Lakshmibai Tilak’s Marathi autobiography Smruti Chitre—translated in English as I Follow After is remarkable for its comprehensive self-projection. Lakshmibai Tilak started writing the book in 1930—around twenty years after the publication of Ramabai Ranade’s autobiography and the condition of the Indian woman had improved a lot during the intervening period. Women’s education had found a wider acceptance in the Indian society, as evidenced by Lakshmibai’s book itself—Rev. Tilak wanted his daughter to be a doctor. Women had begun to go in for jobs, which has been also evidenced by the book itself—Lakshmibai Tilak stays out of house to work as a nurse for some months. With the emergence of Gandhi and the struggle for Independence, women had become political activists and were exposed to the outside world. They had stepped out of domesticity. As a result of all these factors, the life of the Indian woman had ceased to be husband-centred. The autobiography reflects all this improved condition of the Indian woman and so unlike Ramabai Ranade, Lakshmibai Tilak is never apologetic while talking about herself rather than the husband. Unlike Ramabai Ranade, Lakshmibai Tilak does not end her autobiography with the death of her husband. Instead, when the third
volume of *Smruti Chitre*, which ends with the death of the husband, was launched in a glittering ceremony at Nashik in 1935 and Acharya Atre, an eminent Marathi writer who presided over the function, publicly requested Lakshmibai Tilak to take rest instead of going on writing *Smruti Chitre*, she stoutly denied this request. This shows that now the woman no longer considered her life as a widow to be meaningless- she found it important and worth telling about. So the self-portrait that emerges from Lakshmibai Tilak’s autobiography is far more comprehensive than that which emerges from Ramabai Ranade’s autobiography. This spirit of moving on without male support makes the book a landmark in the history of the Indian woman’s autobiography.

After the death of Rev. Tilak, the husband of Lakshmibai Tilak and an eminent Marathi poet, his son Mr. Devdutt Narayan Tilak wanted to write a biography of his father. He requested his mother to write her memories about the husband so that they could be a help for him in the writing of his book. So Lakshmibai Tilak wrote her autobiography, which means that the woman of the age still needed someone’s request to write her autobiography. Mr. Devdutt Narayan Tilak published the book in the form of a series of articles in a Marathi weekly called *Sanjivani* and then in the form of a book in 1934. The first three volumes of the book were
translated in English as *I Follow After* by E. Josephine Inkster and the English version was published by Oxford University Press, Delhi in 1950.

The title of the Marathi book—*Smruti Chitre*—reflects the improved condition of the woman. Unlike the titles of Ramabai Ranade’s autobiography, which refer to the husband or the married life, this one refers to the writer’s memory, which is a part of her own self. Unfortunately, the title of the English version—*I Follow After* conveys a completely contradictory sense. The title of the Marathi book is also suggestive—it suggests that the book is going to project the writer’s life, as and as much as she remembers it.

Lakshmibai Tilak’s self is made up of the qualities derived from her parents. She inherits casteism from her father—her father is such an orthodox person that he cannot tolerate even the touch of a non-Brahmin, and subsequently his orthodoxy reaches such an absurd length that he cannot tolerate even the touch of a Brahmin. Lakshmibai Tilak hates her father, as she and her family have to suffer a lot on account of his orthodoxy. His conservatism occasionally leads him to severely beat her and it once drives her to make an unsuccessful effort of committing a suicide. She also loves the father—the news of the death of the father comes as a great blow to her. Even after the death of the father, the image of the father seems to be firmly
embedded in her mind. According to Jung, the father 'imago' and the mother 'imago' - the primordial images of the father and the mother - are 'unique and imperishable' and so in adult life, not many difficulties are needed to reawaken those memories and make them active. Such 'constellated' [i.e. activated] unconscious contents are always projected - that is, they are discovered in external objects, or are said to exist outside one's own psyche.

So Lakshmibai Tilak also projects the father image upon Uncle Govindrao or Pendse, her brother-in-law. She follows her father's beliefs for a long time, even though the self-same values have once driven her to commit a suicide. She gets slightly away from the fatherly mould when she decides to live with the converted husband. Still she sticks to the fatherly orthodoxy - even though she does not mind living with the converted husband, she does not like Christians to be in her neighborhood. Later on even when she has to stay in their vicinity, she still keeps to her Brahminical rites and purifications. Once when she has to drink the water drawn from a well by a Muslim, she simply vomits and feels that she has committed a great sin. This shows the extent to which the father's influence can determine the behavior and thoughts of the daughter. Lakshmibai Tilak's lack of formal schooling and scant exposure to the outside world could have strengthened the
influence of the father's orthodoxy on her mind. According to Jung, the child should be brought up only with a right amount of authority.

There are, unfortunately, many parents who keep their children infantile because they themselves do not wish to grow and give up their parental authority and power. In this way they exercise an extremely bad influence over their children since they deprive them of every opportunity of individual responsibility. These disastrous methods of upbringing result in dependent personalities or in men and women who can achieve their independence only by furtive means. ³

As too much authority is brought to bear down upon Lakshmibai Tilak, it seems to have made her personality 'dependent' on the father, disallowing her to think on her own. After she vomits the water drawn from a well by a Muslim, it suddenly dawns upon her that the caste distinctions are meaningless and so she begins to accept food from even the Christians. Her husband is happy about it, which seems to have encouraged her to further get away from the father's hold. Then she surpasses the husband on this count - she freely mixes up with the lower castes, adopts their children and brings them up and even herself converts to Christianity. Alongside her husband, she serves the plague-stricken people at Wai, even working as a sweeper for them - this is a rejection of the father's excessive notions of cleanliness and purity. Obviously enough, all these things are mainly due to Rev. Tilak- if
she had not married a progressive person like Rev. Tilak, she would have
remained unchanged. Rev. Tilak is ‘the wise old man’ for her. She herself
gives full credit for the development of her personality to ‘the wise old
man’-

...his life, so filled with high ideals, had an
immediate effect upon other people; otherwise
it would have been impossible for Narayanrao
Gokhale’s daughter to be ready to undertake
cheerfully and enthusiastically the work of a
sweeper... If there be anything in that to be
praised, then it is Tilak who must be praised.
He was in these things my teacher. He led
the way, and my part was only to run boldly
along it with my eyes shut.  

As ‘the wise man’ always has something spiritual about him, Rev. Tilak has
been portrayed as a thoroughly ‘spiritual’ person. Things such as his
declaring himself to be a ‘Christian ascetic’ during his last days and
thereafter living with an ascetic simplicity have been carefully noted. She
has also made a point to record things like his tearing off leaves of a bitter
neem tree and thereby making a woman comment about him,

...he has the power of a saint.  

According to the archetypal theory, the mother becomes ‘terrible mother’
when her son or daughter questions her values. In this autobiography,
Bhikutai- the writer’s elder sister, who is just like a mother for her- plays the
role of the ‘terrible mother’. After Tilak’s conversion, Bhikutai looks after
the writer with maternal love but she becomes ‘terrible mother’ immediately after the latter decides to live with the converted husband. The writer’s living with the husband shocks her to such an extent that she falls ill and after she hears of the writer’s conversion, she becomes riveted to her bed. Then the writer becomes an unwelcome guest at her house- she has been given one quarter of a cake of unleavened bread for food and the horse saddle for bedding. After the writer’s conversion, Bhikutai refuses to meet her or to even look at her, though her hostility for the writer and her family melts in the course of time. Her sickness eventually leads to her death, which comes as a great blow for the writer- she grieves over the fact that she has been responsible for Bhikutai’s illness and death. Yet all this does not alter her changed perspective on the communal distinctions.

Lakshmibai Tilak loves her mother a lot- having a whimsical father, who insists upon washing everything before using it, seems to have drawn her more to the mother than the father. It is her love for the mother that seems to make her project the image of the mother on Bhikutai, her elder sister, and Ashammabai, a kind Christian woman. The mother-complex in her takes the form of ‘Hypertrophy of the maternal instinct’- she becomes a mother for others. After the death of her first son –Vidyanand- Rev.Tilak brings a parrot for her to make her forget her grief and she loves the parrot
with maternal care, which becomes a subject-matter for a poem by Rev. Tilak. Later on adopting children and looking after them becomes a 'mania' with her. During the period of a famine, twenty-two children have been turned out of a Christian boarding school and she keeps them at home and lovingly looks after them even though Mr. Hume, a well-wisher of the family, often protests against her doing so. Without actually adopting people like 'Balkavi Thombare', a distinguished Marathi child-poet, she treats them with maternal love and nurses them with motherly care in their sickness. She seems to take pride in the fact that she has got many of such sons and daughters-

By the mercy of God I have many I can call son or daughter.

Significantly enough, she has a passion for nursing—her mother likes to dispense medicines to others and she carries on with this tradition of the mother. When she goes in for a job, it is the job of nursing, which is very much related with motherhood. Fortunately, this 'hypertrophy of the maternal instinct' has not been carried to the absurd length of becoming a mother for the husband or treating him merely as a means of procreation. Nor does it mislead her into being totally unconscious of her personality and living in complete identification with the objects of her care, as it is supposed to do.
Her mother is a poetess and she inherits the mother’s poetic talent and sensitivity, which has flowered after living with a poet husband. Her mother is generous by nature and she also seems to have inherited the mother’s generosity. Yet her generosity seems to be more unconventional in nature than the mother’s- her mother would not have dreamed of adopting lower-caste children and bringing them up. Similarly, unlike the mother, she is not tolerant to the whimsical and impractical nature of the husband. Even though she loves him a lot and is protective about him and he is a friend, philosopher and guide for her, at times she is quite assertive. There is a shift noticed in the position of a husband. He is no longer the God of her world but a companion. When Rev. Tilak once insults her by calling her ‘a vampire’, it has been sharply rebuffed by her. At times she takes her own decisions, without consulting the husband, and executes them- the husband subsequently accepts those decisions. The decision of adopting a lower-caste beggar girl called Houshi has been taken by her and later on accepted by the husband. Unlike Ramabai Ranade, she does not need the emotional support of the husband while breaking social traditions. When the husband disappears for months together, leaving her to fend for herself, she manages to do without him. Though a number of problems come her way during his long absences at home, she courageously stands up to all of them. As a
poetess, she refuses to be overshadowed by the husband, who is a celebrated poet. Thus, she makes it a point to record the fact that though her poem, which was read out at the Poets’ Conference at Jalgaon, had been revised by Rev. Tilak, the line- ‘You are poets, I, a beggar, at your door’ that won a lot of acclaim at the Conference was her own. When her poem ‘A Modak among the Karanjis’ has been published, she receives a letter from a woman from Pandharpur, asking her whether her husband helped her in writing the poem. This angers her and she writes a reply to it in a verse of two hundred and seventy-five lines in order to prove her poetic talent. The very thought of the death of the husband does not seem to scare her as much as it scares Ramabai Ranade- nor does the death shatter her world, as it happens with the latter. Instead, immediately after the death, she assures the daughter,

I will not let you want for anything.
I shall complete your education.

Here we find the importance of ‘the wise old man’ dwindling- he is reduced to a source of inspiration. His emotional support is no longer needed and there is no emotional dependence upon him.

Of course, she appears to be somewhat timid to the husband at times- the husband occasionally severely beats her up and she seems to patiently bear with it. Even though she is more shrewd, cautious and pragmatic than the husband, at times she seems to be rather gullible in dealing with him, as
she seems to be easily taken in by his shrewd tricks. Thus, even though at the time of her beginning to live with him after his conversion to Christianity, he assures that he will not make her convert to Christianity, he draws her into the fold of Christianity in a clever way. Once when in the course of a Christian prayer, she repeats a Biblical verse- ‘Oh God, have mercy upon me- a sinner’, he makes a shrewd remark to her,

If being bound to me by promise, you desert me, what can I think of you? Even so if you live apart from Christ to whom you are devoted, how can God be pleased with such deception? How can He have mercy upon you?  

These words have such an effect upon her that she converts to Christianity the next day and she does not seem to see through his shrewd trick even at the time of writing the autobiography.

In the ultimate analysis, Lakshmibai Tilak has more of independent individuality than Ramabai Ranade. While Ramabai Ranade’s world is largely confined to the upper castes, her universe includes the lower castes and Christians and this seems to have given her a broader vision of life than Ramabai Ranade.

Though the book thus presents a very comprehensive self-portrait, there are certain things which somewhat mar the comprehensiveness. Mr. Ashok Tilak, the grandson of Lakshmibai Tilak, notes in his introduction
to the ‘abhinav avruti’ of Smruti Chitre that she was a woman of firm
determination in actual life but the book does not reflect this one and some
other qualities of hers. While Mr. Ashok Tilak may be right on this count,
one may counter him by saying that the self-portrait as it emerges from the
autobiography is never identical to the original personality of the writer-
some aspects of it are likely to remain covered in the autobiography. At
another point in the introduction, he indicates that the book does not reflect
the intense sensitivity of Lakshmibai Tilak and cites an example for it- the
book coldly records a fact that she did not like the idea of Dattu’s wedding
being arranged in the month of ‘Chaitra’. However, when the marriage was
actually arranged in the month of ‘Chaitra’, she was very scared. He cites an
English letter by Rev. Tilak to Dattu in support of this-

She is simply frightened to find that if you
are married any day after the 11th of this
month your marriage will be performed in
‘Chaitra’, which she believes to be the most
inauspicious month for the ceremony and
must cause in future some harm.  

Mr. Ashok Tilak may be right on this score but the intensity of the
autobiographer’s emotional reaction to a particular thing naturally mellows
down in the course of time.

Like the self-portrait of Ramabai Ranade, this one has also been drawn
with honesty- just like Ramabai Ranade, Lakshmibai Tilak does not conceal
her faults or mistakes, nor does she try to justify them. She has no scruples in presenting uncomplimentary things like Rev. Tilak’s remark about her,

She is an angel but she has her weaknesses.  

Just like Ramabai Ranade’s, Lakshmibai Tilak’s self-portrait has been also delineated with modesty but unlike the former, Lakshmibai Tilak does not seem to suffer from excessive modesty and so she is not shy of revealing all the social work she has done. This shows how with the changing times, the woman overcame her diffidence and began to reveal several aspects of her life and the self.

In the absence of a keen psychological insight, Lakshmibai Tilak generally refuses to delve deep into her mind but remains content with giving some indications about her mental states. Her relating the incident of her coming to know about Rev.Tilak’s conversion is significant in this context- she tells us that at that time she was at her sister’s and she had been called upstairs by her brother and sister to convey the news of the conversion to her. She was so overcome with apprehension that she could not climb the staircase and like a small child, she had to draw herself up by her hands. Yet such indications can hardly compensate for the lack of a deep psychological exploration. There is just a single emotional experience- the experience of her getting rid of the fatherly orthodoxy - which she projects in vivid details.
Unlike Ramabai Ranade’s, Lakshmibai Tilak’s autobiography is not husband-natured in nature but even then it manages to draw a comprehensive portrait of the husband. Rev. Tilak, as the book portrays him, is a multi-faceted personality - a poet who can write poems in the act of speaking, an actor whose performance in a play can move the audience to tears, an eloquent orator who wins a number of prizes in elocution competitions, a great teacher whose teaching can turn even urchins into poets. Apart from that, he is also a man of vanity who seems to value respect and honor a lot and to fear that everyone is out to insult him, a man with a sense of humor, absent-minded, irascible, impractical, courageous, unconventional, spiritual, a loving but whimsical husband.

The portrait has been also delineated with objectivity. As in the case of Ranade, this objectivity is specially remarkable because just like Ranade, Rev. Tilak also had his own admirers and followers and exposing the human weaknesses of such a venerated person was certainly a matter of courage. The book Jara Vegla Angle by Mr. Ashok Tilak tells us that Tara - the adopted daughter of Rev. Tilak - did not like the way her father was presented by the book. ‘Why do you write such bad things about Papa?’, she used to ask her mother and quarrel with her on this count. It is certainly to the credit
of Lakshmibai Tilak that at the risk of inviting this kind of criticism, she has portrayed the husband objectively.

Of course, at times she uses humour as a 'camouflaging' device, as Dr. Leena Chandorkar calls it, to cover up the irascibility of the husband. The incident of the husband's beating her up even when she is pregnant has been presented as a humourous incident in order to underplay its seriousness, which shows the patriarchal influences on the writer's mind. As Dr. Leena Chandorkar points out, even though Lakshmibai is 'ready to reveal the darker side of Rev. Tilak',

... because the narration is done in a deliberately light-hearted manner, the criticism loses the barb. ¹¹

The patriarchal hold on the writer's mind is also reflected in her projection of herself as a product of the husband. As Dr. Leena Chandorkar notes,

Writing an autobiography is an act of assertion that was denied to women. Lakshmibai Tilak realizes this and tries to sublimate the boldness of an I-centered narrative by projecting herself as a creation of her husband. ¹²

The portrait has not been drawn with much of sympathetic understanding. Mr. Prabhakar Padhye, an eminent Marathi writer and critic, has tried to offer a valid psychological explanation for Rev. Tilak's egoism in his Marathi article 'Smrutichitratal Tilakdarshan'.
According to Mr. Padhye, as a child, Rev. Tilak was hated and discriminated against by his father, which could have given rise to inferiority complex in his mind. As per Adler’s theory, inferiority complex often transforms itself into superiority complex and so later on Tilak’s inferiority complex could have transformed itself into superiority complex. In the absence of formal education and a keen psychological insight, Lakshmibai Tilak has failed to understand Rev. Tilak’s egoism in this way. His forgetfulness is also quite understandable, as a poet often has a tendency to live in his own world and so to forget small practical matters. As Robert Lynd observes-

…the poet may forget to post a letter, because his mind is filled with matter more glorious. Absent-mindedness of this kind seems to me all but a virtue.¹³

In spite of being a poetess herself, Lakshmibai does not take such a mature approach towards his absent-mindedness. According to Mr. Ashok Tilak, Lakshmibai could not understand the greatness of Rev. Tilak properly. In his Marathi book Jara Vegla Angle, Mr. Ashok Tilak compares Rev. Tilak with other social reformers like Hari Narayan Apte, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, ‘Keshavsuta’ of his age and says that Rev. Tilak had a more progressive, liberal approach to women than them. While they championed the cause of women’s liberation out of pity or a sense of justice, Rev. Tilak championed the same out of his high respect for what he called as ‘nari shakti’. Even
though Mr. Ashok Tilak may be right on this score, an uneducated housewife like Lakshmibai Tilak could be hardly expected to know the views of the other social reformers regarding women and to compare them with the views of her husband and so her understanding of the greatness of the husband on this count was bound to be limited.

The portrait reflects the development of the character of Rev. Tilak— a person of vanity turning into a saint. Of course, as Lakshmibai Tilak did not know all the twists and turns in this spiritual journey, the book does not bring it out in all its bearings. Mr. Ganghadhar Gadgil, a distinguished Marathi writer and critic, conceives of the autobiography as the story of Rev. Tilak’s journey towards sainthood and notes that Lakshmibai Tilak does not have the ability to draw an all-round portrait of this journey. One may counter Mr. Gangadhar Gadgil by saying that the autobiography is basically a self-portrait - it can not be expected to draw an all-round portrait of the spiritual journey of someone else.

The book is not husband-centred in nature and this seems to have given the writer a free hand in dealing with characters. Similarly, as Lakshmibai Tilak’s world was larger than Ramabai Ranade’s, the book is peopled with a large variety of characters, including the lower castes and Christians.
Some of these characters are parallel and contrasting to each other. Rev.Tilak’s mother-Janakibai- is a woman of generosity and so is Ashammabai , who is something like a mother for Rev.Tilak, which makes their characters parallel to each other. While Janakibai loves Rev.Tilak very much, Wamanrao- her husband- holds him with contempt, which makes their characters contrasting. Being thus parallel or contrasting to each other, these characters throw light on each other.

Some of these characters are representatives of their age as well as individuals in their own right, as evidenced by the character of a poet. The poet , who takes the wife to a temple and pretends to beat her in order to show to the world that he dominates over her, subsequently turns into a saint. While his showing off his domination over the wife makes him a representative of the age, his subsequently turning into a saint makes him an individual in his own right.

Some of these pen-portraits have been delineated with objectivity. Even though she projects Wamanrao, her father-in-law, as a cruel person, she does not fail to mention that he never used an unseemly word to her or laid a finger on her. It is remarkable that just like Ramabai Ranade, Lakshmibai Tilak also has good words to say about a person who has troubled her a lot.
As far as the narrative-technique is concerned, Lakshmibai Tilak is very choosy in giving details. As Sarojini Vaidya observes, the age depicted by the book was the age of Lokmanya Tilak but the book makes just a single passing reference to him. It was also the age of social, political and religious upheavals but the book does not reflect them. According to Sarojini Vaidya, the reason could be that having converted to Christianity, Rev. Tilak and his wife were cut off from the mainstream of Hindu life and so those social, political and religious matters had no bearing upon their life. In the view of Sarojini Vaidya, it is admirable that Lakshmibai Tilak has not brought in such irrelevant social, political things just for imparting information to the reader about the age. She compares Smruti Chitre with some other recent Marathi autobiographies, which give numerous details about irrelevant social, political matters of the age and indicates that Smruti Chitre is better than them on this score. This view is unacceptable on two counts - in the first place, the Tilaks’ conversion to Christianity may not be the only reason behind Lakshmibai Tilak’s being unconcerned with social and political realities. It may have something to do with the facts that Lakshmibai Tilak was not formally educated and that she was mainly a housewife, not much of an active participant in public life. Secondly, while it is admirable that Lakshmibai Tilak did not bring in irrelevant social or political matters, it is
certainly not praiseworthy that she was completely without social or political consciousness.

The narrative-technique is conventional in nature, though at few places, the writer directly addresses to the reader- while talking about the arrival of a ‘saheb’, she tells the reader,

Behold, the disaster, in the shape of the saheb, before the door!  

This gives the book the feel of an old grandmother telling stories.

Similarly, at few places, the writer tries to blur the distinction between the past tense and the present tense-

My eyes had begun to close of themselves, when I saw descending before me a tall woman, dressed in a red sari, her hair loosened and a big ‘kunku’ drawn across her forehead... Now she is touching the bed. Now she has laid a hand on the child. She is beginning to draw him out... .

The traditional nature of the narrative-technique is quite understandable because the narrative-technique of even men’s literature of the age was generally conventional in character.

As far as the style is concerned, it is remarkable that in spite of being a poetess herself, Lakshmibai Tilak has avoided using ‘poetic’ language. The similes she has used are very few in number. The range of these similes is limited- they have been generally drawn from nature and
are conventional in nature. A simile reflects the expanding knowledge of the Indian woman-

The sale of milk and eggs had been a great help to me in my housekeeping, but all was lost, like the glass ware of Shiekh Chahlhi in the basket at his feet when he dreamed of kicking his wife.\(^7\)

A few metaphors have been used and they are also limited in range and traditional. A metaphor reflects the widening world of the Indian woman-

The brakes of the Deccan Queen must be stronger than the other brakes, because its speed is greater. The brake of my suspicion was created in opposition to this quality of Tilak’s and as a result of living with him.\(^7\)

The language has no innovativeness but nothing is surprising about it because linguistic innovations were a rarity in the Marathi literature of the age. Besides, by her own admission, being formally uneducated, Lakshmibai Tilak could not write Marathi very well. Such a lady could be hardly expected to experiment with the language.

In conclusion, it can be said that the book is certainly remarkable for its interesting self-portrait and the portrait of the husband, its large world of characters and their complicated relationships, its absorbing narrative-technique and generally natural language-style. However, one of its limitations is that in spite of belonging to an age of a lot of social and
political upheavals, it does not reflect social and political consciousness at all. The next chapter will deal with a book that overcomes this limitation of the Indian woman's autobiography and projects the self in a wide socio-political context.
References

1 E.Josephine Inkster, tr. *I Follow After*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1950. (All subsequent references will be taken from this edition)


5 Ibid. 57.

6 Ibid. 328.

7 Ibid. 352.

8 Ibid. 201.

9 Ibid. 10.

10 Ibid. 346.


12 Ibid. 123.


15 Ibid. 278.

16 Ibid. 169.

17 Ibid. 21.