



A Study of Historical time and Autobiographical time in two Women Writers of Nineteenth Century India

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This paper seeks to study the historical time and the autobiographical time in the narration of *I Follow After* by Lakshmibai Tilak and *Amar Jiban* by Rassundari Devi. Lakshmibai Tilak begins narrating her story right from the time of her childhood, marriage, her trials, birth of her son and time span till his wedding and her own life is narrated till Waman Tilak her husband passes away. In *Women's Time* Julia Kristeva borrows James Joyce's phrase Father's time, mother's species which means linear historical time, progress, destiny. Autobiographical storytelling has emerged as a powerful tool regulating both bodies and selves, it also became a culturally potent tool which the west understood as historical time which is understood as a natural homogenous secular calendrical time without which the story of human civilization, a single human history cannot be told. Autobiography looks back from a fixed point in time which is the terminus of the retrospective. Remembering and recollecting is an important aspect in autobiographical writing. In Virginia Woolf *A Sketch Of the Past* she comments at length on her relation to mirrors. She writes about her mothers passing away at the age of thirteen and at some point she laughed which becomes a therapeutic psychological traumatic need to escape the trauma. Almost all women writing the self connects themselves to the mothers body. This paper will make a modest attempt to study time in *I Follow After* and *Amar Jiban*.

Key words: Historical time, Autobiographical time, narration, narratives, chronotopes

A short biography of the author's academic career

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I Narrative time

i) Gerrard Genette's 'duration'

ii) Time duration in Lakshmi Bai Tilak's autobiography *I Follow After*

iii) Archives of Self, Women as storytellers, Narrative techniques

Narrative time or simply time refers to the cultural, historical and chronological factors surrounding the events of a narrative, the temporal setting sets the stage and the context for the plot events and the ideology of both the characters and the author. "Frequently the actual 'real time' of an event and the time a narrator uses to tell it are quite unequal. This disparity between real time' and the time used to narrate the event is called duration," a term coined by Gerrard Genette in his book *Narrative discourse*.¹ It is not possible for a narrator to retell her whole life story as it actually happened. Some details or events that she liked or reminiscence fondly would take pages to narrate whereas many events are left out. This discrepancy between the events of the real life and as it is narrated in the discourse is known as a duration. Lakshmi Bai Tilak in *I Follow After* writes about her marital bliss and woes spanning 70 long years in the duration time could be two years or even story time could be just one or two hours.² There are 5 Possibilities while between story-time and discourse-time, scene, summary, stretch, ellipsis and pause. All these influence the reader's perception of the speed of narrative.

In the 1970s and early part of 1980s, the idea of the self as a storyteller emerged. In this narration of the self the narrative the traditional concept of identity underwent a change. The concept of identity as a life-long process of construction, reconstruction and deconstruction gained momentum. Many experiments on a continuous rewriting of the text of one's identity was carried on. The protagonist who writes by remembering and recollecting is entwined in the social, cultural, political times of his/her life. Identity construction by the protagonist of her/his present time seems to be the function of autobiographical writings. An Autobiographical memory is about past events and the process of remembering which links the past with the present. The various ways in which time is captured is by tense formation the past, present, future, by lexical features of verbs, by the various types of temporal adverbs, metaphors, metonymy, symbols, allegories and other tropes of time., We understand time as Fathers time, mothers time, time in idioms and proverbs. We spend time, waste time, steal time, time and tide waits for none, time heals, time marches on, we are running out of time. Thus time is a temporal concept, time cannot be captured. We try to understand time in flashbacks, flash-forward, ellipses, overlapping, stretches, summaries, pauses, gaps etc.

2) Time and narratives

i) Ricoeur's Time

ii) Bakhtin's Chronotope-time and space

iii) Rassundari Devi's *Amar Jiban, My Life*

In his book on *Time and Narrative*, volume-3, Ricoeur a modern philosopher analysis time and the perplexing relationship between time and narrative.³ Ricoeur's pioneering contribution to literary theory consists of this analysis of narrative and time. In this work Ricoeur shows how time is the product of narrative arrangements. It is the human need to compute and calculate with time in our relations with others.' Time for Ricoeur is always the time of 'being with others'. Ricoeur develops a narrative conception of 'Time' which differs as per the normal time chronology, arrangements of events, dates, patterns and normal life. Time is defined in the way we narrative our life and the others who come in

¹ Genette, Gerard. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. C, Trans Jane E. Lewin, Cornell University Press, 1979.

² Tilak, Lakshmi Bai. *I Follow After An Autobiography*, translated by Josephine Inkster O.U.P, 1998

³

our life. In telling we narrate of the occurrences in our life. How we deal with time, before and after, how we collect memories by wasting time or saving time. In the narration narrative fragments stumble out in bits, in flashbacks and is brought to life in narrative of ourselves. We define time in relation to the significant others that populate our world. These stories do not emerge whole and coherent in the first telling the full story only begins to cohere in the back and forth of dialogue. Interpretations eventually lead to meanings about time. Eventually episodes are configured by plot into sequence and meaning emerges in their coherence. Time and Narrative is Ricoeur's major work and divides into 4 parts. The first volume has 2 parts while volumes 2 and 3 have 1 part each.

According to Ricour time is experienced in two different ways. Time is experienced as linear succession which is cosmological time. Time as is experienced in hours, days , birth to death., time expressed in the metaphor of the "river"of time. Time is also expressed as past, present and future of the storyteller. He defines it as phenomenological time. We as human beings understand ourselves, as self –aware individuals. We experience both linear succession of time and also present and future time. His concept of 'human time' has both phenomenological time and cosmological time. Ricour links narrative's complexity to Aristotle's narrative as "the imitation of action". He calls it mimesis1 (prefiguration of action), Human acting is prefigured with certain semantics, he/she can raise questions of who, how, why and calls it the 'followability' of narration. Mimesis2 (configuration of the field of action). It concerns narrative emplotment. It configures in an imaginative way, It does exactly the same function as plot is to a story and mimesis3 (refiguration of action).

The Russian literary scholar M.M.Bakhtin (1981) has written four essays on forms of time and of the chronotope in the novel. *The Dialogic Imagination*.⁴ He uses the word chronotope to describe time and space. This term is used as a main element in his theory of meaning. He writes four essays on forms of time and of the chronotope in the novel. For him heteroglossia (multilingualness) published in English in *The Dialogic Imagination; Four Essays*, edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist) that is multiple variation of languages is an important element in the discourse in a Novel. This is explained in his work 'Discourse in the Novel'. Novelistic heteroglossia, that is several voice in the novel in which dialogic interrelations are established. Bakhtin explains that "every language in the novel is a point of view, a socio ideological conceptual system of real social groups and their embodied representatives " (1981, p.411). It is possible to look for chronotopes in autobiographies and autobiographical novels. According to Bakhtin the ancient autobiographical novels revealed a new type of time-chronotope of a person's new self and new life. It narrated the life of an individual who passed through a new life.

Luis Alberto Brandeo in "Theories of Literary Space" (2013) explains that in Bakhtin's analysis of the different types of Novel chronotope "what is found is the search to recognize at the level of the plot the fictional elements represented in fictional situations absence or presence and the scale of human transformation which is taken as an index of historicity" (Brandeo, 2013 p.95).⁵ Bakhtin's view of the change and transformation that character undergoes in both personal and professional life ask for a different kind of representation in the autobiographical novel chronotope. Another very prominent author of the nineteenth century Krupabai Saththianadhan's autobiographical novel *Saguna* offers scope to study historical and autobiographical time.

An autobiography revolves around the evolution of a writer. *Amar jiban* is written in the style of bildungsroman in the sense that the autobiographical 'I' From being a child bride, illiterate and uneducated progresses to a lettered woman, scripts her own life and experience on to paper and achieves

⁴ BAKHTIN, M.M. Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel. In: BAKHTIN, M. M. THE dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin. Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Edited by Michael Holquist. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1981.

⁵ BRANDEO, Luis Alberto. Theories of Literary Space p.95

accolades from the then great writers of her time. ⁶Nineteenth century India was not a favourable place for the girl child in India as child marriages, female illiteracy and female infanticide was rampant in society. It was a challenge to rise above the daily mundane of life and write a biography which had nothing much to narrate rather than the ordinary things. It is considered to be a historical archive of woman writing and the first biography of its time. Historical time is captured in the delineation of cyclical time in the narrative. The protagonist starts her narrative by describing the idyllic time spent with her mother at her mother's home. Those were her happiest days until one day she overhears some women speaking that she is to be given away, she confronts her mother asking her why she is to be given away to someone. Her mother explains to her that there is nothing to be frightened of, when in doubt or difficulty she should pray to Dayamadhav, he will surely help her. This Rassundari remembers throughout her life and on every page of her writing she invokes her God and asks for his pardon because she thinks that by educating herself she has transgressed the limit laid down by society. Memory and remembrance are through narrating good and bad both experiences. But the most poignant things remembered are the death of her mother as she thinks that had she been a boy she would have been able to visit her dying mother. Rassundari's writings was acceptable as she catered to the limits laid down by society in that she was illiterate, homemaker, mother of twelve children and on every page of her narration she asks for pardon and is apologetic, passive, conforming to tradition, the colonial nationalists, writers like Jyotindrinath Tagore, elder brother of Tagore glorifies her motherhood and comments in the preface that had he not read her he would have missed the greatest women author of his time. The same is not true of another woman writer Binodini Dasi, a very prominent theatre actress because acting as a career was not acceptable.

3) Mothering bodies

Most autobiographical writings starts with narrating the separation of the child from the mother. The mother is always present in the writings. She hovers from within and is present everywhere so much so the autobiographical writing is not possible without her presence. Virginia Woolf the most talented writers of the nineteenth century writes with lot of pain about her mother's death. She time and again reverts back to the incident and the repetition in her writings that "my mother died when I was just thirteen" expresses the pain of her separation from her mother. She goes on to write that she remembered everything of that day very vividly and also her laughter which gives her a lot of anguish and describes her psychological frame of her mind. Rassundari writes that she gave birth to eleven children and that she regrets the plight of the girl child and child brides of her times, things are different now when there is only one daughter at home and she receives proper education. Though she wrote during colonial times she refrains from commenting upon any historical or political event of her times. Time, both autobiographical and cyclical in her narrative slowly attains linear time. It would be worthwhile to look at women's diaries, journals, and unpublished autobiographical narratives to record women's history. This could lead to neglected areas on women studies. Kristeva's essay 'Women's Time' urges men and women to rethink their most fundamental views on being masculine and feminine, how they cannot escape their constructions, she likes difference but it should neither be masochistic nor constraining but should be productive and freeing for women and their sexuality. Women have not attained sexual freedom. The state has not granted 'permissiveness in sexual relationships as well as abortion and contraceptive rights. ' when the women's movement began as the struggle of suffragists and existential feminists, it sought to stake out its place in the linear time of planning and history'. For women's writings the time that ruled was cyclical, as in the time for cooking, cleaning, birthing, sleeping. In the household arena of the kitchen, time moves in a circle. Nothing new is really created, i.e. production, the old is recreated or reproduced. The first generation of feminists wanted out of circular time and into the history making possibility of linear time.

I Follow After is an autobiography by Lakshmibai Tilak which is a classic narrative of her time and life. It is narrated through humorous incidents. Lakshmibai shifts from memory and remembrance and weaves a beautiful pattern of her life lived with her husband Waman Tilak. It is about her life with

⁶ DEVI, Rassundari. *Amar Jiban My Life*. Published by Writers workshop. 1866.

Waman Tilak, the poet, her somewhat strange life with him, she accompanies him on all his wild travels from her home to his home, from his uncles place from Mumbai to Pune to living with the missionaries, from learning to live with his wandering kind of life, to living alone with her baby son with absolutely no ration to fall back on, He abandons her time and again, he runs off from home leaving her alone but never once is she heard complaining about it in her narrative. The narrative is more of the process of coming to terms with the changing times. The protagonist also grows into a budding poet and a public speaker in the company of her husband. From a child bride, uneducated and dependent on her relatives mercy she narrates her changing time and role of a woman in nineteenth century India. Lakshmibai started writing in 1930 twenty years after the publication of Ramabai Ranade's autobiography. The original Marathi autobiography is titled 'Smriti Chitre', Josephine Inkstar has titled the English translation as *I Follow After*, but the biography is not so much as following in the footsteps of her poet husband, It is very much about Lakshmibai's memories about living with him, narrated in very lucid remembrances of her past childhood, narrative is about remembering, nostalgia and living in the present. The narrative stops when her husband dies, but her work for the upliftment of the downtrodden continues suggesting that women will continue to write and bring a change in society's view towards woman authors.

Waman Tilak is well versed in Urdu, Marathi, English and Sanskrit. He had a deep interest in reading the scriptures. He was given the Bible in a train journey and converted to Christianity after four years in the year 1894. His family objected to his conversion vehemently, Lakshmibai was totally lost, she didn't know what to do, she kept on crying for days together, she also kept praying that Tilak should come back to her. She lives with her relatives for five years and then moves on to live with her husband, but she cooks separately and is still very conscious of her being a Brahman. Lakshmibai in the story moves to many cities, sometimes alone on a train, sometimes with family. She visits and sometimes live in Nasik, Poona, Nagpur, Lonavala, Rajnandangoan etc where Waman Tilak teaches, English, poetry, himself writes poems on a variety of topics. They are spaces where gatherings and religious functions are conducted. Waman Tilak is almost always busy meeting friends, priests, the congregation of Christians whom he preaches. This marks the actual historical time of conversion during the colonial period. These spaces gave the opportunity to Lakshmibai to write creatively. It fed into her narratives the rich multiculturalism and multilinguality of a nation in transition. At this cyclical trajectory the tragedy of Waman Tilak passing away in the hospital brings a natural ending to Lakshmibai's narration. The personal and private spaces sometimes emerge as close, sometimes months and almost a year of Tilak's disappearance is captured in a chapter. The narrative weaves a cyclical pattern of Tilak's rendezvous with his poetry sessions. This unending trauma of having to feed for herself and her infant son is delineated in chapter after chapter with such precision of words and aura of creativity that it leaves the reader mesmerized of the time chronotope that is captured by an uneducated author. It justifies Bakhtin's writing that words are never our own or original. We use language and words that are already used by some other. It is like worn clothes. It leaves behind the aura or palimpsest of other writers. The intimate and private spaces reflect larger space. The intellectual and social formation of the characters, his poems, his conversion, Lakshmibai's conversion, her becoming a writer and orator. The ways the chapters are articulated all contribute to the construction of the autobiography. The series of episodes, the titles of the chapters, and the presentation of experience all add to the evolution of the self of the writer's life. *I Follow After* is divided into three parts with 27, 25 and 22 chapters each. It ends with Waman Tilak's death.

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