



# REFORMING WOMEN'S SPACES THROUGH SELF-NARRATIVES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SELECTED INDIAN WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

Dr Nishitha

MA(English), PhD

Mangalore University

## ABSTRACT:

The exclusion of women's life narratives from the study of mainstream autobiographical writing had been questioned by several feminist critics. Through such questions they started to build a canon of women's autobiography and restructure the women's spaces. This paper throws light on some such efforts that map the transition from the pioneering attempts of the nineteenth century Indian women's narratives to the twentieth century narratives that are self-assertive in nature. The paper presents a comparative study of the nineteenth century life-narrative by Ramabai Ranade with the autobiographies of Kamala Das and Indira Lankesh. Ramabai's *Ranade: His Wife's Reminiscences* (1963) was originally written in Marathi and later translated to English. Kamala Das's *My Story* (1976) brought a radical shift in women's autobiographical narratives in India. Indira Lankesh's *Hulimavu mattu Nanu* (2013) – an autobiography in Kannada – is a story of a house wife who turns out to be the most independent, successful entrepreneur. The study confirms the evolution of narrative strategies over the years which evidently supports the fact that the women have transformed their lives and created their own spaces by breaking the stereotypical narrative patterns.

The traditional society embodies the predefined norms. Tradition insists an individual to define oneself within an expected framework provided. But the reliability of such definitions is highly questionable, as the nature of tradition constantly changes over time. The removal and acceptance of taboos illustrate the constantly varying nature of tradition. The spatial and cultural differences make it impossible to define or derive a universally applicable common norm. The changing norms provoke a modern self to either question or resist the views of traditional society. When the tradition is being redefined and reconstituted over a period of time, the modernity interrogates and represents resistance to these adjustments. Though tradition is unstable, it is not denied by the modern selves. Every generation questions the authority or justifies its actions by comparing the present scenario with the past. In Jasbir Jain's words, "Tradition sets the ground for self-definition and modernity for self-development" (97).

One of the devices used by the writers to interrogate and resist the social or political construct is the act of self-assertion, which is central to autobiographical writing. This paper analyses women's autobiography, which represent women's resistance against the already constructed space for women and their attempt to define their entry into the new space created by and for them. The paper begins with the problem of mainstream autobiographical tradition which excludes women's self-assertion, and continues with the analysis of women's effort in building their own canon. For the purpose of my study, I have chosen three autobiographies – Ramabai Ranade's *Ranade: His Wife's Reminiscences* (1963), Kamala Das's *My Story* (1976), and Indira Lankesh's *Hulimavu mattu Nanu* (2013). The focus of my study is to represent the transition and development seen in these autobiographies, particularly by juxtaposing the narrative style and other characteristics of the nineteenth and the twentieth century writing. The movement from the self-erasing to the self-affirming woman narrator is evident in the study of these autobiographies.

Although the discussion of the self is not new to Indian philosophy, the study of the self represented in the autobiographical accounts appears to be a recently developed area. The self-valorisation was not accepted, and considered disdainful, as it prompted excessive self-importance, pride and arrogance. Autobiography is an alien genre in the Indian society. The western education provided some of the cultural preconditions of autobiographical writing. In fact, the British rule insisted on the importance of writing history, which encouraged the act of writing the personal history. A developed historical manner of thinking is necessary to write personal history (Parekh, 254).

When one analyses the dominant criticism on autobiography which constructs the tradition of autobiography, it is evident that the critics define autobiography as a simple transcription of life and contemporary society. They also take St. Augustine's *Confessions* as a model which valorises the dedication of the self to God. The tradition of autobiography is constructed by a process of inclusion, exclusion and transformation. "Certain kinds of autobiography have been excluded entirely or conceded only a subordinate place" (Dodd, 1986: 6). The neglect of gender, class or race by the dominant critics resulted in creating a tradition of mainstream/ malestream autobiography. The autobiographies of great men are studied in great fervour. The *Confessions* of St. Augustine, Rousseau and others are considered the set models. In Indian context the autobiographies of Gandhi, Nehru and Chaudhuri belong to the tradition of mainstream autobiography. Estelle C. Jelinek,

a pioneer scholar on women's autobiography addresses the issue of exclusion in her book *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present*. In the introduction to her book, she traces out the development of autobiographical criticism in British and American literature. Among the early critics Wayne Shumaker is the only critic who paid 'respectable attention' (emphasis original) to British female autobiographers in the context of the male autobiographers he analysed in his book *English Autobiography: Its Emergence, Materials and Form* (1954). Although he declared that several women autobiographers in the eighteenth century had contributed to the development of the genre, he did not mention a single twentieth century woman's autobiography. Even George Gusdorf and Stephen Spender do not mention a single woman's autobiography in their works. Spender discusses the autobiographies of Augustine, Rousseau and Henry Miller, whereas Gusdorf discusses Augustine, Cellini, Montaigne, Cardinal de Retz, Goethe, Chateaubriand, Newman and Mill. James Olney's *Metaphors of Self* devotes whole chapters to Montaigne, Fox, Darwin, Newman, Mill and Eliot without even a passing reference to a female autobiographer. Olney was indifferent to women's autobiography, but in his 1980 edited collection of essays, there is a single essay written by Mary Mason, which deals with women's autobiographies. Jelinek further provides a review of important critical studies of American autobiographies, in order to justify that the women's autobiographies are neglected and excluded from the canonical and mainstream autobiographical tradition in America.

Even in the Indian context, the study of women's autobiography appears to be a recently developed area of research. M K Naik (1982) and Srinivasa Iyengar (1983) do not show their interest in women's autobiographies in their pioneering works on the history of Indian English literature, but they focus on the autobiographies of 'great' men such as Gandhi and Nehru. In such a situation, a woman writing her own life becomes an agent of breaking barrier. Writing on her own personal life is not an easy task for a woman. It is a complex process of linking her personal and public life, but not a simple and direct transcription of self as discussed by the dominant critics. In spite of the neglect of mainstream critics, the tradition of women's autobiography is established with the help of feminist excavation of less known, forgotten women's autobiography. The first phase of women's writing followed the set models by placing either God or man at the centre of their lives (Heilbrun, 21). As Estelle C Jelinek (1980) stated, sketching the positive portraits of their esteemed husbands or other male relatives was a common practice followed by women writers. The nineteenth century autobiography by an Indian woman, Ramabai Ranade is the best example for such a kind of writing. The title of her autobiography – *Ranade: His Wife's Reminiscences* (1885) – throws light upon the fact that she sets her husband at the centre of her life and also ascribes divine qualities to him in her work. The women autobiographers are self-conscious about their gender, and doubt whether their autobiographies are accepted by the readers. In order to avoid accusations of vanity for writing their autobiographical accounts, they either valorise the heroic husband figure by making them subservient to their husbands, or use apologetic and self-deprecating remarks in their writing. At the same time, they take pride in their accomplishments and assert their honesty and integrity (Jelinek). The transition from being apologetic to ambivalent and then to self-affirming is clear if we trace the development of women's autobiographies stage by stage. The recent development in women's autobiography is clear when the writers concentrate on the autonomous female self and give voice to the personal desires and relationships. Until the publication of Kamala Das's autobiography *My Story* in the year 1976, this way of writing did not exist in the tradition of Indian autobiography. Voicing out the bodily desires was unfamiliar and unconventional until Das's revolutionary writing. The breaking of the conventional barriers is a two-fold process for women autobiographers. The movement of women autobiographers beyond the boundary of mainstream tradition of autobiography in particular is equally challenging as the breaking of traditional, social and cultural barriers in general. In the words of Charlotte S McClure, more than men the women meet barriers in their desire to break out of the conventional pattern (McClure, 225). "Nevertheless, women who were in position to write their autobiographies were to a large extent already transgressors, both in the act of writing and in the aspects of their lives that rendered their life stories noteworthy" (Boynton and Malin, 178). In the nineteenth century women's autobiographies, the domestic issues were focussed along with the self-education and marginalization. Those women who wrote autobiographies in the nineteenth century belonged to the high caste Hindu society.<sup>1</sup> They were inspired by the western education and the emerging new location for women in the public sphere resulting from reform movements and legislative changes. The early twentieth century autobiographies include the political matters and the late twentieth century writers such as Kamala Das and Amrita Pritam foreground sexuality and desire in their autobiographies (Jain, 292). The publication of such autobiographies in the 70s disturbed the power structure of patriarchal discourse.

The valorisation of silence as the desirable feminine attribute discouraged many women writers to resist the oppressive constructs. The reluctance of Lalithambika Antarjanam to write her autobiography can be illustrated here. A very thought of narrating her life made her as demure as a young Namboothiri woman walking without a shielding umbrella or a veil. In her "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action", Audre Lorde says, "In the cause of silence, each of us draws the face of her own fear – fear of contempt, of censure, or some judgment, or recognition, of challenge, of annihilation. But most of all, I think, we fear the visibility without which we cannot truly live" (Lorde, 41). Lorde writes about the fear of visibility in the context of the racial difference, which leaves Black women invisible through the depersonalization and the double marginalization. But her thoughts are applicable to Indian society too.

In her essay "Speaking Silence: The Social Construction of Silence in Autobiographical and Cultural Narratives," Robyn Fivush marks the difference between 'being silenced' and 'being silent'. Being silenced is conceptualized as negative, as silence is imposed not to let one speak, which leads to a fragmented or shattered sense of self. According to Fivush, 'being silent' can also be a form of power. If one does not speak by choice, it claims that one need not justify or explain. Besides, being silent imposes silence on others. The silence can be transformed into a new narrative, particularly when the marginalized groups come together and share their narratives among themselves (Fivush, 92). These narratives subvert the dominant narratives and hence can be called the narratives of resistance.

According to Estelle C. Jelinek, women's autobiography is unique in nature. But "women's self portraits are still classified as memoirs or reminiscences because of their episodic and anecdotal nature, their non-progressive narratives, their fragmented forms, their focus on others, and their lack of heroic self-assertion, all of which are considered obstacles to the shaping of a "true" autobiography." Jelinek's observation of the unique characteristics of women's autobiography is instrumental in the analysis of the women's autobiographies chosen for the study.

Women autobiographers focus on their personal lives rather than the public life and the historical issues of their time. The emphasis is on emotional attachments and relationships, especially the details about family, friends and domestic matters. Ramabai Ranade's work throws light on the domestic sphere and the hierarchical power structures that exist within the family. The elderly women like Sasubai, Vahini and others exercised their power on the youngest daughter-in-law, Ramabai. Their efforts to confine her into the domestic sphere are noticeable. Ramabai's husband could not go against the elderly women, and therefore advised his wife to be patient enough to go through the ordeal. In her

autobiography, Ramabai encapsulates the dilemma of her husband during their marriage. Soon after the death of his first wife, his father had arranged for remarriage with a young girl, against which Ranade had raised his voice in public as a reformist. He was an advocate of widow remarriage. But he could not put his words into practice as he was forced by his father to marry Ramabai. Ramabai explains that when the parental word is juxtaposed with the ridicule of society, her husband, Madhav Govind Ranade was ready to lose his self-respect and follow his father's words with utmost devotion. He was ready to lose his valued friendships for the sake of his principle of devotion to his father. But there was a widespread agitation in Maharashtra for giving up his publicly declared principle of widow-remarriage in his own case. Ramabai provides justification to her husband's actions, which were criticised by all of his reformist friends. The detailed documentation of such domestic dilemmas cannot be seen in men's autobiographical narratives.

The focus on personal relationships and emotional attachments can be found in Kamala Das's as well as Indira Lankesh's autobiographies. For Indira, the tussle between her husband and her, and the way she handles the situation by taking the responsibility on her shoulders become the centre of concern. Indira's husband – Lankesh – does not reveal much about the problems between them, in his autobiography *Hulimavina Mara* (1997). He devotes almost nine pages in describing the nature of his relationship with one of his students, who is given a fictitious name 'Kumari.' He does not write about the affects of this affair on his family or the personal life. But for Indira, this becomes the central event in her life which strikes a note of discord in their family and provokes her to transform her role from a housewife to an entrepreneur.

As Jelinek states, women are hesitant of writing their autobiographies and at the same time experience pride for their accomplishments. The personal emphasis and ambivalence make women's autobiographies more interesting and human than the male autobiographies that project a heroic self-image and focus almost exclusively on professional achievements. Ramabai Ranade's autobiographical voice strikes an ambivalent note. She tries to justify her autobiographical narrative, by representing herself as an integral part of her husband's life, which influences her to include her story as well in the reminiscences of her husband. The fact that she transcribes her life into writing, and provides an acceptable explanation for her choice of the particular genre of writing, throws light on the presence of her sense of accomplishment. The twentieth century women writers have grown beyond this phase and have learnt to manipulate the situation, by turning personal into political.

Women's autobiographies are fragmentary, disconnected, complex and rarely chronological. Kamala Das's nostalgic recollection of her past, the memory of childhood, grandmother and her house often lurk in between her narration. The insertion of poems in between the chapters endorses the disconnected narrative practice of the autobiographer. As an exception, Ramabai tries to arrange her chapters in chronological order, as her intention is to record her husband's deeds.

Women autobiographers represent a non-heroic female identity. For the most part, women do not see themselves as the legendary figures or representatives of their times, as critics interpret the self-image in men's autobiographies. As an educated and reformist woman, Ramabai was truly a legendary figure during her time. But she never expressed such a glorified picture of herself. She presents herself a humble and modest wife of Ranade. Kamala Das expresses her helplessness while describing her search for true love. Her purpose was to create an alternate space for a non-heroic self of woman, which rejects the already set space of a heroic autobiographical self, constructed by dominant male narrators and critics. Indira Lankesh does not glorify her success as an entrepreneur, but narrates it as a matter of fact.

According to Jelinek, women use irony, humour, understatement and a straightforward style, rather than the idealized, self-confident, exaggerated and sometimes nostalgic style used by the male autobiographers. Kamala Das uses irony while portraying a middle-class house wife in her *My Story*. "I would be a middle class house wife, and walk along the vegetable shop carrying a string bag and wearing faded chappals on my feet. I would beat my thin children when they asked for expensive toys, and make them scream out for mercy. I would wash my husband's cheap underwear and hang it out to dry in the balcony like some kind of a national flag, with wifely pride ..." (85). She leaves several ironic statements regarding the life style of Nair women, the cheap behaviours of the elite and sophisticated classes in Delhi, the conjugal and sexual relationship, and social manners in general.

In *Hulimavu mattu Nanu*, Indira Lankesh ironically comments her husband's violent behaviour towards her. She recalls three incidents which provoked Lankesh to show his coercive power on her. The incidents are characteristically silly and unimportant. The first time he slapped her, for waking him up from his sleep though there was no mistake from her side. She woke him up when his friend had visited their home. The second time he slapped her for cutting his nail too short when it did seep little blood. At this time, he was not in sleep like the previous incident, but conscious of what was happening. The third incident which provoked him to hit her was their son Ajith's incidental fall at his tender age. He fell down and gave a loud cry while he was playing. Though Lankesh was concerned of his son, he did not accompany Indira when she went to consult doctor (56). The illustrations from the selected twentieth century autobiographies provide sufficient understanding of how women writers use irony, humour, understatements and sarcastic comments in their writing.

Ramabai Ranade does not use ironic comments and understatements in her autobiography. Her way of narration is completely different from Kamala Das, Indira Lankesh and such other twentieth century women writers. She strongly believes in 'pativrata dharma' and is all in praise of her husband in each and every page of her autobiography. Her husband is the heroic figure in her work and also in her life. At some places she uses exaggerated versions of the stories regarding her husband's deeds. But she pictures herself as the most modest wife throughout. She gives a detailed account of the elderly women's disapproval of her learning to read and write. This is the only occasion where she quotes some of their ironical comments thrown at her for learning English. One of the remarks by the elderly women was: "... You are turning yourself into a 'maddam' by learning English. It would be only fitting to the pomp of a 'maddam' that she should have her food upstairs. After all we are here, downstairs, all the slaves and servants of my lady!" (79)

Carolyn Heilbrun's essay – "Women's Autobiographical Writing: New Forms" – throws light on the traditional recurring plots such as the marriage plot, the romance plot in the women's autobiographical writing. She also points out how the plots or autobiographies end with marriage or death. *Ranade: His Wife's Reminiscences* ends with the death of Ramabai Ranade's husband, Madhav Govind Ranade. In the years after her husband's death she was actively participating in the social reform movements. One is surprised to note that she did not mention even a single event of those productive years of her life. She limits her writing to produce the biography of her husband and therefore ends her work with his death. In her own words, "When I began writing this account, I had no intention of saying much about myself, I think I have succeeded more or less up to now. But one of the strange things in life is that a wife is like a shadow of her husband. You cannot avoid her even if you wish to, while speaking of him" (190). Her remark visualises the existence of wife as a follower of her husband. As *His Wife* (reference to title),



she narrates not only her husband's life, but also her life. She does not stop her reform efforts after the death of her husband, though she fails to write about them. The fact that she ends her narration with the plot of death, does not affect her future endeavours. Literally she transcribes her role of wife by following her husband's footsteps even after his death. She continues her husband's reform efforts and thereby proves that she is a *pativrata*.

Indira Lankesh emerges as a successful entrepreneur when her husband was alive. As an independent woman she builds a house, purchases a property in her name. She gives a picture of the separate spheres of lives built by themselves for each other. Her success in the business world and her husband's success in the world of journalism and literature are seen as the outcome of two separate individual struggles for independence. The respect for the individuality and independence is maintained till the end of their lives. Although being a twentieth century woman, she ends her autobiography with the conventional closure of the death of her husband. She does not reveal her life after the death of Lankesh. She expresses her guilt of not being available to her husband at the time of his death. She had gone on a tour to Goa with her cousin Shantha and her husband. She curses herself for not being near her husband, when he needed her at the end of his life. Indira writes regretfully that her husband is in the eternal sleep under his favourite mango tree in his property, but she is *still alive* waiting for death (*italics mine*). Though she had the individuality and identity of her own, she stops her narrative at this juncture, as if she has no reason to live. Indira is not different from Ramabai when it comes to the internalization of the concept of '*pativratadharmā*.' In this context, the transition from the nineteenth century to the twentieth century women's autobiography is not very significant. But Indira Lankesh's autobiography has shown its transition in the representation of the real but not heroic character of her husband, who is central to her life. She uses ironic and humorous comments to pull her husband from the pedestal.

In the book *Writing a Woman's Life*, Carolyn Heilbrun discusses the need of an angry tone in the autobiographies which is always suppressed by the authority. Anger is forbidden to women, as it demonstrates the desire for power and control over one's own as well as other's lives to some extent. She illustrates Mary Sarton's autobiographical writing as a movement towards the expression of anger and pain. Mary Sarton, an American poet, novelist and memoirist published her autobiography *Plant Dreaming Deep* in 1968. She realized eventually that the book did not reveal her anger and the passionate struggle or despair of her life. "She had not intentionally concealed her pain: she had written in the old genre of female autobiography, which tends to find beauty even in pain and transform rage into spiritual acceptance. Later reading her idealized self in the hopeful eyes of those who saw her as exemplar, she realized that in ignoring her rage and pain, she had unintentionally been less honest. Changing times helped bring her to this realization. In her next book, *Journal of a Solitude* she deliberately set out to recount the pain of the years covered by *Plant Dreaming Deep*. Thus the publication of *Journal of a Solitude* in 1973 may be acknowledged as the watershed in women's autobiography" (Heilbrun, 12-13).

Heilbrun's advocacy for the expression of pain and anger can be analysed by applying them to the autobiography written by Indian women. Ramabai Ranade never expresses her anger in her *Ranade: His Wife's Reminiscences*. In fact, she is repeatedly advised by her husband not to express her anger. The women's education was an important motto of social reform movement in the nineteenth century India. Being a social reformer, Justice Ranade took his first step of teaching his wife, Ramabai Ranade. The elderly women of the family did not appreciate the idea. For them, education was a taboo, as they agreed with the dominant superstitious belief of the time that education leads to widowhood. They believed that education would be of no use for women except for the recital of Puranas. Among them, Sasubai (mother-in-law) and Vansa (husband's younger sister) were taught how to read and write by Ramabai's father-in-law. They knew to keep accounts and were proud of their accomplishment. But their internalisation of the superstitious beliefs did not allow them appreciate Ramabai's efforts to learn. The elderly women were disappointed with Ramabai. They used to give harsh and sarcastic comments and segregate her. They disapproved Ramabai's interest in English education, more than her previous phase of learning Marathi literature. Their ironical comments made Ramabai uncomfortable. She was forced to take cold water bath near the well, soon after she finished learning English lessons from a missionary lady. Along with the taunts and ritual purification baths, she had to undergo the isolation from the other women of the family. In order to attend the Saturday meetings of the Arya Mahila Samaj she had to face the critical scenario at home. The elderly women in the family did not talk to her and permit her entry into the kitchen. The segregation continued till Thursday and on that day, she was asked to cut vegetables and assigned one or two simple works. But before they returned to the normal pace of their life, another Saturday was ready ahead to disturb the situation. In none of these situations Ranade, the husband was ready to support his wife by taking her sides. Instead, he advised her to be patient enough to go through all the sufferings.

Additionally, Ramabai was also conscious of her husband's anger, which she had experienced occasionally at home. His anger was expressed in the form of silent protest, which Ramabai could never tolerate. She could not face him when he learnt that Ramabai pretended that she was sick and returned home without participating in Anasuyabai's discourse on puranas. Anasuyabai was well-versed in Sanskrit and gave discourses on puranas. Her discourse was arranged in Vishnu temple, where most women paid regular visits. The women had already decided to leave no place for reformist women, by occupying all the space usually kept for women in the inner part of the temple. The women in the temple justified their segregation by remarking that the reformist women did not need the enclosed space reserved for women, as they attended meetings with their husbands and were ready to participate in all the public events. They were made to sit along with men in the outer courtyard. Ramabai Ranade came to know about the plan and got humiliated for excluding her as a reformist woman. She had to sit with Pandita Ramabai who sat opposite to the reformist men. She felt uncomfortable and walked out of the discourse by giving an excuse that she is not well.

Ramabai was aware of her husband's mood swings. Ramabai was given the responsibility of keeping an account of household budget along with managing it. She never spent more than five rupees from the sum total allotted for household expenses without his permission. He never said no to such demands. "But he did not like it if it was done without asking him. This was our custom and I never neglected to observe it" (61).

Ramabai was conscious of others' anger but never exposed her own even within her private life. She could not outpour her deep sorrow when she learnt about the decision of her husband to undergo purification ceremony in spite of the strong criticism of journalists and his friends. After Panch Howd Mission<sup>2</sup> incident he was ready to face humiliation for the sake of his friends by taking spiritual purification bath against his own will even though he was not a direct sufferer of ostracization. Her disappointment over the issue was never articulated directly with her husband. Instead of raising objections against this sudden decision of her husband, she limits herself to reason out the issue after listening her husband's words of justification of his actions.

Though Ramabai does not voice out her anger and pain, she expresses her sensitive nature and ability to endure the pain. She valorises the beauty of tolerating pain. But one must keep in mind that Ramabai's autobiography must be analysed by using the nineteenth century social norms and conditions. She represented certain amount of deviation from the norm by portraying herself as an educated woman, who addressed both the women's and mixed gatherings. She enjoyed social mobility that was denied to the women of nineteenth century. She was bold enough to travel alone by train from Lonavala to Bombay and search for a suitable house for their living during the crisis of plague. She even enjoyed the best moments of tours and travels with her husband which was an escape for her from the rigid, traditional, domestic sphere controlled by elderly women of the family. As she writes, "...so happy were the days of that tour... we cherished them even more than our days at home" (95). The plot of romance is inserted into the autobiography to emphasize the companionship in marriage, which was possible because of her education. The nineteenth century reform movements stressed the need for companionship in marriage. The girls were given education with the purpose of making them better wives and companions to their husbands. As Joytsna Kapur writes, more than romance, the idea of companionship is valorised in the nineteenth century. Being a companion was a great contribution of wife in her husband's life. In Ramabai's case, she publicly supported her husband in his reform efforts. She attended meetings with him and addressed the gatherings along with her husband. Even the tours she enjoyed with her husband highlight the role of a good companionate wife. The element of romance has been overtaken by the idea of accompanying her husband, to help him in every other way.

In contrast to Ramabai Ranade's autobiography, the twentieth century autobiographies explicitly criticize the male dominant patriarchal society. Kamala Das's *My Story* can be read as the autobiography of a rebellious female self as it critiques the patriarchal authority and creates woman's space against the culturally embedded space. By picturing Nalapat house, she provides a location to assert women's tradition in the Nayar family. The range of women characters she portrays validate Nalapat house as women's space. The Nalapat house was gifted to Kunji, the ancestress of the writer. It was a gift of an 'amorous chieftain' who married Kunji by bringing her to his village after the disastrous encounter of the Dutch and the English which led to the burning of her hometown, Cochin. The grandmother of Kamala Das had an authority in the house as her words were respected in the family. Kamala Das is strongly influenced by her personality which is a strange mixture of authority and affection. The aunt of Kamala Das, Ammini kept on turning down all the marriage proposals and led an ascetic life. She sang the fashionable love songs of Kumaranasan. From listening to her, Kamala Das sensed that love was a 'beautiful anguish' and a 'thapasya' (14). Another aunt of the writer, Ammalu too remained unmarried. She wrote poems on Krishna and declared that her chastity is the only gift that she offers to Lord Krishna. Being a child Kamala Das builds a communicative rapport with the paralyzed Ammalu. As an adult, Kamala Das takes her tricks of trade from Ammalu and writes poems like her, and even declares Krishna as her only reliable lover, at the end of her autobiography. Kamala Das writes about her uncle Narayan Menon, and describes his relationship with his second wife. Their relationship was radically sex based. She had a control over her husband, and "at night she enslaved him with her voluptuous body" (21). The matriarchal set up, along with the list of characters provided above validate Nalapat house as the women's space.

She critiques the institution of marriage by discussing three generation of unfulfilled marriages in her matrilineal relations – the marriage of Kamala Das, her mother and grandmother. Throughout the autobiography the ruined relationship of Kamala Das and her husband is evident in terms of her search for love outside of her marriage, and his indifferent reactions to that. Kamala Das's parents were not good companions, as their interests differed from each other. As she writes, "They were dissimilar and horribly mismatched. But my mother's timidity helped to create an illusion of domestic harmony which satisfied the relatives and friends. Out of such an arid union were born the first two children, my brother and I, bearing a swarthy skin and ordinary features." (4-5). Kamala Das's great grandmother whom she was fond of, raised her daughter as a single mother. She was the only daughter of a wealthy chieftain. She used to ride on elephant while visiting the temples. She was married to the Raja of Chiralayman, within a year of attaining puberty. But, all of a sudden, at her young age of nineteen, she became frigid and came away to Nalapat house, offering no explanation at all (135). Apart from these three unhappy marriages, she critiques the institution of marriage by portraying two unmarried women – Ammalu and Ammini – who rejected it out rightly.

Kamala Das expresses her anger and pain both in her poetry and autobiography. The search for love through her extra-marital relationships is the strong, rebellious reaction against her husband's indifference towards her. Her openness in describing her body and its desires is against the early tradition of Indian women's writing. Moreover, she projects her autobiography as a confession, by stressing the fact that she wants to empty all her secrets and depart with "scrubbed out conscience." But the demarcation between factual and fictional elements in her autobiography is questioned by several critics.<sup>3</sup>

The expression of anger and pain is evident in Indira Lankesh's autobiography, *Hulimavu mattu Nanu*. The failure of her marriage is articulated in her autobiography. She happened to read a letter written by Lankesh to one of his students, wooing her and stating his depth of love that he is even ready to leave his wife and children for her sake. Indira questioned and quarrelled with her husband. In her rage she burnt all the letters Lankesh had written to her and their photos. She concluded that their relationship would never continue and removed the Mangalasutra from her neck (60). Self-pity is not the subject of her story as her narration does not focus on her depression or exaggerated version of lamentation. Instead, she becomes more responsible and starts her own business in partnership and later gradually emerges as a woman entrepreneur by owning a sari house 'Mayur Textiles.'

Indira writes about her husband's relationships outside of marriage. She does not show excessive attention to those relationships. By remarking that none of those women was a magnificent beauty or intelligent, she moves on to comment on the poor taste of her husband. She herself states that her independent existence and freedom in life are the direct results of her break up with Lankesh (95). Indira mentions the popularity of "Nilu" and "Nimmi" columns in Lankesh's paper, *Lankesh Patrike*. She knew that both columns were written by Lankesh. By using the pen name of Nilu, he imagined himself as a woman writer and was able to exhibit very sensitive and emotional woman's perspectives in his writing. In the autobiography Indira questions why Lankesh, who is able to sense woman's emotions and perspectives, could not understand or console her (95).

By the study of autobiographical writings of Ramabai Ranade, Kamala Das and Indira Lankesh, one can assess the gradual development in their varied response to the traditional way of writing. The nineteenth century autobiographical selves internalized the prescribed boundary for them and emerged as the typical conventional women. The twentieth century women either set their own border lines or deny any kind of boundary that hinders the development of their selves. Ranade's perspective on women's education justifies the traditional understanding of the role of education on the lives of women. In her opinion, education must help women to make them more sensitive, gentle and fit into the acceptable reformed space of women.

The modern or the twentieth century women autobiographers have moved beyond such conventional scenario. The valorisation of feminist interpretations of their lives and articulation of gender discrimination are central to the modern women's autobiography. The ability to resist the traditional writing of autobiography in particular and the contemporary traditional or cultural construct in general is analysed with reference to the autobiographies of Kamala Das and Indira Lankesh. On the whole, the movement of the female autobiographical self from "hiding self"<sup>4</sup> towards the unrestricted self can be recognized.

#### ENDNOTES:

1. The women who wrote their autobiographies in the nineteenth century were from the high caste Hindu society. They not only had an access for education, but also the support of their husbands and fathers, who were the promoters of women's reform movement. Some of the women autobiographers during the nineteenth century were Ramabai Ranade, Lakshmbai Tilak, Dosebai, Anandibai Karve, and others.
2. Panch Howd Mission was held on 14 October 1890 at St. Mary's Convent. The nuns of Zenana mission served tea, and some of the reformist men drank it. The fifty two men who had tea at the mission were ostracized. Sri Shankaracharya appointed a Shastri to investigate into the case and sent him to Poona. The ostracization made several families suffer a lot.
3. Several critics have discussed the presence of factual and fictional elements in autobiographical narratives. Meena T. Pillai's essay – "Translating Her Story: A Woman in Quest of a Language" – throws light on the fictional elements in Kamala Das's autobiography, by juxtaposing *My Story* (1976) and *Ende Katha* (1989), the Malayalam version of her autobiography. The process of writing and translating her life appears more complex, as the cultural specificities differ in Malayalam and English versions of her autobiography. Pillai illustrates number of events and characters from both the works, to ensure the difference and gap between the texts. Moreover, the emphasis on the second word of the title – *Katha/ Story* – expresses its ambivalent nature.
4. The phrase 'hiding self' is coined by Patricia Meyer Spacks. Her essay "Selves in Hiding" was published in Estelle C. Jelinek (ed) (1980) *Women's Autobiography*, Bloomington: Indiana University.

#### REFERENCES:

- Baer, Elizabeth. R. "The Journey Inward: Women's Autobiography". *Lets Talk About It*. Ed. Bill Otts. N.p.: American Library Association, 1987. N. pag. Web. 27 May 2014.
- Boynton, Victoria, and Jo Malin. *Encyclopedia of Women's Autobiography*. London: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2005. *Google Book Search*. Web. 27 May 2014.
- Brereton, Bridget. "Gendered Testimonies: Autobiographies, Diaries, and Letters by Women as Source for Caribbean History." *Feminist Review* 59 (1998): 143-163. Web. 27 May 2014.
- Das, Kamala. *My Story*. New Delhi: Sterling, 1976.
- Dodd, Philip. "Criticism and the Autobiographical Tradition." *Modern Selves: Essays on Modern British and American Autobiography*. Ed. Philip Dodd. Great Britain: Frank Cass & Co.Ltd., 1986.
- Fivush, Robyn. "Speaking Silence: The Social Construction of Silence in Autobiographical and Cultural Narratives." *Memory* 18.2 (2010): 88-98. Web. 3 Nov. 2015.
- Heilbrun, Carolyn G. "Woman's Autobiographical Writing: New Forms." *Modern Selves: Essays on Modern British and American Autobiography*. Ed. Philip Dodd. Great Britain: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1986.
- . *Writing a Woman's Life*. New York: Norton, 1988.
- Jain, Jasbir. *Writing Women Across Cultures*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2002.
- Jelinek, Estelle C. *The Tradition of Women's Autobiography: From Antiquity to the Present*. N.p.: Xlibris. 2003. Ebook.
- Kapur, Jyotsna. "Putting Herself into the Picture: Women's Accounts of Social Reform Campaign in Maharashtra, Mid Nineteenth to Twentieth Centuries." *Manushi* 56 (1990): 28-37. Web. 10 April 2015.
- Kumar, Udaya. "Autobiography as a Way of Writing History: Personal Narratives from Kerala and the Inhabitation of Modernity." *History in the Vernacular*. Ed. Raziuddin Aquil and Partha Chatterjee. Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2008. 418-448.
- Lal, Malashri. "Writing the Self: Indian Women Writers in English." *Literature and Ideology: Essays in Interpretation*. Ed. Veena Singh. New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 1998. 108-122.

Lankesh, P. *Hulimavina Mara*. Bangalore: Lankesh Prakashana, 1997. Rpt. 2010.

Lankesh, Indira. *Hulimavu mattu Nanu*. Bangalore: Lankesh Prakashana, 2013.

Lorde, Audre, "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action." *You're your Sister: Collected and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde*. Ed. Rudolph P. Byrd, Johnnetta Betsch Cole, and Beverly Guy-Sheftall. New York: Oxford U P, 2009.

McClure Charlotte S. "From Impersonators to Persons: Breaking Patterns, Finding Voices." *Private Voices and Public Lives: Women Speak on the Literary Life*. Ed. Nancy Owen Nelson. Texas: University of North Texas Press, 1995. PDF file.

Parekh, Bhikhu. *Colonialism, Tradition and Reform: An Analysis of Gandhi's Political Discourse*. New Delhi: Sage, 1989.

Pillai, Meena T. "Translating Her Story: A Woman in Quest of a Language." *Translation Today* 2.2 (2005): 99-115. Web. 4 Dec. 2015.

Ranade, Ramabai. *Ranade: His Wife's Reminiscences*. Trns. Kusumavati Deshpande. Bombay: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1963. Trans. of *Amchya Ayushatil Kahi Athavani*. N.p.: n.p., 1885.

Shumaker, Wayne. *British Autobiography: Its Emergence, Materials, and Form*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954.

Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*. London: U of Wisconsin P, 1988. *Google Book Search*. Web. 2 June 2014.

Usha V. T. "One Woman's Autobiography: Kamala Das's My Story." *Kamala Das: A Critical Spectrum*. Ed. Rajeshwar Mittapalli and Pier Paolo Piciucco. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2001. 1-9.

