

**IMAGINED LIVES: A STUDY
OF SELECT INDIAN ENGLISH SELF-NARRATIVES**

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PART FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Registration no. TZ166926 of 2016



SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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TEZPUR UNIVERSITY

AUGUST 2023

CONCLUSION

The study shows how the Indian English self-narratives deconstruct themselves—imagination, metaphors, rhetoric and tropes dominate the structure and narrative in every way, blurring the difference between any other literary text and an autobiography. True to poststructuralism, the inherent fissures in the binaries get manifested here. It counters the authoritative meaning and narrative associated with autobiography through Paul de Man's proposition of autobiography as de-facement. A variety of relevant literatures or theorizations have been employed in each of the five chapters in order to comprehend the various ways in which tropological structuring of the autobiographies and memoirs take place.

Chapter 1 shows how Indian English self narrators construct their identities through the metaphor of other lives or voices. Tropes of relationality, addressivity, "face of the other" in fact de-face the autobiographies and memoirs by shifting the faces to other dominant figures from outside. Paul John Eakin's theorizations on the relational self, Judith Butler's account in "Giving an Account of Oneself", Levinas' concept of "face of the other" and Bakhtin's ideas of dialogism have been used to analyse the use of referentiality and addressivity as tropes in all the selected Indian English autobiographies. Nehru's polyphonic, relational self comes alive through his dialogical relationship with his father, Gandhi and many necessary others like Annie Besant, the peasants and so on. The peasants were the trope of answerability for him who made him reconsider his own identity as well the identity of his nation. His de-facement is understood through the faces of the peasants. The extensive biographical depictions of Gandhi's life and activities in Nehru's *An Autobiography* render the autobiography as only "a figure of reading" in the words of Paul de Man.

In *India Calling*, the lives of the purdahnashins become the tropes for Cornelia Sorabji's self construction. The voices of these women can be heard through her narrative. Their faces take a front seat rather than her own face. The downtrodden sections of the society serve as the metaphors for Mulk Raj Anand's philosophical autobiography *An Apology for Heroism* while his *Conversations in Bloomsbury* makes many other conflicting voices heard. The plurality of consciousness and relationality runs true in case of Nirad C Chaudhuri's autobiographies too. *Thy Hand, Great Anarch!* is replete with biographical accounts of many great personalities like Sarat Bose and Rabindranath Tagore. Khushwant Singh's autobiography is also

addressed to different other lives. Many renowned personalities contributed greatly in the creation of the poetic selves of Dom Moraes and Khushwant Singh.

Chapter 2 highlights the use of English language, literature and law as tropes or metaphors by Indian English self narrators to imagine their subjectivity. Using the theories on different facets of colonial identity by Edward Said, Gauri Vishwanathan, Aijaz Ahmed, Leela Gandhi, Homi Bhabha, Tabish Khair and Meenakshi Mukherjee, the English self-fashioning of the select writers have been analysed. Cornelia Sorabji always took pride in English language, lifestyle and law. She supported the colonial venture of civilizing the East and hence took up the cause of the Hindu purdahnashins. The “colonial schizophrenia” as coined by Naipaul can very well be found in case of Sorabji, N. C. Chaudhuri and his recurrent reference to decadence in his autobiographies. English literature was the metaphor for his anglicized self. Both Sorabji and Chaudhuri were orientalist as identified from their self-fashioning techniques. Again, hybrid or, in Bhabha’s words, ambivalent nature of colonial identity construction appears prominent in case of Gandhi and Nehru. Both of them went abroad, studied English law and literature, only to return back to India and fight for the freedom struggle.

A similar ambivalent attitude towards the colonial identity is evident in the memoirs of Mulk Raj Anand too. *Conversations in Bloomsbury* showcases his attempts to shatter orientalist notions about India. Fashioning the self through the English literature composed by the authors gets illuminated in Dom Moraes, Kamala Das, Salman Rushdie and Mulk Raj Anand. Their memoirs are found inseparably intertwined with their short stories, fiction and such other creative endeavours, true to Stephan Greenblatt’s literary self-fashioning. The merging of life and literature can be best witnessed in Rushdie’s *Joseph Anton*. Literature and literary characters function as tropes or metaphors for the self in the autobiographies. Drawing the phrase and concept “Babu fiction” from Tabish Khair, the last section of this chapter focusing on “Babu autobiographies” infers the identity formation of the selected autobiographers in terms of their higher caste orientation in the Indian society. While some writers completely mimic the English or colonial self-fashioning and manifest colonial schizophrenia, some others have an ambivalent take on the same. Though in varied degrees, the lives of these Indian English autobiographers get fashioned by the tropological structure of

colonial language, education, literature and so on.

Chapter 3 infers the imaginative and poetic nature of the historical depictions in the Indian English autobiographies. Using the tropological analysis of history undertaken by Hayden White in *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe* the chapter deduces the poetic dimension of the narration of history. The use of emplotment, the modes of historical argument and ideological implication have been studied in the self-narratives undertaken as per the tropological study laid down by White in his treatise. History narration acquires a form of tragic realism in the autobiographies of Cornelia Sorabji and Nirad C. Chaudhuri. In Hayden White's coinage, both these writers use the tragic mode of emplotment to portray a history of India that was decaying according to their perception. Moreover, the mode of historical argument employed can be interpreted as that of Mechanistic as they draw defeatist conclusions. Sorabji was always against the freedom movement and in support of the British rule. Both these writers draw reductive conclusions of contemporary history. Chaudhuri's repeated reference to the degradation of the then India's political, social order and the Hindu civilization infer the Anarchistic mode of ideological implication of history. He crafts the decadence of both the country's nationalism and the Bengali life and society. His narratives on the life and activities of Gandhi, Bose and Nehru are all a moulding of his personal considerations with an ideological stance.

In case of the memoirs of Dom Moraes and Salman Rushdie, history narration undertakes a satirical mode of emplotment as death, helplessness and captivity dominate the ideological standpoint. The negative take on religious extremism resonates the Mechanistic mode of historical argument whereby historians draw reductive conclusions in the lens of Hayden White. The prolonged narrative on the degradation of the religious and political scenario of the world over time in *Joseph Anton* gives an Anarchistic dimension to the nature of ideological implication with the idea of fall from a good past. Dom Moraes felt like a captive in India as understood from *Never at Home*. His book *Out of God's Oven* showcases how he has always perceived India as being a torn and shattered entity in socio-political and historical terms. His harsh critique of the Indian democracy with the inequalities of caste, religion and his utter faith in the lost British rule justify the Mechanistic and Anarchistic modes of argument and ideology respectively.

Khushwant Singh manifests a mixed ideological stance with his varied approach to Sikh and Muslim friendship throughout the autobiography *Truth, Love and a Little Malice*. The Contextualist mode of historical argument is however identified in his narration as he elaborates his contemporary historical happenings like that of India's partition by dissecting all the varied elements of the historical field. The tragic framing of the partition atrocities follows the tragic mode of emplotment. However, a Liberal mode of ideological implication stands tall in his uncertain approach towards some landmark historical happenings like that of Indira Gandhi's Emergency declaration. Singh's history narration becomes ideologically driven through personal terms and friendships with the Gandhi family. Attempts have been made by him to contextualize the country's history through family issues.

An analysis of Nehru's *An Autobiography* through Hayden White's postulates renders it as characteristic of the romantic mode of emplotment. Besides giving a romantic narration of all the movements in the freedom struggle, Nehru professed the anticipated victory of the freedom fighters over the British. His portrayal of prison life too makes the romantic trope visible. Traces of Organicist as well as Formist kind of historical argument appear in his autobiography. It covers a miniature of India by distinctly highlighting all the elements involved, be it the peasant upheaval or the contribution of varied freedom fighters. When it comes to the ideological implication, Nehru was undoubtedly a Radical unlike his father and Gandhi. He was totally for a change in India's socio-political order through an end to the British hegemony. The same kind of ideological implication is reflected in Mulk Raj Anand's *Apology for Heroism* too where he philosophizes a writer's contribution in bringing humanitarian changes in the society. *Conversations in Bloomsbury* captures Anand's constant radical attempts to shatter orientalist discourses among the members of the group. His historical narration on Indian art, music, religion and the entire civilization reveals his Organicist mode of argument owing to the microcosmic portrayal of the country as evident from his conversations.

Chapter 4 interprets the psychoanalytic tropes of desires, dreams, death instinct and trauma as instrumental in the construction of autobiographical subjectivity with the theorizations of Sigmund Freud, Cathy Caruth and Jacques Lacan. The psychosexual creation of the self is found dominant in the memoirs of Mulk Raj Anand, Dom Moraes

and Khushwant Singh. Anand's fantasy for older women becomes the metaphor of pleasure principle in Freudian terms besides his elaborate take on infantile sexuality in *Seven Summers*. The chapter analyses how the trope of libido functions in the same way while recounting the female fantasies of Singh and Moraes. The section dealing with "mirror stage and split personality" contemplates the autobiographical de-facement through Lacanian concept of the mirror stage. The fragmented and illusory nature of the self in Kamala Das and Salman Rushdie's memoirs get explored thereby. Alienation and the imagined disparity between the imagined reality and the real world appear through Das' narrative of disappointment in marriage and her refuge in psychological therapy as evident from her autobiography. Split personality is manifested best in Rushdie's *Joseph Anton* where he is constantly torn between the multiple personalities.

A constant sense of lack in psychosexual terms in Moraes, Kamala Das and Rushdie as seen through the lens of Lacanian "objet petit a" justifies the inability of the autobiographical self to be whole or complete. It has been traced the most in Khushwant Singh's narrative where the constant lack led him from one woman to another only to end up in a deeper sense of lack. Again, a metaphorical take on "objet petit a" appears in the autobiography of Nehru who perceived a lack in his knowledge and depth about India which he tried to fulfil through Gandhi. Dreams take the shape of a metaphor for wish fulfilment in some writers like Rushdie.

In the examination of trauma and subjectivity, Salman Rushdie's self narration is found to be intermingled with his Freudian death instinct since his fatwa. Survival became a crisis for him while the death instinct served as its metaphor. His subjectivity cannot be imagined without his traumatic neurosis. A similar trope of trauma shapes Dom Moraes' subjectivity too, especially in *My Son's Father*. In the conceptualization of Cathy Caruth, Moraes' repetitive trauma arising from his mentally unstable mother has a belated and incomprehensible affect throughout his memoirs. The psychosomatic nature of his trauma has also been identified in this section through his violent confrontations with his hysteric mother.

Chapter 5 identifies the role of space and place as tropes in the autobiographical imagination. The spacing of the self in a poetic manner through ecological emotions,

images of houses or cities have been interpreted here to comprehend the construction of subjectivity. Gaston Bachelard's idea of the home and imagination in *Poetics of Space*, Foucault's "Of Other Spaces", Aijaz Ahmed's theorization of "the rhetoric of exile" and Peter Perreten's dictum of eco-autobiography in "Eco-Autobiography: Portrait of Place/Self-Portrait" have served as the major tools of analysis for this chapter. As a very relevant literature for this chapter, Kilian and Wolf's *Life Writing and Space* (2016) has also shed abundant light on the varied facets of self-narratives seen through spatial dimensions.

In case of Cornelia Sorabji it has been analysed that zenana as the "heterotopia of crisis" became the driving force behind her memoir *India Calling*. Two very different worlds which are otherwise incompatible—the inner domain of the purdahnashins and the liberated, anglicized outer domain of Sorabji's abode come together in the memoir. Her fascination for English homes and architecture recapitulates Bachelard's formulation of day-dreaming and imagination as intertwined with homes. A similar vein runs true of Nirad C. Chaudhuri too through his poetic portrayal of houses filled with nostalgia and day-dreaming in Calcutta in *Autobiography of An Unknown Indian*. Instances show how he imagined England and Shillong through mere listening to stories or watching pictures of the same. Topography, ecological emotions and animism play a significant role in the formation of his autobiographical subjectivity. Extensive narratives on the landscapes of his villages, the seasonal change there and pathetic fallacy highlight the eco-autobiographical elements that characterize Chaudhuri's discovery of a new self in nature.

The repeated personification of roads and rivers in Anand's *Seven Summers* infers his imaginative selfhood during his childhood. Rivers, streams, roads function as tropes leading to his identity construction in an ecological way. Personified depictions of animals, birds and insects in prison render an entirely different characteristic to Nehru's creation of subjectivity. Moreover, landscape, topography and the Himalayan mountains become metaphors for his free-spirited self, caught up in prison. Prison as a "heterotopia of deviation" throws enough light on Nehru's day-dreaming and imaginative self in *An Autobiography*.

Borrowed from Aijaz Ahmed's essay "Language of Class: Ideologies of Immigration", the concept of the "rhetoric of exile" fits well in case of both Dom Moraes and Salman Rushdie's memoirs. They were never exiled forcibly in India or out of India. While Rushdie perceived India as his imaginary homeland through his rhetorical exile, Dom Moraes felt perennially uprooted and imaginatively exiled in India as revealed through an analysis of *Joseph Anton* and *Never at Home* respectively. The space created by fatwa as a "heterotopia of deviation" rendered Rushdie like a captive and it became the main trope behind the framing of his memoir as an outlet of his suffocation. Again, Khushwant Singh locates and relocates his self with a change in places like Lahore, Delhi, Bombay with geographical emotions attached to most of them as narrated in his autobiography. Space, place, location, topography, heterotopias, rhetorical imaginations thus feature as the tropes of self-portraiture that de-face the narrator. The rhetoric of space and place also problematize the difference between fiction and autobiography in the select Indian English autobiographies and memoirs. The spaces frame the self-narratives and then the narratives bring out alternate ideas of imagined spaces too.

To conclude, the autobiographical project predicts the author's life rather than the other way round. As de Man writes, "...the autobiographical project may itself produce and determine the life and that whatever the writer does is in fact governed by the technical demands of self-portraiture..." (920). This study shows that the Indian English autobiographers also try to reshape their selves through the inherent rhetorical tropes and metaphors which in fact de shape their real selves. The tropes of relationality, colonial self-fashioning, psychoanalysis and trauma, metahistory and spatiality blur the distinction between fact and fiction at many points. The writing self becomes a mere tropological substitution rather than being the authority of the subject of autobiography. A face is given to the otherwise dead past events through the incorporation of figures and rhetoric.

True to Paul de Man's dictum, autobiography can be considered to be a figure of reading that occurs in almost all texts. However, whether figuration produces reference or reference produces figuration is an undecidable entity. Indian English autobiography de-faces its stable nature through the constant chain of significations in the form of the metaphorical tropes. According to de Man there is an impossibility of

closure and totalization in a play of tropes which does not reveal reliable self-knowledge. Autobiography is indeed an act of self-restoration in which the author tries to recollect his/her fragments, Indian English self-narratives being no exception.