Abstract

This study is an attempt to analyse the autobiographies of some Indian women namely Ranade-His Wife’s Reminscences by Ramabai Ranade, I Follow After by Lakshmibai Tilak, With No Regrets by Krishna Hutheesingh, My Story by Kamla Das, The Revenue Stamp by Amrita Pritam, And Pine for What is Not by Suneeta Deshpande, Selective Memory by Shobha De from a social psychological perspective, keeping in mind the evolution of the Indian woman from a ‘dasi’ of the husband to an independent individual, who has self-awareness. Traditional Indian culture had confined the life of woman to the domestic world only and thereby suppressed her growth. Due to the efforts of great social reformers like Mahatma Phule, Gopal Ganesh Agarkar, Dr. Ambedkar as well as various other factors, she acquired awareness of her self and the self has developed in various ways, which has immensely benefited her autobiography in different ways. The present study explores these changes and their effects on the genre of women’s autobiographies. The archetypal theories of Jung have been used as parameters while critically examining the given autobiographies.

The autobiographies chosen for this study are selected because they clearly demonstrate the changes in the status and mindset of women in
India and their effects upon the genre of their writings. Ramabai Ranade, the first woman autobiographer under consideration and Shobha De, the last one, are studies in contrast—while the former can not easily break away from the parental influences and needs emotional support from ‘the wise old man’, the latter one has the ability and courage to move on to a different world with which her parents are totally unfamiliar, without seeking the help of any ‘wise old man’ for it. While the similes and metaphors used by Ramabai Ranade are drawn from her small, domestic world, those used by Shobha De have been drawn from different fields of life, obviously because women have stepped out from the threshold of house.

Amrita Pritam’s The Revenue Stamp, Krishna Hutheesingh’s With No Regrets, Shobha De’s Selective Memory have received scant critical attention. Though Dr. Vimal Bhalerao has critically examined Ramabai Ranade’s Ranade- His Wife’s Reminiscences in her Marathi book Marathi Wangmayatil Streeyanchi Atmacharitre- Ek Abhyas, she fails to present Ramabai Ranade as a product of the patriarchal system of the age, as the present study tries to do. Mr. Gangadhar Gadgil has critically discussed Lakshmibai Tilak’s autobiography in his Marathi book Marathi Sahityache Mandanda but the focus of his discussion is on the narrative-technique of the book. He wrongly conceives of the book as a story of Rev. Tilak’s
journey towards sainthood and complains that the book does not bring out his spiritual journey in all its bearings. Sarojini Vaidya has also critically discussed the book in her Marathi book Mati ani Murti but her attention is also mainly focussed on the narrative-technique of the book. Dr. Leena Chandorkar has tried to critically explore the book in her Ph.D. thesis ‘I Across the Boundaries : A Feminist Approach to the Study of Three American and Three Indian (Marathi) Autobiographies by Women but she has dealt with the book from a feminist point of view. Iqubal Kaur has tried to make a stylistic and psychological analysis of Kamla Das’ My Story in her book Untying and Retying the Text- an Analysis of Kamla Das’ My Story. Mr. A.N.Dwivedi has dealt with the book in his book Kamla Das and Her Poetry and Alladi Uma has also discussed it in his article ‘What’s in a Genre? Kamla Das My Story’ but these critics are mainly concerned with the stylistic features of the book. Though the Marathi book Ahe Manohar Tari- Vachan ani Vivechan, edited by Mr.V.P.Bhagwat and Vijaya Rajadhyaksha contains a lot of critical material regarding Suneeta Deshpande’s And Pine for What is Not, the book fails to consider Suneeta Deshpande as a representative of the post-Colonial period, as the present study does. Except Mr.M.S.Patil who has tried to treat Suneeta Deshpande’s autobiography from the archetypal point of view in his article ‘Ahe Manohar
Tari- Adibandhatmak Drushtikonatun’, no critic has so far applied the archetypal theories to these autobiographies, as the present study attempts to do. So the present study tries to consider these works from a new perspective.

The thesis is divided into ten chapters. The first part of the chapter – ‘Introduction’- introduces the main topic of the study and the reasons for choosing the given autobiographies for consideration. It also discusses the parameters of the archetypes of self, the process of individuation, the father, the mother, the wise old man, persona and the trickster, which have been applied to this study. According to the archetypal theory, the self is made up of the elements inherited from the parents but the process of individuation demands growing out of the parental mould. So the focus of this study is upon whether the women autobiographers concerned are able to get away from the shadow of the parents or not.

The second part of the chapter ‘Autobiography as a Literary Genre’ discusses the existing definitions of autobiography and as it finds them incomplete, it attempts to define the genre of autobiography. The chapter also deals with the forms of autobiographies, the motives behind the writing of the autobiography and the strengths and limitations of autobiography.
The first part of the second chapter ‘A Historical Perspective on the Position of Women in the Indian Society’ projects the history of the Indian woman from the Vedic period to the modern age. It shows how the position of the women in the Vedic period was satisfactory but how it slowly went on degrading in the subsequent periods till the woman was reduced to a shadow and slave of the husband. The chapter also shows the changes brought about in the position of women in the colonial and post-Independence period due to interaction with the Western culture.

Chapter 2B – ‘A History of the Indian Autobiography’ traces the development of the autobiography in the various Indian languages. It shows how the Indian autobiography came into being after the colonial interaction and how it acquired variety, boldness and innovativeness in the course of time.

From the third chapter onwards, all the subsequent chapters discuss the autobiographies selected. Ramabai Ranade’s autobiography Ranade- His Wife’s Reminiscences was originally published in Marathi as Amachya Ayushyatil Kahi Athavani in 1910. Ramabai Ranade inherits the patriarchal values of uncomplainingly suffering at the hands of the in-laws and treating the husband as God. She carries the influences of these values all her life. Her husband encourages her to get educated and participate actively in
public life in the face of the stiff opposition of the elders in the family—
he becomes ‘the wise old man’ for her. She puts up a resistance against the
elders of the family, though a silent one and often with the emotional
support of ‘the wise old man’. The death of the husband means the end of
the world for her. Yet her struggle to break away from the patriarchal system
shows the signs of self-awareness.

Writing an autobiography itself is her struggle to free herself from the
shackles of patriarchy. She dares to speak about the husband-wife
relationship in a period when it was a taboo to speak about such intimate
relationships in the open. This autobiography is a landmark because it
registers the beginning of women’s struggle for freedom of expression.
Because it is husband-centred, the book does not give enough space to the
writer’s self. So we come to know more about Justice Ranade than Ramabai
Ranade. The book presents the husband as a flesh-and-blood human being
when the contemporary society expected her to treat him with extreme
respect. It depicts all the sufferings she has undergone at the hands of the
in-laws when the woman of the age was supposed to be silent about them.

Lakshmibai Tilak’s autobiography I Follow After was originally
published in Marathi as Smruti Chitre in 1934. Lakshmibai Tilak’s father is
an orthodox, casteist Brahmin, who cannot tolerate even the touch of another
Brahmin, let alone that of a non-Brahmin. She inherits this quality from the father and she is governed by it for a long time. Even after she begins to live with a converted husband, she can not accept food from the Non-Brahmins. Under the influence of the husband, she gets off the fatherly orthodoxy- she freely mixes up with the lower castes, eats their food, adopts their children and brings them up. She subsequently converts to Christianity, which is a total rejection of the fatherly conservatism. Here we find the assertion of freedom, where she breaks away from the orthodoxy. Rev. Tilak becomes ‘the wise old man’ for her in defying social conventions but unlike Ramabai Ranade, she does not need the emotional support of ‘the wise old man’. She can easily do without the husband when he suddenly disappears from the house for months together, leaving her to fend for herself. The death of the husband does not shatter her world- instead, immediately after the death, she assures her daughter that now she will be both the father and the mother for her. She loves the mother to the extent that the mother complex in her assumes the shape of ‘hypertrophy of the mother’ complex. Still she is far less tolerant to the husband’s weaknesses than the mother. Here we find the importance of ‘the wise old man’ declining- he is now reduced to just a source of inspiration. Unlike Ramabai Ranade, she does not seek the emotional support of ‘the wise old man’ in breaking up social conventions.
While she inherits generosity from the mother, her generosity is far more unconventional than that of the mother—her mother would not have dreamt of adopting lower-caste children and bringing them up.

This individuation has enriched her autobiography in various ways. In this autobiography, the character of Lakshmibai emerges fully as compared to that of the husband. It boldly exposes the human weaknesses of the husband at the risk of inviting the ire of his admirers and followers. Of course, she uses humour as a camouflaging device to cover up the irascibility of the husband. She also feels the need to acknowledge the role of her husband in moulding her life. From the narrow, domestic world of Ramabai Rande, Lakshmibai Tilak’s world had expanded because of her interaction with different layers of society. So the number of characters in the book is also larger than the earlier autobiography. One of the limitations of the book is that it does not reflect social or political consciousness.

Krishna Hutheesingh’s autobiography With No Regrets was published in 1944—at a time when the Nationalist movement was at its height and many women actively participated in it. Krishna Hutheesingh represents the freedom which the women from politically strong and rich families enjoyed. She inherits bravery from her mother and stubbornness from the father. Yet she has the gumption to go England unescorted at the age of
sixteen against the wishes of her mother. On her return from England, she seeks the father’s permission for joining the job of a school-teacher. With the conceit of a patriarch, the father refuses the permission. Then she seeks the help of her mother, but the mother refuses to help her as with her patriarchal mindset, she considers getting married to be the sole aim of a girl’s life. She then seeks the help of Pandit Nehru, her famous brother, who becomes ‘the wise old man’ for her. He mediates between her and the father and gets the father’s consent. ‘The wise old man’ is no longer a source of inspiration- the woman herself wants to violate patriarchal conventions and ‘the wise old man’ just assists her in it. Unlike Ramabai Ranade, she is far from being too much emotionally dependent upon the husband- she lets him join the nationalist movement even if it means courting arrest or death. Her experiences abroad as well as her joining the nationalist movement widens her vision of life. Her imprisonments bring her into contact with criminals, which makes her understand that they are human beings like everybody and so they also deserve sympathetic consideration.

Unlike the earlier autobiographies, this one relegates the husband to the background. The focus is shifted to other relations like the father, the mother and the brother. The number of characters in this book is larger than
the earlier autobiographies. They include foreigners and criminals and even criminals have been treated with sympathetic consideration.

Kamla Das' autobiography *My Story* was published in 1976. The book belongs to the post-Independence period, in which the position of the women has undergone a lot of modifications because of a number of factors like the rise of girl's education as well as job opportunities for women, the growing influence of feminism and the establishment of women's organizations. These developments helped many women to become self-sufficient and independent. Now they can easily break away from the parental mould, without seeking the aid of any 'wise old man' for it. Though Kamla Das inherits the mother’s poetic talent and sensitivity, she is far from being a blind follower of the mother. Instead, the mother complex in her assumes the form of 'resistance to the mother complex', which prevents the growth of her sexuality. While the mother hides her dissatisfaction with the husband, she can boldly articulate it in her autobiography. Though she inherits the father’s generosity and Gandhian idealism, she rebels against the uncaring nature of the husband by wildly drinking or going in for extramarital affairs, which means she asserts the freedom of action.

Her autobiography portrays a shockingly bold self-portrait. It depicts her bodily and sexual experiences as well as her affairs with different men.
is significant to note that the woman can now talk about not only the husband but also other men in her life, which means the world of experiences of the outside world has expanded. The word ‘my’ in the title is significant- it shows that within the period of 66 years- from 1910 to 1976- the emphasis shifted from ‘his’ story to ‘her’ story, which signifies gender equality. The range of the similes and metaphors used by the writer is very wide. Some perceptive remarks made by the writer reflect her analytical mind.

Amrita Pritam’s The Revenue Stamp was originally published in Punjabi as Rasidi Tikat in 1976- the year in which Kamla Das’ autobiography was published. Like Kamla Das, her personality also bears distinct marks of the post-Independence period. The patriarchal system can not chain her down. Her father was a famous poet, a religious leader and a former ascetic who subsequently married. She inherits the father’s poetic talent, sensibility and sensuousness. In the opinion of Jung, the positive father complex in a woman can give rise to spiritual aspirations and Amrita Priam’s autobiography reflects this. She is defiant to the father’s authority from her childhood. While the father wants her to meditate over the Divine, she exercises her freedom of thought by meditating over Rajan, her ‘animus’. While the father wants her to write religious poetry only, she
exercises the freedom of expression by writing love-poems. In search of a person who is consistent with her ‘animus’, she keeps walking out of married lives till the age of thirty-nine.

Significantly enough, Amrita Pritam wrote this book even though Khushwant Singh had made fun of the very idea of her writing an autobiography, because he considered her life to be small and insignificant. Now women take their life very seriously, even though it may appear to be insignificant to others. The narrative-technique is different, novel and innovative- it relates all the incidents without chronological order, which conveys the sense of the eternal continuity and chaotic nature of life. It also makes the book an ‘anti-memoir’ in the terminology of Michael Bejour- ‘anti-memoir’ follows a dream-logic, which means no logic at all and weaves facts, memories, fantasies, analyses, arguments etc. The writer’s wide knowledge is reflected in the literary, historical, mythological references that she makes. She tries to probe the motives behind her going in for writing and continuing with it all her life. She also tries to explore the relationship between her writings and her subconscious mind. Some of the similes and metaphors she has used have been derived from history and mythology, which links the past with the present.
And Pine for What is Not by Suneeta Deshpande, who passed away recently, was originally published in Marathi as Ahe Manohar Tari in 1990. She loves the father to such an extent that her ‘animus’ is an ‘intelligent father’. Yet she joins the nationalist movement against the wishes of the father at the age of sixteen, which means that she asserts the freedom of decision. It also shows that now exposure to the Freedom movement is no longer confined to rich and powerful families but it can be enjoyed by middle-class women also. She loves the mother to such an extent that the mother complex in her assumes the shape of ‘hypertrophy of the maternal instinct’ complex. This complex dwells together with the ‘resistance to the mother’ complex, which enables her to reject some of the mother’s values like untouchability and ritual purity.

The book was seemingly written to draw public attention to her contribution to the iconic status her husband- the late Mr. P.L. Deshpande had attained in Maharashtra due to his multi-faceted genius. This shows her getting away from the shadow of the husband. The book profoundly explores the subconscious motives behind some of her actions or decisions. It reveals some of the human weaknesses of the husband at the risk of inviting the anger of his admirers. All the incidents have been narrated in a
disorderly fashion, which is reminiscent of the ‘anti-memoir’ technique used by Amrita Pritam.

Shobha De’s autobiography Selective Memory was published in 1998. Even though she inherits the father’s idealism, she rejects his puritanical values by going in for fashionable dresses or hair-styles or writing ‘pornographic’ novels, which shows her exercising the freedom of choice at the personal level. Far from being in need of any ‘wise old man’, she herself inspires her elder sisters to defy the parental authority. From Ramabai Ranade who needs ‘the wise old man’ and who is emotionally dependent upon him, the woman seems to have come a long way—now she herself becomes a source of inspiration, a trend-setter for others in breaking up patriarchal conventions. Though she has been pampered by the mother and so she loves the mother’s world a lot, she grows out of it and enters the world of modeling, which is totally unknown to the mother. She exercises the freedom of choice at the professional level. Being associated with different areas of life like modeling, journalism, writing television serials, she has vast exposure to life.

The book is interesting for its linguistic innovations, which is breaking away from linguistic norms.
Thus, all the autobiographies under study reveal the women’s growing self-awareness and self-actualization. From Ramabai Ranade to Shobha De, the study covers a long period of 9 decades. It shows that in every decade, there is some change in the status of women and their writings. In the year 1910 when Ramabai Ranade’s autobiography was published, the woman had just begun to find her voice. Her life still revolved around the husband. In the next two decades, the nationalist movement brought women out of their cocoon of domestic worlds and made them active participants in social and political life. This enhanced women’s status in family and society, which is reflected in Lakshmibai Tilak’s autobiography. In the Nineteen forties, the nationalist movement reached its peak and it widened the horizons of women’s lives. Krishna Hutheesingh’s autobiography shows this expansion of the women’s world. The next two decades witnessed further improvement in the condition of women. Kamla Das’ My Story and Amrita Pritam’s The Revenue Stamp bear distinct marks of this improved condition of women. Women got the courage to talk about subjects which were so far taboo for them. Women also got enough self-awareness to open the book of their lives before the world, even if others could find it insignificant, as exemplified by the autobiography of Amrita Pritam. In the next two decades, the opening up of various career
opportunities further widened women’s world and developed their individuality. Suneeta Deshpande’s *And Pine for What is Not* and Shobha De’s *Selective Memory*, both of which belong to the Nineteen Nineties, illustrate this changed condition—while the former has the strength to break away from the shadow of the illustrious husband, the latter presents a large world of variegated experiences. In this way, all these autobiographies demonstrate the truth that the changes in the social status of women have enriched the genre of women’s autobiographies in India in different ways. This is the conclusion the present study arrives at.