal effectively with the demands and challenges confronted in everyday life”.
(http://tumkuruniversity.ac.in/oc_pg/msw/MSW%20II%20sem_Need_and_Importance_of_Life_Skill_education_in_Institutional_and_Non-Institutional_Settings.pdf)

UNICEF defines life skills as “a behaviour change or behavioural development approach designed to address a balance of 3 areas: knowledge, attitudes and skills”.
(https://www.unodc.org/pdf/youthnet/action/message/escap_peers_07.pdf)

There are various kinds of life skills but some are common in all cultures and society. WHO has identified ten core life skills, these are:

1. Self-Awareness
2. Empathy
3. Critical Thinking
4. Creative Thinking
5. Decision Making
6. Problem Solving
7. Interpersonal Thinking

8. Effective Communication
9. Coping with Stress
10. Managing Emotions

Besides this list there are many life skills which we need in day to day life challenges: Time management, Leadership, Risk management, anger management, presentation skill, public speaking skill etc.

Inculcation of Life Skills:

There were many stalwarts who wrote their own autobiographies to enhance the skills of readers. Reading of popular autobiographies is also believed that it inculcates and enhances the skills and competencies among its readers because it depicts the journey of these stalwarts through life situations, such as:

1. Up from Slavery:

Booker T Washington wrote his own biography in which he explored his life achievements. How A slave negro boy become the master of a grand institute? How he got education in those times when he didn't have money? This autobiography depicts how to manage resources, self-determination, how to fight against slavery and injustice, self-awareness. He coped with stress in his hard times.

2. The Story of My Experiments with Truth:

Our father of the Nation M. K. Gandhi described his life experiments with the inner self and truth in his autobiography. A simple man who go to get education abroad and learn foreign culture and change himself as a gentleman. After self-realization he fights for justice with non-violence and truth and gather huge crowd who follow him with faith on foreign land. His life journey depicts the assertiveness, decision making, managing crowd, public speaking etc.

3. Long Walk to Freedom:

In the time of apartheid in South Africa, a person who was neglected by majority become father of the nation and president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela explained his apartheid time experiences. Majority of population was White, and he was the leader of Blacks. How he gathered people to fight against injustices. Determination, Self-awareness, Problem solving, Decision Making etc are skills which inculcate among its readers.

4. Freedom in Exile:

With the Calmness of heart and mind, a man of faith, lead a group of people which are in exile. Dalai Lama wrote his biography Freedom in Exile which depicts the hard ships of his life as religious leader. He is a

spiritual leader who inspire whole world and was awarded Nobel Peace prize for his selfless services to mankind.

5. Wings of Fire:

Born in a poor family of madras and become the president of his country, APJ Abul Kalam wrote his life experience in his biography. A brilliant boy with minimum resources become a scientist and is known as Missile Man of India. These life journeys inspire reader and compel them to think that how he manages resources and overcome problems. Public speaking, communication skills, leadership, risk management, dedication, punctuality etc. are some skills which this autobiography inculcate among its readers.

6. The Story of My Life:

This autobiography depicts the challenging life struggle of disable person named Helen. Keller. How a disable person can fight against his disability and become world famous? author who wrote lots of books and speeches.

As literary genre, an Autobiography is not only the narratives of events but represents a personality by oneself who inspire, motivate and inculcate some important life skills among its readers to deal effectively with the demands and challenges confronted in everyday life.

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