



timepass: Protima Bedi's Memoir as a Rebuttal to Media

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Abstract

Feminist autobiographical writings often serve the purpose of legitimising the author's praxis/professional life and partake in the process of reshaping their identity. This article argues that Indian classical dancer Protima Bedi's posthumously released memoir — an example of *écriture féminine* - is a personal space to confide and create a new sense of self. The paper gives a glimpse of Protima's transforming identities in different stages of her life. This paper tries to explore her memoir as a rebuttal to the media and hullabaloo it created with her persona. Exploring a love-hate relationship between Protima and the media, this article focuses on how the autobiographical writing, traversing through the past and the present, attempts to reclaim the lost ground through legitimisation by confiding.

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1. Introduction

Writing an autobiographical work is a deliberate act of self-representation in the public sphere. The evident truth of the narrative tends to gloss over the deliberateness of choices made in the writing process. Identity and its representation are key factors in such writings. These writings demand an examination of identities and different roles, revealing them as a social discourse. Women's autobiographical writings are especially marked by the desire to establish self-identity. They deal with both the public and private spheres of life, emphasising the development of the idea of self. The identity represented in these writings keeps transforming throughout the narration.

Several social and feminist movements have influenced women's writing in the twentieth century. After the early twentieth century, a new stage of feminism (postmodern feminism) had begun with new theoretical aspects in women's writing, which are recognised as "space," "style," and "medium."¹ Feminism highlights gendered constructions of self, and the genre of autobiography is associated with self-possession. Their mutual dependency interconnects both feminism and autobiography in a way. According to Beverley Skeggs' idea in *Feminist Cultural Theory: Process and Production* (Skeggs, 1995) "there has always been a strong feminist interest in autobiographical, beginning with an attempt to connect the 'personal' with 'political', and concomitant emphasis on women's experience as a vital resource in the creation of women's knowledge" (Cosslett et al., 2012) From the 1980s, feminist critics started focusing on the "accepted canon of autobiographical writing" linked with "identity", and it came under changing and reconfiguring theoretical issues. By then, "Autobiography has been one of the most important sites of feminist debate" (Anderson, 2015). Since the feminist theory is rooted in the lives of women and their narratives, Women's autobiographical writing, "literature of personal revelation" (Shiple, 2008, p. 32), is a primary essential document for feminist research and ideology.

Autobiographical writings are one of the modes in which women find their personal space to confide. However, Space is recognised in different aspects based on the intent of the author. It is considered and theorised as "location and position of life narrative" (Watson, 2016). Moreover, it is used in multiple ways: space as 'material surround' - it is a geographic specificity of place in the life narration. It is an 'Embodiment of space' - where the body is a site of autobiographical knowledge, which memory recovers and reworks on the body politic. Autobiographical narratives are organised around sociality, including relationships, actions, ritualisation, or identification by gesture and bodily positioning. 'Geopolitical space' relates to the subject's social relations that are situated within geographic space, with the complexity of citizenship or histories of conflict in the narratives. 'Spatial figurations' - figurative language is used to represent the self-relationship of the writers. 'Memory and spatialisation of temporal distances' represents the temporal distance that one traverses in memory, where the narrator engages the history of oneself. 'Peritextual space' is considered a space of publication, reception, and circulation. According to Whitelock's study of life narrative (2019), "peritext concerns not only who reads whom, when, and to what effect, but also the kind of audience a text may construct at a given moment" (Watson, 2016). All these forms engage based on the readers and subjects of the narratives. The author practices any of these ways of space in their autobiographical writings to justify their life and to confide.

Authors reconstruct themselves and their bodies through writing. Expression of the female body and their sexual experiences became collective writing of women in memoirs, diaries, autobiographies, journals, etc., recreating the "inner being" as a writer with self-exploration by telling truths. Women's writing sought validation of their experience in their autobiographical texts as a reference for life. Cixous' concept of *écriture féminine* gave rise to the validation of feminine writing of the female body.

Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies-for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into the text-as into the world and into history - by her own movement (Cixous et al., 1976).

The theory of *écriture féminine* has its origin in the early 1970s during the second wave of feminism in France through the work of Helene Cixous, Monique Wittig, Luce Irigaray, Catherine Clement and Julia Kristeva. It was first coined by Helene Cixous in the work *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1975). She stimulated women to write themselves out of the world men constructed for women by re-framing the language and pushing out the rules. It foregrounds the understanding of self and body through language. Rachel Bowlby has contributed the equation "WOMAN=BODY=UNCONSCIOUSNESS=TEXT" (1983, p.63), which gives the core theme to this French theory. Women often unconsciously express their emotions and feelings, relying less on reasoning than male writers. The language she (woman) chooses to write is distanced from men's language. She feels the presence of her body in the language she chooses to write (Bowlby, 1983).

Women's autobiographical writings are not an exception to this theory. Feminist research on these writings has evolved over time and has become a significant field of study. The pursuit of information about an individual through autobiographical texts is one of the research areas within literature. However, the methods we use to explore and analyse their identities occasionally change. To understand or evaluate a person's identity through his or her autobiographical work, we must also consider the person's cultural and social context. According to Mary Evans, "the search for greater information about the person has shifted to a search for an interpretation of how the individual could be located within a particular *Zeitgeist*." In this paper, I aim to examine Protima Bedi's cultural and social environment to explore how she negotiates and transforms her identities throughout her memoir. I focus on the Indian setting of the 1960s and 1970s because most of her identity shifts and significant moments in her life took place during this period.

"Westernization gave rise to the new ... intellectual class which is 'modern'" (Gandhi, 1980). Because of modernisation, commodity culture became prevalent in India as well. The advertisement of products, which showcases a particular culture, fueled the fashion industry. The fashion field has come with many developments linked to the textile industry and the film industry. The Miss India competition was started as early as 1947, but it commercially began in 1964, headed by *Femina*ⁱⁱ. The Indian film industry underwent tremendous growth and witnessed changes in dressing, music, dance and technical aspects in the 1960s. Most classical singers and dancers, including Amrapali, Vyjayanthi Bali, Sonal Mansingh, M. Balamurali, and Pandit Jasraj, also participated in these developments in the film industry.

2. Protima and *timepass*

Protima Bedi talks about her life in her memoir as a contrast between tradition and modernity. Her memoir is a collection of journals and letters that she had written to her children and lovers during her lifetime. Pooja, her daughter, brought it out after her death. Even though it is a writing on select parts of her life, it instead gives a holistic glimpse of her life in a sequential order. She was born as Protima Gupta in Delhi in 1949, the second of four siblings. Her family moved to Bombay. A dark moment recorded in her memoir is that, at the age of nine, she was sent to stay at her aunt's in a village in Karnal district. There she was repeatedly raped by a cousin of hers. As a child, she found humiliation in being branded "ugly duckling"ⁱⁱⁱ and was neglected by her family. She started being independent and living according to her wishes. At the age of sixteen, she started her modelling career, trying to be financially independent. This was the beginning of her sexually promiscuous life, too. She says, she lived a life "in sin"^{iv} with Kabir Bedi before marriage. She is also open about her multiple relationships out of wedlock. She became a mother of two children. She had a major brush with the media when there was a streaking incident. After seven years of marriage, she had a breakup with Kabir. Her passionate involvement in Odissi dance at the age of twenty-six made her face many obstacles. With the help of the Karnataka government, she established the 'Nrityagram'^v. She had changed her name to Protima Gouri from Protima Bedi. After the death of her son Siddharth, who was suffering from schizophrenia, she lost interest in material life. She gave up everything: her dance, Nrityagram, Kuteeram^{vi} and relationships and took *sanyasa* (though not in a traditional way). She died in August 1998 in a landslide when she was on a Kailash-Manasarovar pilgrimage.

The argument in this essay is based on Protima's memoir as a tool that justifies and legitimises her views and perspectives regarding media portrayals and representations of her life. It is believed that Protima used 'social space' to confide in her memoir. Additionally, this paper aims to present her narration as a 'peritextual space', as the title, *timepass*, suggests. Her outlook on life differed from others. She lived her life purely to enjoy it, and she said it was simply passing time for a mere human being in this vast universe. She stated,

[i]t's so much larger, so much grander. We are just microscopic specks in the whole big scheme of things in this universe! How bogged down we get by rules, by what society wants and what people say, when in fact it's all just timepass. Enjoy the moment, even the grief (Bedi, 1999, p. x).

Secondly, her scandals became a topic of timepass for the media and society. Her movements and activities created ripples in the media at a certain stage in her life. While she was relishing the media limelight, she was sarcastic about people who made her life a topic of timepass.

It must be awful for these people to have such boring lives that all they can do to make them interesting is to talk about somebody else's life. I'm glad I provided them with timepass conversation (Bedi, 1999, p. ix).

This attitude persisted throughout her life, filled with scandals and sexual openness, leading her to such a lifestyle. She led a rebellious life within a traditional family setup. Dance and

sex became two central preoccupations in her youth. She regarded dance as divine enjoyment and sex as physical pleasure, both requiring full involvement of body and mind.

Goals change in a person's life over time. This was seen in Protima's life from childhood to *sanyasa*. From childhood, she wanted to have a large family with a loving husband and ten children. Later, she started searching for love in various affairs of hers. Her ambitions changed from time to time: She did modelling and gave performances in fashion shows; started a dance career; established Nrityagram; constructed Kuteeram, and took *sanyasa* in a non-traditional way. When Pooja, her daughter, asked,

[w]hy are you always running away? You ran away from your mother and father, you ran away from your husband, then you ran away from us, your children, and now you're running away from Nrityagram. Why? (Bedi 1999, p.301).

She said,

...her perspective was wrong. I was not running away from anything, I was always running towards something with time. (Bedi, 1999, p. 301).

3. Legitimising life through writing

In post-independence India, women from elite sections sought to redefine success in accordance with their personal interests, working effectively towards new goals and ideals. They transcended narrow, traditional models of success by embracing life-affirming values. Protima also broke through these traditional barriers to pursue her aspirations. Her life and career were largely marked by scandals. She occasionally wrote journals and letters addressing these issues to present her perspective. Protima found refuge in her memoir, where she expressed her views on her life and countered society's and the media's responses to her lifestyle. She created her own space within the memoir by shaping her personal view of life. The autobiographical space discussed earlier applies to Protima's memoir, which belongs to the genre of autobiography—a form of life writing that falls under autobiographical literature. For example, in 1974, after returning from Europe, she streaked during the launch of Cineblitz, a film magazine, which published photographs of her streaking down the busy road outside Jehangir Art Gallery in Mumbai. An article in the *Mumbai Mirror* stated, "Protima Bedi, dancer-model-enchanted, who was married briefly to Kabir Bedi, wore a fierce individuality as lightly as her skirts, which she often slipped out of to either do a nude streak on Juhu beach or even pose for an unprepared photographer." She responded strongly to this report, which manipulated the image of her streaking. The original photo was taken in Goa, not outside Jehangir Art Gallery in Bombay as claimed. It was at Anjuna Beach in Goa, where many hippies wandered around naked, as she did. She questioned why the background of the crowd was absent if she had streaked on the busy streets of Bombay. She protested this misreporting through her journal writings. However, she also realised that it did not serve its purpose, since "to the readers the media's version was always the truth" (Bedi, 1999, p. 84).

Nevertheless, it is not to say that Protima had an antagonistic relationship with the media. She enjoyed the media glare too. She said,

I have never regretted whatever I did. Everything has its time and place, and every experience helps you evolve. I was amazed at the media's preoccupation with me. I enjoyed seeing how people ran around and after me if I did this, and how they froze or flopped over if I did that. ... The whole phase of playing up to the media, feeding, scandalizing it, shocking it – it was not done out of my conviction, but simply because I was having a whale of a time. ... At no stage did I feel that I was playing with my life or that I was a "disrespectable" woman (Bedi, 1999, p. 84).

In one of her interviews, she was asked if she did not feel embarrassed when she streaked on the beach, and what was the effect of that incident on her relationship with Kabir Bedi, her husband. Her response was,

I thought, what is it – it's the body, it's the boobs, it's the womanliness. That's all it is. What about the woman inside? No one thinks about the woman inside. So, is this what they want? Let them see the ****ing thing. (Chowdury, 1998, pp. 2–3).

In all the instances, she had the courage to face the media and express her views towards the reaction of society and the media.

Not only had she dared enough to streak, but she was also ready to face a photographer with a bikini. After this streaking incident, N.K. Sareen, the photographer, had reported to Sowmyadipta Banerjee, reporter of Mumbai Mirror, regarding Protima's call for a photoshoot in the year 1975. Banerjee captures Sareen's hatred of the whole episode:

I promised to myself that I would not ruin my picture by aiming the flash-gun at her. ... I could almost imagine the look of utter disgust when I would place those pictures on my editor's desk. I could almost see how she would narrow her eyes and look straight into my face with a nasty smirk written all over her face. It was the look that every bone in my body hated (Banerjee, 2013).

And he continued that "I could see she was hell-bent on breaking traditions" (Banerjee, 2013). Protima defied the established norms and followed her own way. Her followers in the media put her attitude in a positive light after her death. One of the web sources stated, "Defying every societal norm that every Indian woman was conditioned to believe as 'normal', Protima Bedi was an unforgettable woman" (*Protima Bedi: A Feminist Icon Who Defied Indian Societal Norms for Women*, 2018). She was fearless, and she said, "[s]ociety always has problems with anyone who combines courage and curiosity with a strong belief in oneself" (Bedi, 1999, p.276).

The scandal about her relationship with Rajni Patel created chaos in her life. Rajni Patel (Protima called him Dada), a famous barrister and Congress leader in the 1980s, was suffering from cancer. Meanwhile, Protima and Patel had an affair and were committed to each other. Protima wanted to publish their letters to each other after his death. Because Patel took her promise that, "after he died I would publish them, as he thought they were the most precious treasure of his life" (Bedi, 1999, p. 153). Protima worked day and night to write and publish the book, *To You, My Da*, as a tribute to Rajni, to be released on the fortieth day after his death. Meanwhile, Kabir's friend Sunil Sethi, who was writing for *India Today*, wanted a small fragment from her manuscript for his writing. She agreed to that. However, the extract was manipulated by Sethi and was published in *India Today*. The affair became a sensational issue, and it sounded like

“secret love affair, the kind of scandalous thing you see happening in the political world every once in a while” (Bedi, 1999, p.156). She states that all that appeared in the magazine was immaterial. She said,

[t]he book was not about me, not even about us; I was immaterial. The book was about a very special phase in the life of a sensitive man with a wonderfully alive mind. The letters were simply about love – a dying, unhappy man’s letters to a woman he loved. (Bedi, 1999).

But untimely media exposure snatched away this potential of the affair to cast a famous barrister, politician in a very humane light. On the other hand, much of the press was unkind and published articles against her. The gravity of the matter reached such an extent that she, as well as her children, faced life threats (Bedi, 1999). Manu, a lawyer friend of hers, defended her in this context in a press meet and tried to exonerate her. He was a friend of Patel's, too. He argued that it was an intention of Protima to project a beautiful relationship with Patel, a case gone out of hand. Now people were more worried about Patel, the politician. But Manu said even Protima’s character was at stake in this issue – a woman, a dancer. Moreover, she had the guts to speak about this beautiful relationship in public. A compromise was struck with stakeholders in this issue in that context that she would not publish the book about this relationship for at least ten years. However, she decided to use the materials for her autobiography. Within a few days, *Sunday* published an article favouring Protima’s perspective on this whole issue (Bedi, 1999, pp. 160-161).

She arranged her affairs in a striking manner and said, “I had the capacity to love many at a time, and for this I had been called shallow and wayward, a good-time girl. I had had many beautiful relationships.” She regarded these relationships as gold sovereigns and carried these memories proudly, saying,

I carried them with me, always, like the relationships I had with Kabir, Jasraj, Manu and scores of others. Most people perhaps did not have the capacity to love so much, to give so much.

She was happy to be a woman, and her sex reminded her of her beauty and the fulfilment of her life.

According to French feminism, a woman has bodily autonomy and she can express her sexual desire, and can also put in her text, which has been under criticism for many years. Pamela McCallum mentions

[i]f an erotics of the text is privileged over a critical consciousness, it is hardly surprising that the female 'subject' is rewritten or recoded as a conductor of unexpected sexual or libidinal energy (1985).

Protima is considered to be a subject in her bodily activities. But some of the Indian women's writings show it is untrue when it comes to the Indian aspect. In *Outcast*^{vii} Mahasweta Devi created a woman’s body that is foregrounded as a sexual object. Regarding this, Malashri Lal observes that,

[t]he French feminist perspective of the woman’s body as a sexual counter in man-woman relationships will not operate in the Indian context. Once again, society plays up collectively

to interpret and direct the woman's sexual expression, it is not by individual choice that she grants access to her private self (Lal 2014, pp.49-50).

I argue that Protima does not come under Lal's description of "Indian women". We need to make a distinction between different socio-economic categories of Indian women here. We cannot have a monolithic category of Indian women. Protima used to openly discuss sexual habits with her friends and used to laugh at it; and also she discussed her one affair with the other person, who was in a relationship with her. Very frankly and openly, she says:

I knew which girl was good in bed, which one liked to be fingered, which one gave a hand job and which one used her mouth. Whenever I talked to those girls at parties and they replied to me in a very prim tone rather piously, I would imagine them doing the things that the boys had told me about and I would roar with laughter (Bedi 1999, p.25).

Protima's openness and non-remorseful attitude towards relationships allowed her to live her life in her own way. Women's writings reveal the truth of their relationships, and in some cases, they have a tone of regret or of having been victimised, or in many cases, not revealing a few things. But Protima's writings prove that she was happy with the fulfilment in every relationship she had. In her own words, "if there is any regret, it is only that I did not do enough in my youth" (Bedi 1999, p.2). Even though she loved her husband a lot, she treated him as casually as her other affairs. She admitted her womanhood in a casual way. She would comment on her own virginity, love-making and other sex-related matters in a highly casual way (Bedi 1999, p.36). She had also revealed her other relationships to Kabir. No woman of traditional India would ever speak about her premarital/out-of-wedlock sexual relationship to her husband, but Protima dared to reveal them and be open about them even to her readership. In a way, her "openness" and "honesty" emerge as an antidote to the manipulations of the media.

4. Becoming a Danseuse

The self is not constant; it is continuously in flux throughout a person's life. Life-writing is a continuous process of constructing and deconstructing lived experiences of selves. Writer here and now takes upon himself or herself the task of describing the progress of a protagonist from past to present by transforming their selves or their identities. The construction of identity has a narrative structure that includes past events and new information resulting from negotiations between past and present experiences, dreams and desires, which is related to cultural memory. According to Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka

cultural memory is the faculty that allows us to build a narrative picture of the past and through this process develop an image and an identity for ourselves... cultural memory comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose "cultivation" serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image. Upon such collective knowledge, for the most part (but not exclusively) of the past, each group bases its awareness of unity and particularity. (Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995).

Protima identified herself in different vocations such as that of a model, a dancer, a writer and considered motherhood also to be a part of her vocation. Several experiences had made her transform her ways of life, guided by her career in traditional dance in her later life. Protima's

writing of her body, expression of changing identities and sexuality are examples of the concept of *écriture féminine*. Cixous says such writings are necessary for a woman and gives pleasure to write her "self". Cixous mentions,

[t]o write. An act which will not only 'realize' the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength; it will give her back her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal" (Cixous et al., 1976).

Here I argue that her memoir is one such example for following an ideology of *écriture féminine*: she reveals dark secrets of her life and dealt with her body in her memoir frankly from her childhood itself; she recounts how her cousin deflowered her at the age nine; she even confesses her desire for sexually attractive body and the way she dressed and removed dress for striptease.

Protima's *timepass* reflects as 'Spatial Figurations' where Protima uses figurative language to describe her self-relationship. When Protima opted for modelling to cover her expenses at the early age of sixteen, physical looks and a sensuous body were the first priority of the industry. She never missed an opportunity to be a beautiful woman with a sexy body when she was a young girl, and then a model and even after starting her dance career. In her writings, she kept on recalling her beauty from her childhood; even as she called herself "ugly duckling", she wanted to be a beautiful woman, and she called herself a reincarnation of Urvashi (divine and beautiful apsara in Indra's court). As a model, she made herself look very appealing by wearing clothes that were very tight, so that her beauty was showcased. Protima declared herself an elite.

Anything to do with Indian culture was sneered at. Indian culture was only for the middle classes, the locals, the frogs-in-the-well who were not aware of the world outside. Indian culture was for the Hindiwalas, not for the elite who conversed in English. And I was part of that charmed elite (Bedi 1999, p.14).

From her childhood, she always yearned for an attractive body, and she was also very anxious about her womanly looks. She says:

[t]he years passed and I had still not sprouted boobs. They hadn't started. My sister was wearing bras at the age of twelve, and here I was, flat even at sixteen. Which man would want a wife without breasts? ... Every other girl was embarrassed by her periods, but not me. I made a bold exhibition of the fact that I was menstruating. When the others hunched their shoulders forward, embarrassed by their new breasts, I would wonder at them. Being flat-chested was my greatest sorrow. Wouldn't God give me at least enough to fill the smallest bra?(Bedi 1999, p.15).

But when she became a dancer, she transformed her beauty into a purely traditional look by wearing a cotton sari with a big *bindi* and *gajra* (flowers in her plaited hair).

Meanwhile, she was also keen to identify herself as a good dancer. She started her dance career unexpectedly at the age of twenty-six in 1975. The 1970s were a period of transition in many fields in India. Many feminist movements in the West had influenced Indian movements. The film industry was robust by this time. Classical dances were adopted in the films. Some of the dancers were already taking part in the films. But Protima did not take part in the film even though

she was the wife of a Bollywood actor, Kabir Bedi. As irony would have it, she stepped into an Odissi dance recital theatre instead of a party hall, where she fell in love with the dance genre. She specified in an interview with *India Today*—she directly asked Kelucharan Mahapatra, “*Hamko dance karna* (I want to dance)”; the response was “no” from the guru, and she continued, “I caught hold of his *kurta* and said that I would give up anything to be taught by him” (Jain, 1994). Finally, the Guru yielded, and with hard work for three continuous years, she learnt Odissi dance. It is paradoxical that earlier, she made fun of Indian classical dances. She said that:

[t]he music was so painful and hard on the ears, and the basic posture—we called it the ‘chamberpot’ posture—was utterly ridiculous. ‘Looks like she’s constipated,’ we’d laugh. ‘A piece of shit’s about to appear any minute!’ Everything to do with South Indian, its language, its culture, was cause for ridicule (Bedi, 1999).

Subsequently, she had some misunderstandings with her guru due to his son Shibhu’s behaviour. Shibhu aspired for a position of Odissi dance guru in the Nrityagram that she established. Shibhu, who got into the Nrityagram, behaved according to his whims and fancies. This led to his removal. At this stage, Shibhu spread the most malicious and filthy stories about Protima and the girl students at Nrityagram. Magazines published malicious stories and spread a perception that “Nrityagram was no place for decent people to send their children” (Bedi, 1999, p.220). Guruji was angry with Protima because of the reports in *Pioneer* accusing Shibhu of financial irregularities at Nrityagram. He thought it was her doing and stopped interacting with Nrityagram. Protima wrote to Guruji, explaining that it was not she who made the story. Instead, it was Shibhu who spread the wrong information that she had spoken with the press about him. The whole episode affected her dance career and the image of Nrityagram, too. The patrons of the Nrityagram denied support for Vasantahabba^{viii} just because of the negative report in the *Pioneer*. Even guru Kelucharan Mahapatra started feeding lies to the press. When he asked for the reason for quitting Nrityagram, he gave silly reasons and said that “Protima had accused him of having sexual leanings towards his students” (Bedi, 1999, p.269). But she kept quiet regarding this issue because of the immense respect she had for her guru. The only thing Protima did was to confide all this in her memoir to justify her simple and straightforward ways without any mistakes. Again, here, the media played a crucial role in spoiling the guru-shishya relationship, though the very same media had also contributed to the development of Nrityagram with their earlier reports.

5. The power of Kali

She had a confused state of mind when she took up dance as her career (Bedi 1999, p.188). There was a complete transformation in her lifestyle once she accepted it. She identified herself as a devotee of “Kali”,^{ix} and she felt as though Kali was invoked in her body. In a volatile state of mind, she would imagine herself speaking with Kali (Bedi, 1999). She says even when she danced on stage, it was not she who offered flowers to Jagannath.^x When she began the recital, it was the Mother Kali. All her performances ended with Kali’s *tandava*^{xi}.

Indian feminist writings recreated many images of mythology by using the characters of Sita, Draupadi, Meera, Radha, Urmila, etc. Lal states, “Indian feminism has succeeded in creating a unique niche in reworking images from mythology and legend” (Lal, 2014). Even Protima related

her two different identities to mythological images: Kali and Urvashi. She begins her memoir by proclaiming herself to be an incarnation of Urvashi, the apsara, one who entertains the gods and goddesses with her physical beauty and dance. But with the beginning of her dance career, the image of “Kali”, the evil remover, was more recurrent. The earlier style of a model slowly disappeared with the beginning of her dance career. Urvashi stands as a metaphor for the first half of her life, emphasising the importance of beauty and the body’s pleasures, whereas the second half of her life, as a dancer, borrowed the image of Kali, although these images sometimes intersected. She later became “mother” to many disciples when she changed her name from Protima Bedi to Protima Gouri. In Nrityagram, everyone started calling her *Gouri amma*. “When I arrived in Hesaraghatta (Bangalore), everyone called me Bedi-amma out of respect” (Bedi, 1999, p.241). She gave this credit to her guru. “It all came back to my *guruji* saying ‘*bahut kali-ka rup dekhaya tumne*. (You have shown a lot of Kali in you) Calm down a little bit. *Parvati-ka roop lo*. (Take on the image of Parvati—other part of Kali)” (Bedi, 1999).

6. Conclusion

As a basis for my argument, the autobiographical writings set forth a view on representing the self and its doings. Additionally, these writings focus on encoding the self as a subject. Every life writing has the intention of justifying life incidents. Protima’s memoir represents self-exploration, self-revelation through the concept of *écriture féminine*. The frankness and willingness to mention the uncovered truths of her life in her letters and journals to her lovers and her children proved to be a feminist icon of a daring identity. Moreover, that openness of her persona is foregrounded to vindicate her from the gossip-mongering manipulations of the media. Her memoir, thus, is an example of a rebuttal to the media where she confides to legitimise.

Endnotes

ⁱ Virginia Woolf’s concept of women’s space, Rachel Blau Duplessis’ concept of women’s style and Helen Cixous’ concept of women’s medium of writing in their works (Bowen, 2004, p. 12).

ⁱⁱ *Femina* is the oldest Indian English magazine owned by Worldwide Media, a wholly owned subsidiary of the Times Group.

ⁱⁱⁱ During her childhood, Protima was very thin, black and cranky. Her nose was fat and flat, her eyes were like a frog’s eyes, and her thick lips were never thought sexy then; only Africans had such unfortunate lips. So she called herself an ugly duckling (Bedi, 1999, p. 11).

^{iv} In Protima’s own words. She says she enjoyed this sinful life and states that “the idea of ‘sin’ made it so adventurous, so colorful, so utterly wicked and marriage she called it as play-acting—cooking for your man, mending his clothes, looking after the house and generally doing all the exciting work which married women find such a drag and a bore” (Bedi, 1999, p. 42).

^v India's first modern Gurukul of Indian classical dances was established by Protima in 1990 at Hesarahatta, the outskirts of Bangalore. Literally meaning "dance village", Nrityagram is maintained and guided at present by her daughter Pooja Bedi and her disciples: Surupa Sen and Bijayini Sathpahy.

^{vi} Luxury hotel built opposite Nrityagram, to support Nrityagram financially.

^{vii} *The Outcast: Four Stories* is a collection of stories on four tribal women, in which the experience of Douli, a Dusad (tribal community) girl who was conceived and discarded by a Brahmin man and continues suffering with other men of her own and other castes. Curses received from her mother and other women are an instance of the woman's body as a sexual object (Devi, 2002).

^{viii} *Vasantahabba* is a grand festival of dance celebrated in Nrityagram every year for three days.

^{ix} *Kali* is an Indian Hindu goddess who represents femininity and motherhood. "Feminine here is powerfully terrifying: naked and intoxicated female-dark, bloodstained, and dishevelled-dancing on the prostrate body of Shiva, her husband, with her tongue lolling out, wearing nothing except a garland of human heads around her neck, a girdle of severed human hands around her waist, and infant corpses as earrings. However, strangely enough, the devotee sees in this macabre picture, an 'impossible beauty', and a 'mother.' The mother here is anything but domestic (engaged as she is in a battle-dance) and anything but nurturing (adorned as she is with symbols of death-skulls, corpses, and blood)" (Dalmyia, 2000).

^x Jagannath is a deity worshipped in the regional tradition of Hinduism and Buddhism in India and Bangladesh. Jagannath is considered a form of Vishnu. Odissi dancers used to offer their devotional feelings or prayers in front of Lord Jagannath by offering flowers and salutations to the earth, which is called as Mangalacharan.

^{xi} The *Tandava* is a sacred dance-drama of Southern India that has vigorous, brisk movements. Performed with joy.

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