

Tribhuvan University

**Conflation of the Autobiographical and The political in Franklin's  
*Autobiography***

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Degree of Master's of Arts in English

by

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This is to certify that the thesis entitled “Conflation of the Autobiographical and The political in Franklin's *Autobiography*” submitted to the Department of English, Ratna Rajyalaxmi Campus, by Deepika Shahi, has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee:

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## **Abstract**

This research is concerned with the blending of the narrator's private experiences with the political concerns and expectations of Benjamin's time. This issue is examined in the light of theoretical insights of Peter Brown, George Gusdorf, and Jacques Derrida concerning autobiography and life narratives. The narrator writes in such a way that what is personal is reflective of the political. His thirteen virtues are reflective of how the eighteenth century Americans followed with the view to transforming their threat-ridden lives into the Promised Land. The personal voice that dominates the entire autobiography is expressive of political suggestions, implications and messages.

The narrator makes personal assertions regarding puritanism, empirical search for knowledge, entrepreneurship, religious tolerance and the idea of the Promised Land. These assertions are stepping stone in taking out the political interpretations. The two were avid readers and practiced their social and debating skills, working their way into a class of intellectuals. Collins and Franklin developed a whole club of readers to join them in intelligent social conversation regularly. As Ben matured, he made friendly acquaintances with everyone within his reach, collecting contacts that may prove beneficial for a later purpose. He made friends with governors, businessmen, preachers. This study yields the finding that only by maintaining the balance between the subjective and the objective, the personal and the political, enduring peace, prosperity and harmony can be achieved.

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## **Conflation of the Autobiographical and The political in Franklin's *Autobiography***

### **Defining Conflation**

Conflation is the mixture of two separate things, entities and notion so as to give rise to a new idea which includes partly the qualities of both the entities. The product of conflation acquires partly the qualities of both entities and terms.

Conflation happens when separate categories seem to be a single identity. In the state of conflation, the differences appear to become lost. Conflation is the practice of treating two distinct concepts as if they were one. In John F. Haught's words, "Conflation produces errors or misunderstandings as a fusion of distinct subjects tends to obscure analysis of relationships which are emphasized by contrasts. However, if the distinctions between the two concepts appear to be superficial, intentional conflation may be desirable for the sake of conciseness and recall" (77). Weak conflation occurs when the root expressions do not mean the same thing. The conflation expresses both of these ideas at the same time.

The personal voice in the text delves into the political voice. The autobiographical serves as the medium to convey the politically and ideologically charged message of utmost importance. This research probes into how the autobiographical and political voice is conflated in the *Autobiography* of Benjamin Franklin. The narrator follows the political and personal process of self-correction, self-determination and confession. The adventure from one place to the other shapes the innermost liking of the narrator for emancipation.

In the autobiography, the painful sense of agony at being held in confusion and inner exhaustion. The narrator's movement from one sphere of experience to another is a process of growth and development. This development is embodied in a

sequence of events. These events simultaneously characterize different aspects of self-assertion. The narrator in this autobiography acts on principle in the later part of his life. He does not avoid the moment to redefine himself in the process. He sees the glimmer of freedom despite her recurrent endeavor.

### **Personal voice in the Text**

The voices in this narrative in connection with the voices of other reformist movement contributed to the creation of inspiring and ensuring atmosphere for freedom. The narrator collects money through hard work. He uses only the extra time to make money for freedom. He does not feel exhausted and tired in his struggles towards making money. Hope of freedom, the possibility of freedom and his devotion to the path of freedom are some of the positive sides of the narrator. These are enough evidences for her undying passion for freedom. In this money making process, he notices a horrifying reality. The growing religious fervor in the Methodist meeting creates an impression of free life. Even in real life, Methodism didactically instructs that god is a light, inner light, inner power of illumination.

Gurdip Panesar is one of the noted critics of Benjamin Franklin. He lauds Franklin as the pioneer of enlightenment spirit. He is of the opinion that Franklin's biography is the synthesis and symbiosis of enlightenment spirit and religious thought. Panesar puts forward the following view with respect to this aspect of Franklin's *Autobiography*:

Biographies of Franklin have abounded over the past two hundred odd years. His achievements in so many fields have naturally resulted in a multiplicity of approaches in Franklin scholarship—political, philosophical, sociological, and scientific. Trying to extract him from the realm of legend and from his variety of public roles in order to



concentrate on him purely as a man of letters can be an arduous task.

(2)

No single isolationist approach is enough to peruse Franklin's biography. He embodies the synthesizing thought, synthesizing voice. No single perspective is enough to interpret it. Though it is brimful of crystal clear thought the intended implication that underpins the whole structure of autobiography, there lies plenty of complexity.

J. H. J. Van Kessel notices the similarity between Max Weber and Franklin. He clearly expresses that the impact of capitalism-endorsing spirit of Weber's thought is manifested in this autobiography of Franklin. Additional view of Kessel is mentioned below:

The fact that his exemplary type of capitalist spirit — Benjamin Franklin — is free from any direct link with religion is crucial to the social historian and sociologist Max Weber: Benjamin Franklin represents a secularized every day ethic. Weber used Benjamin Franklin as a tool. (4)

Benjamin wants to use any thought, idea and notion after experimenting it with the context. For him, understanding historical and socio-cultural climate is basic to checking feasibility of this idea. Novelty of thought hinges on its feasibility and viability.

Steven Forde explores Franklin's hidden vision of democratic society in his autobiography. Along with this vision comes other supporting visions social harmony and profit-making business enterprise. Any culture rooted in firm economic foundation has the maximum likelihood to succeed. With respect to the vision of democratic society, Forde argues:

Franklin's *Autobiography* was written in part to provide a model for the emerging democratic individual and democratic culture of America. Franklin's teaching in the work has been subject to severe criticisms from the beginning, though it has had many defenders, too. Neither friend nor foe, however, has taken a sustained look at the *Autobiography* itself to explore its teaching in detail. (10)

Sound economic basis and strong commercial incentive are instrumental in boosting economy, culture and social life. Yet it is obvious that the thoughts and notions that Franklin valorizes do not have absolute novelty. The majority of thoughts are European importation. But the mode of valorization is somewhat unique and singular.

Charles Angoff detects chief characteristics of personal journey. The very rise of the narrator from poverty to celebrity is one of the most fascinating thematic cues. Dwelling on this side of thematic concern, Angoff makes the following remarks:

One of the leading themes of the *Autobiography* and one that Franklin takes evident pleasure in emphasizing is his own astonishing rise from poverty and obscurity to means and celebrity. One of the stated purposes of the work is to accentuate the contrast between his humble beginnings and his later success and to show the means by which it was accomplished. (75)

Personal journey is kept at the center of this autobiography. But the autobiographical elements and events acquire socio-cultural importance. Doubtless, it is true that implication and significance carry immense importance. In actuality, it is the journey from penury to prosperity, anonymity to eminence and analytics of inquiry to affirmation of faith.

In Emily Cappel's view, autobiography projects the track on which national leadership can be made. Cappel, in this context, discloses the following remarks:

But Franklin is the last to think this will be the way with all and is fully aware that those who take such a lead will likely be a minority. The problem of sociability thus opens something of a breach in the smoothly democratic exterior of the Autobiography—a breach that becomes wider and more significant, the closer one looks. (110)

Utilitarian thinking, pragmatic potentiality and healing power of faith are all equally important things for Franklin. The good, the virtuous and the valorous should be blended in one coherent school of thought. Franklin had placed importance on the Power of doing Good.

Although all these critics and reviewers examined *The Autobiography* of Franklin Douglass from different points of view and then arrived at several findings and conclusions, none of them notice how the issue of the personal becomes the political. In the society where commercialization and industrialization have gained massive foothold, the fate and future of financially weak people remain bleak. Even the prosperous people are devoid of any affection, emotion and grace of humanity. Everything is cast into the mold of monetary values. It is the adverse situation created by economic hardship that compels people to exchange feelings and emotions with monetary worth. The financial concern lies behind the rapid exploitation of human feelings and sentiments. Even the sacred social institution like marriage becomes the means to secure financial stability and prosperity. The impact of low pay, job dissatisfaction, exploitation and various other evils of mercantile capitalism has spoiled the emotional strength and vitality of those who are committed to bring change in American society.

Virginia Woolf is also keenly interested in the role and function of parodic biography. According to her mock-heroic tone in which autobiography is written can function effectively its communicative and ideational purpose? In the course of defining this purpose, Virginia Woolf says "The woman writer historically comes into view. Having arrived in the twentieth century, Orlando offers an autobiographical peroration on the multiplicity of selves which constitutes her; the biographer as a result finds her own role discomposed" (98). The following extract illustrates additional view of Woolf:

We must here snatch time to remark how discomposing it is for her biographer that this culmination and peroration should be dashed from us on a laugh casually like this; but the truth is that when we write of a woman, everything is out of place-culminations and perorations; the accent never falls where it does with a man. (98)

Women's difference does not need justification or clarification. Any attempt to emphasize the gender difference is likely to generate possibility of violence or the extension of already existing violence. Thus, it is better to develop a sense of critical awareness so far the parodic nature of autobiography is concerned.

Sherill Grace puts forward the concept of autobiography. The concept of autobiography dismantles the hierarchy difference between autobiography and biography. Grace's approach is also called post theory approach. According to Grace, the difference between serious text and commercial text, canonical and non-canonical text no longer exists. She thinks upon the changes that appear when transformed into theatrical performance. She is of the opinion that a great deal of change occurs when a biographical/autobiographical text is changed into dramatic

performance on the stage. Her view is briefly cited below for the sake of exemplification:

Across the multiple truths arises an autobiographical performance. Instead of getting a single, objective, neutral, truth we come across various truths. In life narratives and stories based real experience are changed into theatrical spectacle our desire for agency, voice, visibility and subjectivity will be fulfilled. Theatrical performances offers spaced to create meaning full identity. (55)

Dramatic transformation of textual narrative makes the rigid forms of genre more flexible. Authoritarian genre loses its rigidity and becomes more dramatic and flexible. The process of changing autobiography into stage spectacle enables us to look at dehumanization, fragmentation and commodification in a new light.

Repressed voices come out if autobiography is converted into theatrical performance. All these possibilities and achievements can be practical if there is an agreement among reader, the producer of autobiography and organizer stage action. Issues like national solidarities and the personal identity are reviewed and reexamined from a new angle. Fixed notion of self and subjectivity are challenged increasingly in favor of the plurality and multiplicity.

Franklin gives credit to the views of liberal writers, thinkers and poets on the subject of free creative mind, power of imagination, natural freedom contribute to the emergence of the prospect of emancipation economic restrictions. Everyone has the potentiality for spiritual growth. Spiritual pursuit serves as a means to deflect depression and melancholy. Salvation/liberation "experienced within the calm retreats of domestic bliss far removed from the chaotic world of strife" (72). This model coincided with the deliverance narratives.

The subjective ideas, views and opinion of Franklin have political values. The complaints dislodged by the narrator in this autobiography towards his family members and other neighbors are tilted towards the growing need to harmonize scientific forces and religious sensibility. Religious faith and scientific spirit stood in a disharmonious way in American society during the time of Franklin. His cursory observation of social disorder and imminent chaos yield finding that itself is a remedial measure.

### **Fusion of Secular Spirit and Puritanism**

The rigor of puritanism, instrumentality of enlightenment reason, and local American sensibility were some of the power ingredient of the then American society. It was necessary to harmonize these progressive forces. Under the guise of his personal narrative account, Franklin tends to appeal all the American citizens to think and act in this direction. Though he is a man with scientific cast of mind, he does not deny the efficacy of religiosity. He is in favor of allowing religiosity to soften the instrumentality of enlightenment reason and vice versa. The historical need of mechanizing society was in circulation in the narrator's time. Franklin does not deny the need to mechanize those sectors from where human beings gain maximum advantages. The dynamic nature of American society is the most valuable property, according to Franklin. Over mechanization can debilitate this unique dynamism of American culture. Under the guise of the personal, strong political message is given.

Instead of dramatizing problems of American society, he wants to put on the mask of autobiographical self. By means of introducing and enumerating private problems and personal concerns, the narrator wants to make Americans aware of the vital need to bring reform in some of the defective department of American politics.

Literary writings possess diverse characteristics. Some literary works are objective while others are subjective. Even amidst subjective writings, the nature of exploring self and subjectivity tends to be drastically different from the straightforward poetical exploration of selfhood. Doubtless, writings serve various purposes. Mainly, writings where authors express their selves carry huge importance not only for themselves but for readers too. Going through the subjective writings of authors, readers can get a great deal of benefits. Of all the subjective writings, confessional literature carries crucial importance.

In the literature of confessional importance, readers can find out how noble personalities face crisis, how they overcome it and what lessons they derive from their confrontation with crises. In addition, in confessional writings like life narrative and autobiography, readers can be face to face with how the ability shoulders the extreme pressures in crucial modes of life leads to the actualization of long-expected goal. It is often motivational. It can be cathartic at the same time. The function of confessional creations is difficult to specify. Concerning this aspect of the autobiographical works and their liberating roles, James Olney makes the following arguments:

What is of particular interest to us in a consideration of the creative achievements of men and the relationship of those achievements to a life lived, on the one hand, and an autobiography of that life on the other is the isolate uniqueness that nearly everyone agrees to be the primary quality and condition of the individual and his experience. (4)

Olney does not dither about interrogating how an individual happens to do, act and choose in such a way that he becomes isolated from the rhythm of social life. Any detachment and isolation from the mainstream hectic life is bound to implant feeling of loneliness, isolation, alienation. But the genius tends to overcome it at any cost.

The uniqueness of an individual and the resulting choices of anomaly are extensively examined in the majority of life narrative.

Political undertone is latent beneath the excessive plethora of personal events and incidents. Franklin tells stories about his family's ancestry. In this type of personal narration, the notion of self-assertion is clearly reflected. Self-assertion finds its perfect manifestation in the later transcendentalism of the nineteenth century America. The following extract brings to the fore typical features of genealogical narrative full of perusal pride and prejudice:

Benjamin Franklin was born in Milk Street, Boston, on January 6, 1706. His father, Josiah Franklin, was a tallow chandler who married twice, and of his seventeen children Benjamin was the youngest son. His schooling ended at ten, and at twelve he was bound apprentice to his brother James, a printer, who published the "New England Courant.

(3)

This narrative contains Personal truth, personal reality about family ancestry and projection of emerging scientific personality of puritan age. Under the banner of family narrative and personal account, the narrator projects his political, social and cultural concerns. He tells of his grandfather and uncles. He informs who the most creative ancestors were in his family history. He does not hesitate to mention how active Franklin clan is. It is a sort of assertion. Franklin members have the proud history of being involved in the reformation of Europe. They have the history of witnessing the unfolding of progressive thoughts and spirits of Europe.

Paula Gunn Allen is a noted theorist of life narrative and autobiography. Her views on autobiography are highly quoted. She maintains that "autobiography is a term for a particular practice of life narrative that emerged in the Enlightenment and



has become canonical in the west. Its generic category has been challenged in postmodern and postcolonial era" (5). This genre has gradually lost its pristine aura and atmosphere. Overtime its role and significance have undergone change.

Additional view regarding this genre is cited in the following extract:

Privileged as the definitive achievement of a mode of life narrative, autobiography celebrates the autonomous individual and universalizing life story. Its theorists have installed this master narrative of the sovereign self as an institution of literature and culture, and identified, in the course of the twentieth century, a canon of representative life narrative. (4)

Autobiography is not always full of personal impressions and subjective experiences. In the postmodern age, the very notion of autobiography has undergone dramatic change. It has started including political and historical importance too.

Benjamin has the capacity to grow into a clever and creative man. The idea of bringing innovation guides him always. He loves to invent. Reform in cumbersome thing and system is what he hankers after. The following extract highlights the case in point:

You may remember the inquiries I made among the remains of my relations when you were with me in England, and the journey I undertook for that purpose. Imagining it may be equally agreeable to you to know the circumstances of my life, many of which you are yet unacquainted with, and expecting the enjoyment of a week's uninterrupted leisure in my present country retirement. (5)

The ideal of living a dynamic life fosters a type of energy to invention and innovation. An admirer of equality, justice and harmony, he is equally an ardent supporter of scientific search for pragmatic and practical values.

The thin boundary between novel and life narrative blurs in the contemporary era. Allen remarks "People often confuse life narrative and fiction. Typically, they call autobiographical texts novels though they rarely call novels "autobiographies". A life narrative is not a novel, although calling life narrative nonfiction, which is often done, confuses rather than resolves the issue. Her additional view is cited in the following citation:

Both the life narrative and the novel share features we ascribe to fictional writing: plot, dialogue, setting, characterization, and so on. Further complicating matters, many contemporary writers are interested in blurring the boundary between life narrative and narration in the first-person novel. (7)

Despite the subversive characteristics taken by life narrative in postmodern context, there continues to remain a temporal distinction between a novel and an autobiography. Novelists are not bound by historical time. They can situate their narratives at any time in the past, present or future. This does not mean that life narrators always offer a retrospective narrative in chronological order.

There is also an element of self-denial on certain occasion. He expects American culture to be assertive, dynamic and rationally connected. But at the level of individual life, he is a humble man of figure. Belief in God and agony at others' sufferings are simultaneously operative catalyst in the narrator's life. The following extract is illustrative of this point:

And now I speak of thanking God, I desire with all humility to acknowledge that I owe the mentioned happiness of my past life to His kind providence, which lead me to the means I used and gave them success. My belief of this induces me to hope, though I must not presume, that the same goodness will still be exercised toward me, in continuing that happiness, or enabling me to bear a fatal reverse. (6)

The same personality elevates the narrator to the higher realm and then relegates to the humbler realm as per the pressures of situation. His love for adventure, his passion for newness and his hunger for novelty are distinguishing hallmarks of Franklin's meaningful search for the higher purpose. This purpose is not escapist. It is rooted in the pragmatic foundation of life.

John Sturrock has pithily noted, "It is impossible for an autobiographer not to be autobiographical" (52). The classical conception regarding life narrative is changing gradually. Autobiographers cannot lie because anything they say, however mendacious, is the truth about themselves, whether they know it or not. Focusing on this aspect, Stanley Fish produces the following impressions:

Any utterance in an autobiographical text, even if inaccurate or distorted, characterizes its writer. Thus, when one is both the narrator and the protagonist of the narrative, as in life stories, the truth of the narrative becomes undecidable. We need, then, to adjust our expectation of the truth told in self-referential narrative. (13)

Autobiographical truth is a different matter; it is an inter-subjective exchange between narrator and reader. It aims at producing a shared understanding of the meaning of a life. Self-referential writing must be viewed in an inter-subjective process.

Autobiographical narration appears to be collection of simple facts. But its hidden meaning resurfaces shockingly.

Franklin's hunger for knowledge, his voracious reading habit and his assimilation of dominant western thoughts of Europe of that time indicate how the then American society freely imported and imitated European ideas. In this step, American society runs on the path of imitation and then it thought about emulation. Emulation did not take place. Or even if it took place, it took place at a snail pace. Franklin's immersion and imitation of dominant European thoughts is reflective of political messages too. As the country imitated and then thought about emulation, so an individual figure. The following extract describes the situation:

From a child I was fond of reading, and all the little money that came into my hands was ever laid out in books. Pleased with the Pilgrim's Progress, my first collection was of John Bunyan's works in separate little volumes. I afterward sold them to enable me to buy R. Burton's Historical Collections; they were small chapmen's books, and cheap, 40 or 50 in all. (13)

Franklin goes to a different grammar school to develop his writing and math skills. His hunger for knowledge is healthy and wholesome. The frequent digression from the study sometimes misleads him. He tends to develop overall aspect of his talent and aptitude. At age ten he is taken from school and put to work with his father. Manufacturing and productive areas drew his attention right from his childhood. He hardly got a chance to wallow in abstract idealism. Only the pragmatism and practice, experiment and innovation charm him right from his childhood.

Joan W. Scott dwells upon the formation of the subject in the language of autobiographical text. Scott believes that subjects know themselves in language.

Subject is embedded in discursive language. Regarding discursive formation of subject, Scott makes the following view:

Subjects know themselves in language, because experience is discursive, embedded in the languages of everyday life and the knowledge produced at everyday sites. For instance, through the discourse of medical institutions, persons learn to understand themselves-experience themselves-as patients in need of healing or as diseased or insufficient bodies in need of surgical intervention.

(26)

There are human experiences outside discursive narratives. Feelings of body, feelings of spirituality and powerful sensory memories are some of the examples of human experiences outside the orbit of discursivity. These non-discursive experiences need self-reflexivity on the part of analyst and critic. Reliance on linguistic model has its own limitations and restrictions.

### **Search For Professional Pursuit**

Franklin first goes to Printing house to work. Productive house draws his attention. It is a compulsion to work due to family trouble. But the early entry into the production house like printing house makes him familiar with business venture. The venturesome spirit and business motive are twin driving forces that go on dogging American economy even now. The narrator narrates subjectively by saying "At my first admission into this printing-house I took to working at press, imagining I felt a want of the bodily exercise I had been used to in America, where presswork is mixed with composing" (43). In the mood of boyish boast, he says "I drank only water; the other workmen, near fifty in number, were great guzzlers of beer. On occasion, I carried up and down stairs a large form of types in each hand, when others carried but

one in both hands" (43). In a confessional tone, the narrator says that other people reacted with mixed feeling of awe and agony. He says "They wondered to see, from this and several instances, that the Water-American, as they called me, was stronger than them- selves, who drank strong beer!" (43). The following extract adds extra appeal and easiness to his familiarity with his start of profession:

My brother-in-law, Holmes, being now at Philadelphia, advised my return to my business; and Keimer tempted me, with an offer of large wages by the year, to come and take the management of his printing-house, that he might better attend his stationer's shop. I had heard a bad character of him in London from his wife and her friends, and was not fond of having any more to do with him. (49)

From his childhood, he is in money-making practice. Even his brothers are envious of his mercantile nature. Though he had acquired mercantile nature, he is not mechanistic in the real sense of the word. He is inventive to the utter dismay of even his father and brother. Idealism and pragmatism coexist in the personality of Franklin.

Autobiography is a recent and a not very widely distributed literary genre. As the French historian Georges Gusdorf remarks:

Autobiography is limited in time and space; it has not always existed nor does it exist everywhere. Its conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual life is the late product of a specific civilization  
Autobiography becomes possible only under certain metaphysical preconditions. (6)

Gusdorf sees the birth of literary autobiography as issuing from the mixed and unstable marriage between Christian and classical thought in the middle Ages. In

regard to Douglass's life as merchant, it is obvious that he embraced the financial freedom of the marketplace. It is through trade that he purchased his freedom. However, this work places him squarely within the dehumanizing ideology of capitalism's driving slave market.

Fondness for Europeanism on the part of Franklin is itself an evidence of the fact that there are some inconsistencies in the cultural practice and political preaching of America of his time. The following extract makes some observation in this regard:

I had begun in 1733 to study languages; I soon made myself so much a master of the French as to be able to read the books with ease. I then undertook the Italian. An acquaintance, which was also learning it, used often to tempt me to play chess with him. Finding this took up too much of the time I had to spare for study, I at length refused to play anymore, unless on this condition. (92)

The flourishing journalism of England chiefly *Tatler* and *Spectators* produces sound impact in the narrator. He realizes that flourishing journalistic writing is basic to the quantum leap in the consciousness of people. Fondness for French is also equally noticeable in the narrator. The uncritical appropriation of western European thoughts gains rapid momentum in American soil. Youths and figureheads like Franklin are not unknown to it.

After being affected and then impacted by European journalism of eighteenth century, Franklin begins to produce pamphlets. His involvement in pamphlet writing serves the purpose of fostering then fructifying the ethos of enlightenment. Anything that promotes the ethos of enlightenment thought is tempting to the narrator. He says "Indeed I had some cause to believe that the defense of the country was not disagreeable to any of them, provided they were not required to assist in it" (120).

The more he reflects on this side of progressive thought, the more alert and dynamic he happens to be. Again he reiterates "And I found that a much greater number of them than I could have imagined, though against offensive war, were clearly for the defensive. Many pamphlets pro and con were published on the subject and some by good Quakers" (124). Critical mass is instantly drawn towards it.

Peter Brown is of the opinion that confession of any kind is bound to acquire the characteristics of "strictly intellectual autobiography and a manifesto of the inner world" (20). The troubled inner world of the confessor comes out in the thrill of giving expression to what had happened in his or her life in the past. Since past of the confessor is viewed from the successful and idealized present, every autobiography is bound to be fictional. Regarding Augustine's Confession, Brown happens to make the following pronouncement:

Two incidents from the Confessions, one about sin or a fall from truth, the other about redemption, will allow us to elaborate the argument further. In the first episode Augustine famously recounts his boyhood theft of some pears. What seems particularly shameful in retrospect about this apparently minor episode is its sheer willfulness. (21)

Often the troubled side of inner self is revealed in autobiography that is confessional in nature. Any confession oriented narrative or autobiography makes a tilt towards the disclosure of the distorted or grotesque or the deviant. The graceful and the consistent seldom make presence in the narrative which is bound to be confessional. Other things remaining the same, the amoral or anything that befits the normal framework is likely to lapse come to the center of narrative of confession.

Of all the laws, Franklin valorizes common law. Though courts of justice are established and legal practices have taken place to the fullest extent, the narrator



laments that no law is higher than the common law. His endorsement of common law is very much an index to the democratization of justice and people's accessibility to equality. The following extract presents the case:

The office of justice of the peace I tried a little, by attending a few courts, and sitting on the bench to hear causes; but finding that more knowledge of the common law than I possessed was necessary to act in that station with credit, I gradually withdrew from it, excusing myself by my being obliged to attend the higher duties of a legislator in the Assembly. (112)

Common law is highlighted as the guiding law in the American society. Citizens have to respect laws. But in the name of making them obedient to laws, nobody should rob people's decent right to justice, freedom of expression, equality and pursuit of happiness.

Sara Davy points out gender specific quality of autobiographical writings. According to her, modern readers are not moved to read writings about sinfulness and salvation of the subject. The subject is likely to repent for his or her sinful error. Smitten by his or her sinfulness, he or she pines for salvation. She holds the view that "while these autobiographical writings constructed the subject through strict narrative and linguistic conventions in order to create a conforming if transcendent, version of selfhood" (34). Women do not show interest in all types of autobiographical writings. The following extract provides her additional view on this subject:

The argument that some autobiographical genres, such as the conversion narrative, privilege the masculine subject must always be held in check, therefore, by a recognition of the different and

historically variable uses that can be made of such narratives. This argument also applies to the presumed compatibility between women's experience and the informal and repetitive narratives of diaries and journals. (34)

Some of the autobiographical writings are gender-biased. Only the males are encouraged to write autobiographical writings. The majority of women do not always get the privilege of writing biographical or autobiographical writings. So it is customary that some autobiographical writings have biased voice. The unavoidable voices of women are intentionally avoided. Despite the need to include it, it is intentionally avoided out of the bias of the concerned males.

Abuse of authority, oppression and exclusion of the poor, indifference to humanity in distress are shocking the narrator. He associates indifference to humanity in distress with the root cause of human misery. The European model of administering society in a rational manner is the most frequently pressurized model of Franklin. The following extract gives clues in this direction:

In their first march, too, from their landing till they got beyond the settlements, they had plundered and stripped the inhabitants, totally ruining some poor families, besides insulting, abusing, and confining the people if they remonstrated. This was enough to put us out of conceit of such defenders, if we had really wanted any. (132)

Out of the empathetic prick of conscience, the narrator extends the helping hands. He also points them out as "a means of showing humility. He wants to make it clear that he has never acted perfectly in all situations, and he wishes to indicate that he recognizes the mistakes he has made during his life. The mention of his second erratum has the same effect" (135). Rational administration of society is the much

more highlighted method. In addition, Franklin also gives equivalent role to specialization and division of labor.

Aberrant identity does not fall into the domain of life narratives. Only the surveying consciousness is brought to the center of life narrative or any type of narrative writing. Addressing this aspect, James Boswell makes the following observation:

When my father forced me down to Scotland, I was at first very low-spirited, although to appearance very high. I afterwards from my natural vivacity endeavored to make myself easy; and like a man who takes to drinking to banish care, I threw myself loose as a heedless, dissipated, rattling fellow who might say or do every ridiculous thing.

(36)

The alternating feelings and impressions of the subject in autobiographical writings are of central value to Boswell. According to Boswell, not only the one-sided things should be placed at the center of the narrative. Heterogeneous things required in autobiography to produce the variegated impressions. Ridiculous and the noble, important and the peripheral, the ordinary and the extraordinary should be put in the subjective narrative. These heterogeneous components need to be brought to the organic connectivity. Only such subjective narratives are able to produce impressions in readers.

In the *Autobiography* Franklin sounds like he is trying to prove to the reader one of his virtues. In his commitment to practice vegetarianism with Keimer, he tells of "how he was able to maintain the diet because of his great determination. Keimer, Franklin points out, was unable to keep up the practice" (142). He refers to the reader

his own skills of determination by showing that another person was unable to accomplish the same things he did. The following extract presents the case:

His use of Keimer to show his own virtue is particularly interesting because Keimer holds a position of authority over Franklin; he is Franklin's boss. Franklin, as we know, does not think much of Keimer as a printer, and so criticizing Keimer in the Autobiography is a means of getting revenge on Keimer for all time. (158)

Franklin contemplates revenge on all the Royal Governors. They castigate him by becoming a great political figure himself. His vindictive desire wells up in an irresistible way. In no way, he remains neutral without resorting to action. Fury and hatred, revenge and retaliation are harmful factors that weaken the foundation of American society.

Autobiographical writing is a product of confessor's attempt to purify his or her inner truth, inner self and inner life. All the obscure and unclear sides of confessor's "interiority are purged, clarified and then made transparent. Such a transparent and purified version of twisted inner life can be of some help to those who read" (Rousseau). Jean Jacques Rousseau especially deals with this side of autobiography. Dwelling upon this side of autobiography, Rousseau makes the following remarks:

The task of an autobiographer is to tell or confess all and make himself as transparent to his readers as he is to himself. Autobiography is less an attempt to remember the past, to memorialize the life he led, than to make others recognize the inner truths about himself that he already knows through the unique access he has to his own feelings. (45)

The approach to write autobiography is bound to be methodical in that it is a product of how to externalize what is internally distorted. The process of unleashing the inner motives and inner truth experienced by the narrator or the semi-autobiographical narrator carries lots of value. It is an idealized move to return to the past for the sake of glorifying the present. It is out and out an act of self-purification through the means of confession and autobiographical adventure.

Franklin even admits to a type of "aristocracy worship when he discusses how pleased he was and how special he thought it was to meet the New World Governors and see them take an interest in him" (153). Franklin himself thinks that those same types of prominent positions. He could end up "being just as good as those he worshiped early on in life. Denham advises Franklin to get a job at Palmer's, a famous printing house, where Franklin works for the next year while living with Ralph" (154). Its counter effect is also known in the same vague and vacuous way. The following extract puts forward the case in point:

Ralph slowly forgets his wife and children and Franklin forgets Miss Read as they live life to the fullest, always having fun and always going broke. Franklin, meanwhile, befriends a man named Wilcox, and together they work out a deal for a small lending library, and idea which will come to greater fruition back in Philadelphia. (157)

Contrary to the narrator's expectation, Ralph moves out of London into the countryside. He is accompanied with his new girlfriend. Ralph becomes a "school teacher and begins writing epic poetry, most of which is very bad, and mailing it to Franklin to read. Ralph's girlfriend begins to worry about Ralph, and she goes to Franklin for advice" (159). Franklin thinks that "she is flirting with him, and so when he propositions her, she runs back and tells Ralph about it, forcing Ralph and Franklin

to break off their friendship" (161). This extract is illustrative of how complexity arose in the sound and sensible interpersonal relationship:

Franklin makes more money and moves out of his old lodgings. He begins renting a room from an elderly woman who tells him lots of stories. He makes more friends and spends much of his time swimming (he even thinks of opening a swimming school), but after 18 months in London, Mr. Denham persuades him to leave London and return to Philadelphia. (133)

Franklin has the talent for getting along with them all very well. He becomes a full-fledged workaholic. Various forces put pressures in him. At time, he is unable to harmonize and reconcile all those irreconcilable forces. In this condition, it is natural for him to develop workaholic condition. Although Keimer gains a lot from "being able to use Franklin's cuts and types, Franklin gains from his new connections. He then returns to Philadelphia and, with his new material from London, begins work in a new printing house with Meredith" (138).

With the onrush of postmodernism, the notion of autobiography undergoes transformation. Barthes and Derrida contributed a lot to the emergence of a new notion of autobiography. The portrayal of self-image in postmodern autobiography stands in sharp contrast to the classical notion of subject that lies at the center of text. Barthes makes the following observation:

The fragmented self-image-the body in bits and pieces, to use Lacanian terminology-can only, paradoxically, in the end be known and represented from the perspective of an imaginary wholeness. Fragmentation, cast in the form of a rhetoric of fragmentation, comes

only after the mirror stage and the constitution of the subject through the illusory recognition of unity. (74)

Unitary subject does not exist in postmodern autobiography. It would be difficult to ascertain if the confessional motive of character. The omnipresence of unified motive and well-informed intention is seldom found in postmodern autobiography. It is reiteration of the veiled motive of confession that marks chief characteristics of postmodern autobiography.

### **Uniqueness of Professional Passion**

Franklin cultivates his own intellectualism. Primarily he is torn between scientific materialism and puritan ideal. But he fully converts to Deism. He adopts "the ideals of "truth, sincerity and integrity," and as a means of debating these, he forms a group called the Junto, which meets every Friday to discuss questions of philosophy and morality" (141). Regarding the sacrifice of individualism and immersion in collectivism, the following extract makes additional point far clearer:

When Keimer falls on the verge of bankruptcy, Franklin buys his paper and turns it around (Keimer later goes fully broke and moves to the Caribbean). He also becomes the official printer for the Pennsylvania Assembly, the colonial government, thanks to his connections with a Mr. Hamilton whom he met on a boat to England. (147)

As an outcome from his full-fledged involvement in business and trade, Franklin begins to make a colossal amount of money. He uses to pay off all the debts he ever incurred. Franklin proves that he does have a benevolent side which can work altruistically. Altruistic and selfless features are rarely common. He follows "the religious principle of allowing others to borrow from you when they are in need, and as a result he loans much money to Ralph, none of which is ever repaid" (148).

Jacques Derrida views autobiography from the logic of deconstruction. He is of the opinion that "autobiography doubles the attempt to live through the name by also taking the name into the title of the work; it also increases its own involvement with death. In attempting to make use of the name as a guarantee of self-presence, autobiography is deflected further from its aim" (81). Concentrating on this aspect, Derrida makes the following statements:

This statement of autobiographical intent is not autobiographical in the way commonly understood by the term. It is not autobiographical because the signatory recalls his past life from a point outside or beyond the text but because he is the addressee and destination of the narration within the text. The 'I' therefore only constitute it through the texts he has written. (82)

The intended meaning in autobiography is scattered throughout the textuality. It gets transferred through linguistic play or the movement of signifiers. Unlike the projected unitary subject in classical autobiography, the subjectivity in postmodern autobiography exists in scattered, veiled and unidentified form. Only the bits and fragments of autobiography can be found. Thus, any attempt to form a single coherent and unified subject or self as well as the identifiable meaning is doomed to fail. This is the realization of Derrida regarding the postmodern autobiography.

Franklin shows here that "although he thinks it necessary to live virtuously, he does not mind giving money to people who do not live virtuously, such as Collins and Ralph. Franklin shows that even though he aspires to be a part of the aristocracy, he is not interested in accruing as much money as possible" (67). Heedless of any public evaluation and judgment, he allows his repressed side of generosity to come out,



transforming entire personality. The following extract is clearly indicative of how the narrator suffers from a crisis in his dark and deep interiority:

Loosely explained, Deism emerged during the Age of Reason as a religious philosophy based on a belief in God but not in any particular denominations. To Deists, God was like a watchmaker who creates a watch and then lets its run of its own accord without interfering in its mechanisms and strategic network. (87)

Franklin's fondness for Deism allows him to achieve maturity. His faith in God but belief in Deism also worked its way. This is his uniqueness. Such a venturesome initiative leads him to create the aphorism, "God helps those who help themselves" (69) Along with Deism comes a "utilitarian attitude by which Franklin idealizes things that are somehow useful or promote pleasure, utilitarianism itself being another ideal to grow out of the Age of Reason" (77).

Allan Bell holds the view that plenty of stereotypical remarks are often available in diverse types of autobiography. Bell is alert in this connection. He warns his readers in this direction. Autobiographies that include these stereotypes belong to the lowest grade of subjective discourse. The persona round whom autobiographies revolve must be independent of all such stereotypical thinking. The following extract is illustrative of this point:

The masculine narrative takes precedence over the feminine one; indeed by depicting her role as domestic angel and celebrating her unobtrusive feminine virtues of care, he also endorses his own centrality; he becomes simultaneously the object of her concern and his readers. The piety of remembering is waylaid by another, more dubious motive. (93)

Representation of stereotype in autobiography is problematical. There is no sound basis for the approving such type of stereotypical mode of representation. In a society which undertakes the mission of women's empowerment and gender equality, such autobiographical representation tainted with stereotype is not accepted wholeheartedly. Hence, it is a risky business. That is why such a mode of autobiographical representation must be avoided as far as possible.

Franklin dwells upon various virtues. He tries to explain why they are precious and important. This eclipses the lengthy discussion of virtues. Franklin's outline of some virtues here may be the result of poor planning. Franklin himself is just starting a new family with Miss "Read, his new wife. He uses the library for his own mental development, and meanwhile he manages to support his family based on industry and frugality. He saves money wherever possible. He remains a firm Deist, but he mentions that he respects all religions and dislikes religious strife. He does not ever attend "public worship" (164). He finds fault in some Christian theological interpretations of morality. He is mildly subversive in this regard. The following extract is indicative of this sort of nature of the narrator:

Franklin consents "to the bold and arduous project of arriving at Moral Perfection." He creates a list of 13 virtues that are, in order:

Temperance, Silence, Order, Resolution, Frugality, Industry, Sincerity, Justice, Moderation, Cleanliness, Tranquility, Chastity, and Humility.

He sets about creating a weekly plan by which he will develop one virtue per week, eventually perfecting them all. (71)

Franklin notices several mistakes at first. But over time he manages to correct most of them. He finds that "Order is the most difficult for him to acquire, partly because Franklin's good memory makes Order not as necessary. However, Franklin ends up

being pleased with his inability to perfect all his virtues, deciding, a speckled axe is best" (163). A benevolent man should allow a few faults in himself, to keep his friends in countenance. In his view, religious virtue is appealing.

Franklin stresses the utilitarian aspect of faith. He mentions that "Humility was added last when his friends started to complain that he was too arrogant. To make himself seem more humble, he used such phrases as I conceive or I apprehend" rather than certainly, undoubtedly" (122). Franklin writes that he "afterwards started enjoying conversations more. However, he found his pride impossible to vanquish. In fact, he sardonically mentions that he became so humble so as to be proud of his own humility" (133). The following extract is self-explanatory in this regard:

Despite hardships, he does return to Boston for a visit to see his family, and he makes amends with his brother, James helping him with printing types. Back in Philadelphia, Franklin oversees the branching out of the Junto, his debating club, which expands to include different chapters in other parts of the nation. (166)

Franklin organizes a town meeting. He wants to discuss the pamphlet. At this meeting he promotes the need for increased common colonial defense. He establishes a type of lottery to raise defense money. He has difficulty raising funds.

To sum up, the core finding of this thesis is that idealism and pragmatism should be blended in order to create harmony not only in the life of an individual but also in society and other institutions. Throughout his autobiography, the narrator hints at the blending of enlightenment ethos and puritan faith. While professing puritan faith, it is necessary to keep in mind the idea of individual freedom, the value of liberty, rights to keep private properties and respect to others' dignity.

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