



**COMPARISON: LIFE WRITINGS AND LITERARY WRITINGS  
WITH A LOOK AT LAND**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Autobiography is gradually coagulating as a genre after the formation of the foundation of the new prospective on the textuality of history and the history of literary texts. However, it is often christened as life-writing, self-writing and self-narration. Whatever may be the alias, it is surely individualistic but never generic in nature. It is too defined as the life story of one written by oneself. It need not be and must not be confused with life-history; as it is a story that is transcendental in form. Therefore, it begets controversy. In the modern sophisticated society one cannot be too clear with objective precision and have computer-parallel memory along with absolute alienation to present oneself on his own, standing on a pedestal away from the society. Though the study of autobiographies, diaries, letters, journals and biographies certainly enrich and deepen students' understanding of literature and add new dimension to literary text still literary texts are embedded with coded and covert declarations of the self with provocative autobiographical elements. This essay aims at comparing the two-life writing & literary writing and place them on the steps they deserve. It also aspires to find more autobiographical element in Jayanta Mahapatra's Land than in his autobiography in its small ambit. However, consequently search for better truth of ones life is aplenty in ones literary writing than in ones autobiography.*

Milan Kundera; the famous French Writer- in his seminal essay "Challenges to Indian Democracy"- condemns:

Superficiality; sensationalism, and speed as the 'ecstasy of technology' that destroys the pleasures of contemplation and slow intellectual or aesthetic enjoyment beginning to replace depth, objectivity and analysis. The culture industry thus mimics the consumer industry where the packing is more important than the product. (Wikipedia.org dld on 20.06.2015)

It undermines the force of attraction for general readers for the study of serious literature thus making autobiography-however impressionistic or expressionistic it may be- an attractive document of literature. Nowadays, rarely a Vyasa or Valmiki is seen writing or contemplating to write serious and voluminous writings. But for the self-proclamations or



self-acclamations or for sheer confession; whatsoever, autobiographical portrayals are not only objects of serious study of man or his age but also the fulfilment or fillers of other literary writings of the same authors or even declarations of human obsessions who are 'others' but not writers of poetry, drama or stories. To be very specific, an autobiography of a poet is the record of his failures or successes of his writings or even the exact interpretation of his poetry. From the writer's point of view it is written for self-realization or with an aspiration for emancipation but this self-expression, self-understanding, self-construction and self-transcendence is the reader's most authentic document to understand the being, his writing as well as his time and so too his understanding of time past or time future. Of course, as a major subject of research on the construction of the self its study helps the readers understand his relationship with other writings of the writer; and with time too to enhance self-knowledge and the knowledge of man and world in general.

The famous Indo-Anglian writer-poet K. Satchidanandan feels that autobiography is that genre of literature that "most immediately and deeply engages our interest and holds it and that in the end seems to mean most to us because it brings increased awareness, through an understanding of another life in another time and place of the nature of our own selves and our share in the human condition" (Satchidanandan, 109). This genre has no limit too. If examined, autobiographical elements can be traced in confessions, journals, memoirs, meditations and self-portraits as much as in fiction, poetry and even drama. Of course, when the borders are blurred autobiography becomes fiction. Yes it is found, autobiography has been accepted as a strong form of protest in the Feminist, Black, Dalit, Gay, Lesbian and Minority movements. There is the convergence of literary, philosophical and psychological interests in the study of this genre. However, the reverse is again true. When C.G.Jung feels man as a process rather than a being; Sigmund Freud and the follower of his tenets; Jacques Lacan makes psychoanalysis of the writing to know the writer. The later employs Saussurian linguistics as a means and reaches at the man- of course, not a coherent autonomous man. Important psychoanalytic critics like Ernest Jones, Norman Holland, Shoshona Felman and Lacan have analysed literature from psychological point of view. Similarly, historicists, like Greenblatt attempted to re-historicise the text and express clearly that literature reflects directly or indirectly historical reality and therefore it is a presentation of another area of ones autobiography. Cultural criticism is no less an autobiographical tenet in literature. This interdisciplinary approach includes social theory, gender study or even post-colonial inquiries and presents man. Ross Murfin and Supriya M. Ray stress on the concern of cultural critics to opine that "they examine how literature emerges from influences and competes with other forms of discourse within a given culture" (Das, 132). So probably, the famous Odia poet; Ramakanta Rath, in a telephonic talk with the writer denies to write his autobiography and with humble emphasis says, his poems form his autobiography though with a break of coherence. It clearly and logically states, this polymorphous presentation without a chronological thematic order; without solipsism or going beyond primary narcissism is



autobiography. Comprehensively speaking poetry or drama or even any literary form is an alternate autobiography without the required recognition. Conclusively it is felt, study of a well written autobiography is literature and study of pure literature is autobiography.

In this context, looking at Land (2013); the latest collection of poems of the famous Indo-Anglian poet Jayanta Mahapatra would transport us a feeling akin to the reading of his autobiography. Mahapatra draws the contours of his land “Under the Drift of Mild Moons” and claims how rooted he is to his earth. He sings: “hunger and stars go past to test our sleep; /behind the wall of ancient rock where a long-/ dead emperor’s edicts still proclaim the morals of war...” (13). The post Kalinga-war period of Odisha and its economic condition are portrayed here. Mahapatra’s world is filled with personal pain, guilt, remorse, hunger and the ordinary lives of the people of Cuttack. That’s why Mahapatra; in an interview; confesses in front of Jaydeep Sarangi: “I belong to my experience; my own feelings...My poems talk of the world I live in; the world around me” (Sarangi, 12). May it be “Death in Orissa” or “A Still Winter Morning” a reader can see the locale of the poet’s living or can draw a very similar picture of the pain and penury there without seeing it. When he sings: “Firewood on their heads; a file of women / stagger along the last rain-wet road / Suna; the faithful village wife, crawls through darkness / as she moves beyond birth and death/ from one night of rape to another” (19); one can see the people, the poet comes across everyday. “The Birthpains of Grief”- like his earlier poems; “Grandfather” and “Hunger”- talks directly about his predecessor and his dying condition during the famine of 1866 that forced him to change his faith and accept Christianity. His love is often resurrected in the metaphoric lines of his poetry. “About My Father’s Plot to Get Home” does replete much with autobiographical elements and the poem seems like an autobiographical soliloquy.

Most of the different moments and varied experiences are caught and painted in different ways with different colour. His “Pursuit,” “Letting in the Darkness,” “A Spring Morning,” “Night,” and “Shapes of Day” are like inscriptions of his love, loss, torments and frustrations. When commingled together they make a complete self of the speaker.

Land is inalienable from the life of Jayanta Mahapatra. His life, love, emotion, and passionate attachment with the people and the surrounding can be well traced in the poetic lines of the collection. Like Wordsworth’s The Prelude; a close study of the poems of Mahapatra is also a close study of the growth of his life, attitude, and psychological development as well as his philosophy.

It is felt, diary is autobiography but one should remember the famous poet Rabindranath Tagore who refutes it saying “ami jadi bokami kari pratidinara diary likhe jetaam,tahale taate kare hota aamar nijara jibaner pratibad. Tahale aamar dainika jibaner sakhya aamar samagra jibaner satyaku maati kare dita” (Das D, 220). As any life writing can never be beyond



prejudice and the deepest and inaccessible self can never be unfolded so sometimes some poems or literary writings turn to be better life writings than autobiographies. And if any life writing is a search for “What is man?” and then this can never advance human understanding of that question because every human being is a Narcissus who never knows “who he is” but does egoistic proclamations all through.

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