THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF A NARRATIVE SPACE: A STUDY OF FACEBOOK AS AN 'AUTOFICTION' IN THE INDIAN CONTEXT (2006-2024)

Synopsis submitted by

Rimi Nandy

School of Media, Communication and Culture,
Faculty of Interdisciplinary Studies, Law, and Management
Jadavpur University
Kolkata, India
2024

Synopsis Of Ph.D Dissertation Titled

The Birth And Growth Of A Narrative Space: A Study Of Facebook as an 'Autofiction'

in the Indian Context (2006-2024)

This thesis proposes to study the Facebook platform as a literary narrative intrinsically bound by autobiographical traditions and the algorithmic culture prevalent in Web 2.0. The transformative role performed by the Facebook platform in creating a space for the birth and growth of digital autofiction is the crux of the hypothesis of this research. Autofiction, typically embodying a blend of autobiographical elements with fiction, breaks away from traditional autobiographical practices. The French author Serge Doubrovsky first used the term in his novel Fils to comment on the autobiographical nature of his novel. This generic intervention was undertaken to provide an alternative to the binary of fact/fiction. The thesis focuses on comparing textual autofiction belonging to print culture and Facebook as a narrative device for the portrayal of the self.

The research follows a mixed methodology, including qualitative analysis of Facebook posts and quantitative analysis of user behaviour reflected in the surveys conducted for the study. The thesis also uses an auto-narrative approach coupled with auto-netnography. Traditional methodologies were perceived to be inadequate for the research as they cross and crisscross various disciplinary boundaries. The development of Web 2.0 gave rise to a multimedia interactive space characterised by its ubiquitous nature. The posts on Facebook redefine narrative structures and reconfigure the author-reader relation. The theoretical framework involves a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach. The primary focus of the thesis is based on narratology and its interconnection with new media studies, postmodernism, posthumanism, nationalism and autobiography studies.

The thesis also tries to situate the narrative practices of the Facebook platform within the context of India and the portrayal of Indian identity through banal nationalism. The study, therefore, traces the Indian autobiographical practices, which, though rooted in modern Western autobiography, significantly differ from them. Analysis of Indian autobiographies and autofictional texts showcases the transformation of the Western paradigm through its encounter with the Indian practices.

The thesis is divided into seven chapters that track the progression of autofiction from a pre-digital age to the age defined by social media and its ubiquitous presence. The mediation of the self through social media platforms essentially restructures the autofictional practice. Each of the chapters analyses the critical elements networked together in the form of sociological, economic and political aspects involved in the social tradition of storytelling.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces the subject of the thesis, outlining the primary objectives and providing an overview of the structure. It includes a brief explication of the theoretical paradigms and a detailed literature review that sets the premise for the research and identifies the existing research gap. The introduction establishes the significance of studying Facebook as an autofictional narrative space within the Indian context, and it discusses the overall structure and chapterization of the thesis, providing a roadmap for the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2: Consumer Culture and Narrativizing Computer-Mediated Communication

This chapter sets the stage by examining the influence of consumer culture on online narratives. It analyzes the transformation of capitalism in the 20th century, contextualizing the growth of the network society and its impact on economic behavior. The chapter offers a detailed examination of how social interactions on digital platforms relate to the sharing of information, laying the groundwork for locating social media within the sphere of digital narratives. Additionally, it discusses the narrative turn, expanding the study of narratives beyond literary studies to build the central hypothesis of the research.

Chapter 3: Autobiography to Autofiction: A Posthuman Understanding of Life Writing

This chapter explores the progression of life narratives from traditional autobiography to autofiction. It introduces the literary genre of autobiography, explaining its essential features, and compares Western and Eastern perceptions of autobiography. The chapter then transitions to a comparative study between autobiography and autofiction, focusing on how postmodernism and posthumanism have reconstructed the concept of a sovereign self. Key theories and concepts related to autofiction and life writing are explored to investigate the shift from traditional autobiography to digital autofiction.

Chapter 4: Digital Memory, Narrativity, and Interactivity

This chapter provides a critical perspective on the impact of digital media on the construction and perception of memory, shaping online narratives. It follows a comparative approach to assess how digital devices transform the structure of life narratives through the capturing and creation of memories. The chapter offers insights into the functioning of narrativity in the digital realm, emphasizing the interactive nature of storytelling on Facebook and its implications for multimodal autobiographies.

Chapter 5: Genre, Textuality, and Facebook Narrative

Extending the overarching theme of self and narrativity, this chapter explores the various genres and textuality found within Facebook narratives. A critical examination of Facebook's architecture and its narrative affordances enhances the understanding of user behavior and the construction of online identities. This chapter delves deeper into how the platform supports different narrative forms and the implications for the representation of the self in digital spaces.

Chapter 6: Facebook in the Indian Context

This chapter focuses on the unique cultural and social factors influencing Facebook narratives within the Indian context. It aims to substantiate the research hypothesis through empirical data and analysis of Facebook posts, filtered through the lens of national identity. The chapter critically discusses the concepts of selfhood, nationalism, and nationhood, examining how Facebook as an autofiction platform intersects with social constructs of identity. It highlights the performative element of Facebook posts and their connection to socio-cultural narratives in India.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The concluding chapter summarizes the essential findings and insights from the preceding chapters, reflecting on the implications of studying Facebook as an autofictional narrative space. It addresses the challenges encountered during the research and identifies areas for

future investigation. This chapter consolidates the research contributions, emphasizing their significance in enhancing the understanding of the interplay between digital technology, narrative, and culture. The term 'autodatafiction' is proposed to encapsulate the multifaceted nature of autobiographical practices on transmedial platforms, underscoring the role of big data in structuring self-narratives.The results of the surveys are analysed and used to explain the various practices of Facebook platforms in relation to the aspects discussed in the respective chapters. The qualitative analysis of the Facebook posts depicts a form of autobiographical practices that cannot be denoted by the term 'autofiction' alone. Therefore, I propose to introduce the term 'autodatafiction' to represent the portrayal of the self not only through multimedia elements on transmedial platforms but also the critical role played by big data in structuring the self-narrative.

In conclusion, this thesis posits Facebook as a transformative platform for the evolution of digital autofiction within the Indian context. By blending autobiographical elements with fictional narratives, Facebook redefines traditional life writing practices. This study employs a multidisciplinary approach, incorporating qualitative and quantitative methodologies to analyze the unique narrative structures emerging from this digital space.

The research highlights the active role of users in shaping and participating in these narratives, a significant departure from the passive consumption of print culture. Facebook's algorithmic architecture and multimedia capabilities enable dynamic interactions, fostering a network of authors and readers who collectively contribute to the construction of online identities. By situating Facebook narratives within the socio-cultural framework of India, the thesis underscores the interplay between digital technology, national identity, and personal storytelling.

The introduction of the term 'autodatafiction' encapsulates the multifaceted nature of self-narratives on transmedial platforms, acknowledging the critical role of big data in this process. This thesis thus contributes to a deeper understanding of how digital platforms like Facebook serve as contemporary spaces for narrative innovation, reflecting broader cultural and technological shifts. It opens avenues for further research into the evolving landscape of digital autobiographical practices, emphasizing the significance of interdisciplinary approaches in studying new media phenomena.

Selected Bibliography

1. Adorno, Theodor W. *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*. Routledge, 2011.

2. Alleyne, Brian. *Narrative Networks: Storied Approaches in a Digital Age*. Sage Publications, 2015.

3. Baroni, Raphael. "Tellability:The Living Handbook of Narratology." *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, 4 Aug. 2011, https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/30.html.

4. Billig, Michael. *Banal Nationalism*. Sage Publications. I995.

5. Cho, Richard M. "Becoming an Imagined Record: Archival Intervention in Autofiction." *The American Archivist*, vol. 83, no. 2, 2020, pp. 268–88

6. Chopra, Rohit. *Technology and Nationalism in India: Cultural Negotiations from Colinialism to Cyberspace*. Cambria Press, 2008

7. Coetzee, J. M. Boyhood: *Scenes from Provincial Life*. Vintage, 1998

8. Dijck, Jose Van. *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age*. Stanford University Press, 2007.

9. Dimitrova, Diana, and Thomas de Bruijn. *Imagining Indianness Cultural Identity and Literature.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2017

10. Ederson, Tim. National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life. Bloomsbury Academic, 2016

11. Ensslin, Astrid, and Samya Brata Roy. "Electronic LiteratureS as Postcomparative Media." *CompLit. Journal of European Literature, Arts and Society* 2023 – 1, N° 5. New Critical and Theoretical Approaches in Comparative Literature / Nouvelles Approches Critiques et Théoriques En Littérature Comparée, May 2023, pp. 145–71. classiques-garnier.com, https://doi.org/10.48611/isbn.978-2-406-14861-6.p.0145

12. Fast, Stephanie. "Facebook | Panopticon: An Analysis of Facebook and Its Parallels to the Foucaultian Panopticon." *Honors Theses*, May 2015, https://scholar.utc.edu/honors-theses/48

13. Fuchs, Christian. *Social Media: A Critical Introduction.* Second Edition, Sage Publications, 2017

14. Gandhi, M. K. *An Autobiography or the Story of My Experiments with Truth.* Critical Edition, Penguin Books, 2018

15. Gangar, Amrit. *Migrant Workers Discourse Histories. Humanities. Arts and the Pandemic!* 2020

16. Georgakopoulou, Alex, et al. *Quantified Storytelling: A Narrative Analysis of Metrics in Social Media.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2020

17. Hoskins, Andrew. *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition.* Routledge, 2018.

18. Miller, Daniel. *Tales from Facebook.* Polity, 2011

19. Page, Ruth E. *Stories and Social Media: Identities and Interaction.* Routledge, 2013

20. Poletti, Anna, and Julie Rak, editors. *Identity Technologies: Constructing the Self Online.* The University of Wisconsin Press, 2014

21. Rowsell, Jennifer, and Kate Pahl, editors. *The Routledge Handbook of Literacy Studies.* Routledge, 2015

22. Ryan, Marie-Laure, editor. *Narrative across Media: The Languages of Storytelling.* University of Nebraska Press, 2004

23. Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives.* Second Edition, University of Minnesota Press, 2010

24. Wagner-Egelhaaf, Martina, editor. *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction Volume I:*

Rimi Nandy

18/6/2024

PROFESSOR
Department of English
Jadavpur University
Kolkata-700 032