



A CHALLENGE TO PATRIARCHY: WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHIES OF 19TH CENTURY INDIA

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Abstract

*In India, during the 19th century, the position of women was not conducive for their being educated or having any access to the outside society, due to it being considered according to the patriarchal social norms of the time. Yet, the autobiographies written by women during or around this time reveal their sheer determination to be educated and make their impact on outside society. Hence, in the paper, I have focussed on autobiographies written by two women from two different regions of India- Rassundari Devi from Bengal, and her autobiography *Amar Jibon*, translated as *Memoirs of My Life* (1836) and, Ramabai Ranade from Poona, currently located within Maharashtra, and her autobiography *Amchya Ayushyati Kahi Athavani* (*Some Reminiscences of My Life*), published in 1910, and also later translated as *Himself: An Autobiography of a Hindoo Lady*(1938) To conclude, the paper reflects how the two women attempt to break out of male-dominated patriarchal dictates, while holding on their domesticity, in different ways.*

Keywords

Autobiography, Women's Studies, India, 19th Century, etc.

Full Article

Introduction:

Despite 19th century India being a time of great political and social turmoil, it was definitely not a very happy time for women. Though it saw the passage of laws for the prohibition of the practice of Sati and the start of widow remarriage, yet among the major disadvantages faced by them, the most important was the lack of access to education. In fact, education for girls was considered as something to be frowned upon, since it was argued that it led to widowhood.

In the 19th century, autobiographies have been written by men, namely *Atmcharit* (Autobiography) by Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar; *Jibansmriti* (My Reminiscences) by Rabindranath Tagore; and others. However, my focus being reserved for women, I would like to note that this century was mostly known for the rise of autobiographies written by women who strove to get educated despite societal resistance, as exemplified through the figures of Rassundari Devi who wrote the first female autobiography in Bengali titled *Amar Jibon*, translated in English as *Memoirs of My Life*, published in 1836, and Ramabai Ranade, of Poona, part of Bombay Presidency, which was later incorporated within the state of Maharashtra, who freely wrote about her married life with her husband, and about her participation in various social affairs, in her Marathi memoir, *Amchya Ayushyati Kahi Athavani* (*Some Reminiscences of My Life*), written in 1910, which was later translated as *Himself: An Autobiography of a Hindu Lady*, published in 1938.

This paper, therefore, serves to explore how such autobiographies written by women reflect a counter-narrative to the male-dominated patriarchal society of the time, through their sheer determination to not let themselves be crushed by male oppression, and by their utilization of common-place, everyday language, in sheer contrast to the lofty, worldly views upheld by men. At the same time, this kind of writing shows how the domestic space often becomes a kind of



microcosm of the outside world, due to the reinforcement of societal values by other family members.

Determination towards Education:

At the very beginning of the paper, it should be noted that, in 19th century India, there were multiple social reformers who had advocated for the cause of women's education- Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Raja Rammohan Ray and Radhakanto Deb Bahadur of Bengal; and Jyotiba and Savitribai Phule of Poone (Pune). However, despite their efforts, there still remained a strong negative taboo around it.

In her autobiography, *Memoirs of My Life*, Rassundari Devi relates how, during her childhood, when she was just eight years old, she was encouraged by her uncle to get a preliminary kind of school education from a Christian lady. For this reason, she was taken to the village school, where she was taught alongside the boys:

There was a Bengali school in our house.. There was an English lady who used to teach them... [My] uncle took me to the teacher and I was asked to sit next to her...I used to stay inside the school room the whole day.. [The] boys used to write the thirty four letters of the alphabet on the floor and read them loudly. Since I used to be there all the time I learned all the letters by myself. But nobody knew about this (Rassundari, 24).

However, it all stopped when the school suddenly burned down, and, ultimately, with her marriage at the age of 12. This reflected the narrow-minded nature of societal norms that mandated education for boys but not for girls. However,

On the other hand, in the case of Ramabai Ranade, there was no such opportunity for getting educated in her family, before her marriage, as she tells us, in her autobiography titled *Himself: An Autobiography of a Hindoo Lady*:

The girls of our family were carefully guarded from any modern ideas. No women of the house or girls over eight years were allowed to appear before the men, or to come outside the house. We knew nothing of reading, and the word 'writing' had no meaning for us. I had one aunt, my father's sister, who was married to a strict Brahmin. He himself taught her to read Sanskrit. Not long afterward her husband died and his death was considered a punishment on her for having ventured to learn. As a result, in our family any sort of education was considered unpropitious, and none of us ever had even a 'smell' of it (Ranade, 2-3).

This incident with her aunt exemplifies the firmly held belief of the time that giving girls' education meant to curse them inevitably with the certain fate of widowhood. Hence, it was only after she was married to the renowned judge and philanthropist, Mr. Mahadev Govind Ranade, that she was able to get educated. Through his encouragement. She says:

He [her husband] even asked if I could read or write; but, of course, I couldn't. So that night he brought me a slate and pencil and taught me the first seven letters of our alphabet. Never having had any previous acquaintance with a slate or the letters, I took fully two hours to draw and memorize those seven letters! From the second day onward, he arranged to give two hours each evening to teaching me the alphabet and the



numerals, and on perhaps the fifteenth day he had me read the first lesson in the first book. He seemed much encouraged that day. As for me, the first reading I did was a revelation.

From that time, my studies proceeded according to the grades. Grammar, arithmetic, Modi and Balbodh writing, reading, and so on, were undertaken. Realizing that he couldn't give two hours every night as he had at first, after two or three months he arranged for a Brahman teacher from the Female Training College to teach me during the day (Ranade, 22).

Though this reflected the impact of the husband's influence on the life of Ramabai Ranade, yet, at the same time, it demonstrated her strong desire to gain adequate literacy, which also aided her during her activities outside the domestic space. Reading, which had been a totally new thing for her, quickly became a joyful pastime and a tool that facilitated her entrance into the wider public arena outside the domestic space of the house.

But for Rassundari Devi, the only restriction she faced was from within herself. By her own admission, she tells how she was loved by every member of the household. Yet, at the same time, as a consequence, she was also constantly afraid of being rebuked and criticized for her desire for reading. She was afraid of hurting the tender sentiments of her family, since she was well aware of the negative manner in which female education was considered by the society around her at that time. As she notes in her memoir,

Around this time, the idea that I should learn how to read books entered my mind. But unfortunately girls were not supposed to read in those days. "What is the world coming to?" they used to say. To think that women will be doing the work of men! Never heard of it before. In this new age even this has come to be true! These days women are becoming famous and men seem good for nothing. Such strange things never happened before. There is even a woman ruler on the throne (Queen Victoria of Great Britain). Who knows what other things may be in store for us! The way things are going, a decent man will very soon lose his caste. Pretty soon the womenfolk will get together and study books."

When I overheard these conversations I used to feel really scared. I have never dared to tell anyone about my desires—but now I became afraid that they might come to know what was on my mind. I dared not look at a page with written letters on it, in case they attributed it to my desire for learning (Devi, 44).

However, despite this, due to her deep sense of spiritual devotion, she experienced a deep desire for reading the different religious texts such as the Chaitanya Bhagawata, and others. In order to accomplish this, she initially relied on her personal deity for strength. Accordingly, she recounted a dream that she had where she was actually reading the Chaitanya Bhagawata, despite having no idea of the written word. This motivated her to develop an understanding of the written script, and to gain literacy. Hereafter, she heard her husband calling to her son to keep out a copy of that same book, which she put down to nothing other than divine intervention. Accordingly, she recounts how she managed to acquire a copy of the book, and the deep anxiety she felt of being caught in the act:

In those days, books were built differently. There were illustrated wooden frames to hold the sheets..[When] the book was brought into the



room, [she] detached one sheet and hid it. But [she] was afraid lest it be found. That would be a disgrace.... Finally [she] decided to put it in some place where [she] would be present most of the time and nobody else was likely to go (Devi, 52-53).

Initially she faced some problems due to being unable to recognize the letters, however she soon managed to find a way around it. The unique method that she adopted to accomplish this is as follows:

I decided to steal one of the palm leaves on which one of my eldest sons used to practice his handwriting. One look at the leaf, another at the sheet, a comparison with the letters I already knew, and finally, a verification with the speech of others---that was the process I adopted for some time. Furtively I would take out the sheet and put it back promptly before anybody could see it.....[after] a great deal of time and with great effort I somehow managed to stumble through the *Chaitanya Bhagavata* (Devi, 53-55).

This demonstrates her own kind of quiet resistance to the patriarchal dictates of the society which forbade education for women. The determination shown by her, however, does not appear to be any sort of extraordinary feat to her, due to her constant claim of godly intervention, nor does she show any desire to stand as an inspirational figure for all women like her. She appeared content to just be able to read without any kind of disruptions, perfectly happy in her own world.

Effects of Marriage as a Social Institution:

The issues raised in the earlier section serve to reveal how the very institution of marriage in Hindu society acted as a kind of bondage for the women. It forced various rules and restrictions on them, with which they were forced to comply, be it the housework, which was considered to be women's work, or the fact that it was their burden to provide a male heir for the family. From Rassundari Devi's memoir, we get to know how she was traumatized by the prospect of being separated from her own family members. After all, she was then barely twelve, so it was natural that she would have hardly any knowledge of what it meant to get married. Below is the account she gave of her bewildered departure from her parents' house:

I knew mother was going to hand me over to the other family. I tightened my hold on her and pleaded, "Don't give me over to them, Mother!" That made everybody present even more upset. They broke down and tried to say nice words to console me.....But I was trembling all over with fear. I was quite unable to speak.....

I clung to whoever came to pick me up and went on weeping incessantly. Everyone, old and young, was moved to tears. Eventually they managed to put me inside a palanquin, which was not the one intended for me. No sooner was I seated inside than the bearers started marching off. With none of my near ones close by I sank into a deep depression... If I am asked to describe my state of mind, I would say that it was very much like the sacrificial goat being dragged to the altar, the same hopeless situation, the same agonized screams. I could see none of my relatives near me. I was miserable, and in tears kept calling for my mother. I also prayed with all my heart as mother had told me to..... Unable to cry any



more I fell into deep sleep. I had no idea what happened after that and where I was taken.

When I woke up the next morning I found myself on a boat with none of my relations near me. All the people who came and talked were strangers. I thought of my mother and other members of the family, the affectionate neighbours, my playmates. Where were they now and where was I? So I started to weep once again. My heart felt as if it would break. All the people in the boat tried to console me. But that increased my misery because their kind words reminded me of the affection of my own people. Tears streamed down endlessly---I just couldn't stop them. I cried till I was out of breath....All I could do in my desperation was think of God, and I did that, though the predominant emotion I felt was fear (Devi, 34-36).

There was also the fact that as a bride, she also had to follow some certain social norms when interacting with her in-laws:

[She] had to stand by demurely near the master of the house after all their household work was over, as though [she] had no other work except household tasks. That was how people used to think in those days. A special rule for the daughter-in-law was to work with the sari pulled down over the face and not talk to anyone. These were considered the signs of a good daughter-in-law. The cloth available then was hardly the fine stuff we get now, it was coarse, I had to wear the coarse material, draw the end of the sari down to my chest and work without a word. My eyes were covered like the eye-shades worn by bulls on a tether. I could see nothing except my own feet. That was the system for the daughters-in-law and I followed that system (Devi, 42).

For Ramabai Ranade, she would hear stories of marriages from her friends and older relatives. This piqued her curiosity regarding marriage ceremonies from a young age:

Weddings are a topic of unfailing interest to women. My childish ideas expanded as I listened to frequent discussions of the wedding days of friends and family; about gifts from the groom to the bride and her family; about parties and dinners at 'his' home for her people. and at 'her' home for his people; about elaborate processions with bands and flaring lights and, occasionally, with elephants. What child could grow up in such an atmosphere without dreaming of an equally brilliant setting for her own small person when the great day should dawn! (Ranade, 9)

However, when her own wedding was announced, it turned out to be a rather rushed affair. The father of her to-be husband, who had just lost his first wife, was getting worried that his son was involved in reformist activities of a highly radical nature, which he feared might hamper the reputation of his family in the eyes of respectable society. To that extent, he had tried to negotiate with his son for marriage and, after multiple entreaties, had finally worn him down and gotten him to agree. He had met Ramabai's father while on a pilgrimage and on hearing that he had a daughter of appropriate marriageable age had arranged with him to get his daughter married to his son. This account below gives one a glimpse of the awkward nature of the wedding ceremony that took place:



After the wedding ceremony there was no single one of the popular practices and customs carried out. The simplest Vedic ceremony and the fire ceremony were punctiliously celebrated, and that was all.

Even on the day of the wedding, Himself did not take leave of absence from the Court. This kept Mamanji [the loving name for Ramabai's father-in-law, given by her husband] in anxiety until his son arrived; for, in spite of his confidence in his son's promise, even when given willingly, Mamanji couldn't help fearing least some of the Bombay group might purposely delay him long enough to miss the auspicious time for the marriage ceremony. Great was his relief when Himself appeared at the house after finishing his Court duty for the day. The wedding proceeded in the usual way, and when it was over, my father left me alone in Poona in my father-in-law's house and went back home to his village.

I must pause here to say that my father was the only one of my family who came with me to Poona when I was brought to meet Mamanji. The plan had been that he would send a telegram when the arrangements had been completed, summoning my mother, brother, brothers-in-law, sisters, cousins, both boys and girls, and all the rest of our relatives to the wedding; but Mamanji decided on so early a date that there was no time to send for them. Besides, as the bridegroom had absolutely refused to have any celebration whatever except the minimum of the required Vedic ceremony, my father was not willing to invite all the women and children for an occasion so dull and uninteresting (Ranade, 17-18).

The same social norms, that prompted her hasty marriage, also forbade her from calling her husband by his given name after marriage, since it was considered a social taboo. Instead she called him by a third-person reference as Himself (as provided in the translated version), which formed the title of her autobiography. As she relates,

My worst trouble was due to Himself's unchanging purpose to educate me. After my father's departure. Himself returned from Court about six-thirty, and, calling me into the room, asked, "Has your father gone?" I replied, "Yes." He continued, "You know that you have been married to me; but do you know who I am, my name, and anything else about me?" Again I answered respectfully, "Yes." "Then say it. What is my name?" And so, because he commanded it, I repeated his whole name as I had heard it. Somehow or other I hadn't been made to realize that a wife would never speak her husband's name under any circumstances! Hearing it so repeated, Himself's expression showed a surprised relief, as though he considered it a hopeful sign for our future (Ranade, 21).

The above incidents show how the norms of society put constraints on both men and women to marry, often requiring them to put aside their own personal feelings in favour of upholding the family reputation before the public. Connecting this with the following paragraph, one can see how the patriarchal dictates impose domesticity on women in different ways.

Focus on Domesticity:



The domestic space had always been considered to be the rightful place for women. And 19th century India was definitely no exception. Coupled with the negative attitudes to women education, there was also the stipulation that women have no place in the outside sphere. At the same time, there was also the household work to consider, which was primarily done by women. Initially, Rassundari Devi was spared from having to do any housework due to being a new bride, and hence, she was much loved and pampered. But when her mother-in-law fell ill with typhoid and was rendered blind, she was forced to take up the entire burden of the household. The daily, gruelling nature of it is noted by Rassundari Devi in her memoir:

It was a large household, to say the least. There was a deity who had to be offered rice and vegetables every day. Guests and passers-by dropped in quite often—they were given provisions. The amount of cooking to be done was not negligible.....[The] domestic staff itself numbered around twenty five. All of them ate twice a day and this food needed to be cooked. Then there was mother-in-law who could no longer see. Looking after her was a priority job. But we had only one domestic help who worked inside the house. The time I am talking about, there was not even one—I was the only worker. The amount of work made me nervous.....My day used to begin very early---and there was no respite from housework till long past midnight. I could not rest, even for a moment. But thanks to the grace of God I did everything in a spirit of duty. No work seemed too tiring. Because God wished it, I managed to gradually finish all the household chores. I was only fourteen then (Devi, 41-44).

Then, alongside the already heavy housework, she also had her maternal duties to consider. At the age of 18, she became a mother for the first time. In her memoir, she gives us a list of names of all the children that she had had:

Now I am going to describe the children who were born to me. I had a son, Bipinbehari, when I was eighteen. At twenty-one, I had another son, Pulinbehari. At twenty-three, I had a daughter. She was named Ramsundari. Another son was born when I was twenty-five. He was called Pearylal. The next son, Radhanath, was born when I was twenty-eight. At thirty, I had another son, Dwarkanath. When I was thirty-two, I had another son, who was called Chandranath. When I was thirty-four, I had one more son, Kishorilal. Then another child, a son, lived in my womb for six months, but then he died. After this, when I was thirty-seven, I had one more son, called Pratap Chandra. Then, at the age of thirty-nine I had a daughter, Shyamsundari. When I was forty-one I had my youngest--- a son named Mukundalal. My first child was born when I was eighteen and the last when I was forty-one. God only knows what I had to go through during those twenty-three years. Nobody else had any idea either (Devi, 46).

On the other hand, Ramabai was able to overcome such barriers to her life. Throughout her life, she never had any children, preferring to remain engrossed with her husband. Her daily chores revolved around taking care of the household and tending to her husband whole-heartedly. However, in her



initial moments, she happened to make mistakes, like in the following incident after the family had moved to the city of Nasik from Poona:

But trouble in another form awaited me! We simply could not find any cook woman, and it fell on me, in all my inexperience, to do the cooking. In Poona that work was done, of course, by the older women; but seeing such things done and doing them one's self are two entirely different things. I struggled on as best as I could, but fear of making mistakes kept my mind in a turmoil, and one day I served the dinner without any salt in it! I knew nothing of this until, having served the men and having cleared away their things, I sat down for my own food. Imagine my horror when I realized what dreadful food I had given them! The next day, fearful, lest I repeat that mistake, I put salt in twice, and again did not know it until they had finished and I sat down to eat! (Ranade, 50-51)

Yet, despite such incidents, she slowly but gradually warmed up to her role as a house-wife and gradually began to solidify her position within the household. Yet, as seen before this did not deter her from her reading and learning prowess, despite the multiple challenges that she had to overcome.

Resistance Against Societal Oppression:

Due to the negative taboos against female education and the emphasis placed on the domestic sphere as being the proper space for women, there was a constant contention with both the family members as well as the society at large. As Ramabai notes, "when my time for studying came, they not only didn't sympathize, but they were angry and scornful. They acted as if they belonged to the old school of thought...and had no interest for education" (Ranade, 24). This was despite the fact that there were no restrictions placed on education for women in the Ranade household. She further notes the kind of humiliation she faced from her mother-in-law and other older women of her family, when she was still undergoing the initial phase of settling down in her new household:

If [she] didn't read them loudly but spoke softly because [she] was timid, then the women became angry; but if [she] recited quite loudly, then some of the women.. would take stand near the stairway or door... the next door...she would begin to drawl out what she recalled of the couplet or poem [recited] the night before, imitating [her] in the craziest way, teasing and shaming [her] before all the older women, and [would] laugh hilariously. But whatever they said [she] never answered back (Ranade, 24-25).

This showed the way in which societal values with respect to male oppression were often reinforced by one's own family members due to various factors ranging from jealousy towards a new family member, fear of societal rebuke, desire to maintain the family reputation, etc. This, therefore, reflected on how the domestic space can often become a kind of microcosm of the patriarchal society outside.

The case of Rassundari Devi shows a different perspective altogether. A humble housewife, her sole desire was to read the religious texts and scriptures, without being caught. However, despite her not wanting to be an inspiration for others, her autobiography speaks of her unique way of expressing herself. This is exemplified by Trayee Sinha, who, in her essay titled *Amar Jibon (My Life): an Autobiography of Rassundari Devi as Expressing the Self*, reflects on the important literary value of her autobiography:



Rassundari's autobiography is in two parts, the first being slightly longer than the second. In her work she has dedicated poems to various gods and goddesses— Saraswati, Dayamadhab. She has simultaneously used prose and poetry, which is worthy to be noted by the readers. The narrative is written in a lucid language. She mentions in her autobiography how she has played the roles defined for her— daughter-in-law, wife and mother of many children. (Sinha, 42)

Also, it demonstrates her use of everyday, domestic language, devoid of the lofty aspirations usually associated with men. This becomes her quiet resistance to the outside demands of society, as she sidesteps them.

Stepping Out: Participation in Society:

Stepping out of the domestic space, considered to be the rightful place for a woman, was in itself a big step. And, to participate in social activities was almost impossible, unless one had encouragement from one's husband. For Ramabai, as she gradually gained proficiency in her reading and writing skills both in her native language as well as in English, she was slowly encouraged by Judge Ranade, her husband, to step outside the home. One such incident was at a mass meeting held to propose setting up a high-school for girls:

And the task of reading an address in English before that audience was assigned to me! Since it was my first attempt at reading an address in English before such an audience, Himself prepared a very simple speech with short, easy sentences, fearful lest I become frightened at the time and fail to read it well. He had me read it aloud several times in the preceding days.

But of course, when the time came, the expected happened! As I stood up to read, my hands and legs trembled, I lost my breath and my head and body seemed on fire...somehow or other I got control of myself and began to read, and continued to the end (Ranade, 81-82).

This was the backdrop for the setting up of Huzurpaga, the oldest Indian-run girls' high-school in India in 1885 under the aegis of James Ferguson, then governor of Bombay, to whom the above-mentioned petition speech was given. While expressing Ramabai's strive for promoting women's education, it also emphasises on the importance of the English language as a facilitator between the Indian social reformers and the colonial masters, without whose benevolent support such a project would not have been possible.

On the other hand, Rassundari Devi did not have any such opportunity. Thus, she continued to be bound to the domestic space, due to her social responsibilities, and was rarely allowed to go out, not even when her own mother was on her death-bed, and was calling for her:

I am a virtual prisoner here. They never sent me to her, because the household work here would suffer. I was allowed to go back to attend some family festival but had to return in a couple of days like a slave. About fifteen people accompanied me on the boat along with two senior men and two maidservants. I was allowed to visit my people only under certain conditions. I was allowed to go only on special occasions, not otherwise. When my mother lay on her deathbed she wanted very badly to see me. I have caused her sorrow, hateful sinner that I am. I tried my utmost, but could not go. It is my misfortune (Devi, 49).



Yet, she is not fully contained within the patriarchal system, The very fact that she is able to write and criticise the social norms of her time is an indication of her unyielding nature, which stays unbroken despite the strictures of patriarchy.

Rise of Strong Woman Figures:

Such women's autobiographies, therefore, reflect the growth of strong female characters who refused to bow under the dictates of patriarchal society of 19th century India. Ramabai Ramade, with support of her husband, appeared to occupy a kind of liminal space between the domestic space, and the outside world. This is reflected in her dual natures of submission and devotion towards her husband alongside her enthusiastic participation in society. Through this, she managed to become a figure of inspiration for all the women in her locality, encouraging other women to come forward as well. One of her achievements was the establishment of a kind of Sabha or committee for women for the benefit of women in Poona, which she had seen while staying in Bombay, called the Poona Seva Sadan:

My idea was to copy what we had in Bombay -- an appointed place and time when the educated women could gather to discuss simple subjects under the direction of some respectable gentleman of experience. The result was the organization of such a group to meet in the drawing room of the Female Training College in Abhyankar's compound.

At first, the society was composed of eight or ten women and five or six men..... [simple] explanations would be given as to how one can tell the time of night by the position of the constellations, and to test our memory of what was taught, we were given our choice of an extemporaneous recitation at the time or of an essay containing all that we had understood, to be read at the next meeting... [we] would return with our productions the following Sunday, and Nana[one of the male members] would praise and encourage us. But, sometimes, failing to understand his lecture, we would write out just anything. Then he would laugh heartily and banteringly show us our mistakes. He would then again endeavor to make the subject clear, and would tell us to try once more (Ranade68-69).

On the other hand, Rassundari Devi's autobiography, *Amar Jibon*, (translated in English as *Memoirs of My Life*) is the first autobiography published in the Bengali language, irrespective of gender. For an ordinary housewife, this is certainly no small feat to accomplish. The greatest endorsement of her work comes through the words of Jyotirindranath Tagore, a famous contemporary playwright, and elder brother of Rabindranath Tagore, mentioned in the Preface to this book, who claims:

The book is written by a woman. What is more, it is written by one fairly advanced in age and old-fashioned—in fact of 88 years. That was what aroused my curiosity and induced me to go through it...the events of her life are so wonderful and her style has such a natural simplicity and charm that it is difficult to put down...Another point to note about the author's life is her earnest desire to educate herself.

Such opportunity however was beyond her reach. It was considered improper for women to learn reading and writing those days. But she taught herself, taking great pains, and overcoming many obstacles. Her motivation was a thirst for spiritual knowledge. It was her wish to read



the scriptures—the Chaitanya Bhagabata—and not a desire to read plays and novels, that prompted her to do so (Devi, 9-10).

Such an endorsement, though focusing more on the spiritual side of her character, reveals the tenacity of her desire to gain reading and writing skills. At the same time, it highlights the honest, simplistic and domestic nature of writing. It reflects, through her writing, the departure from the traditionally patriarchal notions of women not venturing outside the domestic sphere, a narrative which is more prominent in the writings of Ramabai Ranade.

Conclusion:

To conclude, therefore, the paper showcases the rise of an alternate means of resistance to the patriarchal doctrines set by society that restricted access of women to education, and forbade them from stepping out of the domestic space. This is shown through the resilience and determination displayed by both Ramabai Ranade and Rassundari Devi in different ways- becoming educated, participating in different social programs, breaking societal norms, etc. Yet, this demonstrates strongly the importance of education for them and for women in general, since this was what made it possible for them to write their autobiographies.

This, thereby, helps to establish how the domesticity and simplicity of their writing heralds a totally feminine style opposed to the values of the male-dominated Indian society. At the same time, it reflects the 'New Woman' sort of nature of these women figures, who, through their work, become an inspiration for other women.

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