

**SCRIPTING THE SELF: THE CRAFTING AND  
PERFORMANCE OF THE CELEBRITY PERSONA IN THE  
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS OF INDIAN ACTRESSES  
(1930–2000)**

**Ph.D. Thesis**

By

**MEGHNA GANGADHARAN**



**SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY INDORE  
JUNE 2025**



**SCRIPTING THE SELF: THE CRAFTING AND  
PERFORMANCE OF THE CELEBRITY PERSONA IN THE  
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS OF INDIAN ACTRESSES  
(1930–2000)**

**A THESIS**

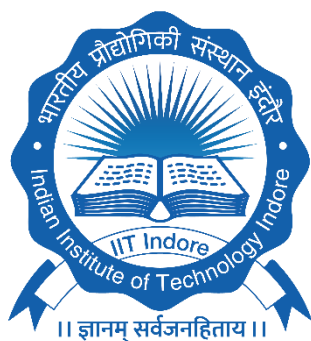
*Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the award of the degree*

*of*

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

*by*

**MEGHNA GANGADHARAN**



**SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY INDORE  
JUNE 2025**





## INDIAN INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY INDORE

I hereby certify that the work which is being presented in the thesis entitled **SCRIPTING THE SELF: THE CRAFTING AND PERFORMANCE OF THE CELEBRITY PERSONA IN THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS OF INDIAN ACTRESSES (1930–2000)** in the partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY** and submitted in the **SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES, Indian Institute of Technology Indore**, is an authentic record of my own work carried out during the time period from January 2020 to February 2025 under the supervision of Dr. Ananya Ghoshal, Assistant Professor, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Indore.

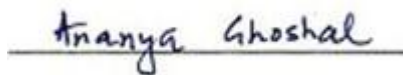
The matter presented in this thesis has not been submitted by me for the award of any other degree of this or any other institute.

 11/06/2025

Signature of the student with date

**MEGHNA GANGADHARAN**

-----  
This is to certify that the above statement made by the candidate is correct to the best of my knowledge.

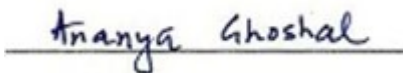


11.06.2025

Signature of Thesis Supervisor with date

**Dr. ANANYA GHOSHAL**

-----  
**MEGHNA GANGADHARAN** has successfully given her Ph.D. Oral Examination held on **9.06.2025**.



11.06.2025

Signature of Thesis Supervisor with date

**Dr. ANANYA GHOSHAL**

-----



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Writing the acknowledgements section of my thesis feels surreal as it marks a significant milestone in my life. As I put my thoughts into words, I realise there is so much that I am thankful for, and I hope my words do justice to my feelings and convey them appropriately.

I am fortunate to have a supportive, understanding, and kind supervisor in Dr. Ananya Ghoshal. There were many days when I lacked conviction and belief in my work, and on those days, my conversations with Dr. Ghoshal reinstated my belief in my ideas and myself. Without her guidance and encouragement, I would not have been able to reach where I am today in my academic Journey. She was instrumental in creating a conducive professional environment in our research group based on the values of kindness, empathy, and teamwork. This helped us support each other in times of need and understand our strengths as researchers. Thank you, ma'am, for choosing me, mentoring me, and helping me realise my dream of becoming a researcher.

I am very thankful for the generous advice and support I received throughout my Ph.D. journey from my PSPC members, Professor Nirmala Menon and Dr. Shomik Dasgupta. I am grateful to Professor Menon for raising poignant and timely questions during each of my CERP seminars, which were instrumental in helping me improve my work. I shall fondly remember her Advanced Literary Theory classes for her innovative approach to teaching and fostering engaging discussions among the students during each class.

I will always count Dr. Shomik Dasgupta among the most genuine, understanding, and supportive teachers I have met. From being in his class as a student to being assigned as one of the teaching assistants and being mentored by him through my doctoral committee, I have had many excellent opportunities to learn from Dr. Dasgupta. I am incredibly grateful to him for being generous with his time whenever I required his insights on my work.

During my Ph.D. I received the excellent opportunity to learn from some of the most diligent and knowledgeable researchers. I am genuinely indebted to Professor Aarti Wani for her commitment to good research and thorough feedback. Thanks to her belief in my work and her sharp and critical comments, I learnt how to structure my articles better. I am grateful to Professor Shobha Shinde for her enthusiasm and willingness to talk about

Hansa Wadkar. I would also like to thank Ms. Madhur Jaffrey and her lovely manager, Ms. Gabrielle Murphy, for promptly responding to my queries. I am sincerely grateful to Dr. Rimika Sanghvi and Professor Erin Meyers for being approachable and prompt in addressing my queries.

I am grateful to the School of Humanities and Social Sciences and affiliated faculty members for always being approachable and encouraging. I sincerely thank Ms. Kalpana, Mr. Amit, and Mr. Atul for their consistent support in crossing all administrative hurdles during my Ph.D.

I am thankful to the University Grants Commission for granting me the Junior Research Fellowship, which supported me financially throughout the past five years. I am grateful to the Academics and Finance departments at IIT Indore for their prompt availability and readiness to address and resolve all queries.

During my Ph.D. studies, I had the privilege of meeting dedicated and professional librarians at IIT Indore and various other institutions. I thank the Learning Resource Centre staff at IIT Indore for ensuring a hassle-free experience in accessing resources. I am indebted to Ms. Saba Sheikh at the National Film Archives of India, Mr. Jason Sanders at the Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive, California, and Mr. Vedant Jatakdar at Prithvi Theatres Archives for their unwavering commitment to helping researchers.

While the past five years were intellectually and emotionally challenging, I was lucky to have had the most wonderful colleagues and friends. I had the privilege of sharing my Ph.D. journey with Manivendra Kumar and Shyam Sundar Pal, my colleagues and friends at the Literature, Performance, and Other Arts Research Group. I am immensely grateful to them for being my sources of academic and emotional support throughout. I am also deeply indebted to Dnyanesh Mirikar, Sayali Suradkar, and Sayali's mother, Mrs. Suradkar, for helping me with the Marathi texts. Without their help, my understanding of some of the primary texts would have been incomplete.

When I look back at my journey, I realise that I owe a lot of who I am today to the wonderful people I have had the privilege of meeting in life. I must first express my heartfelt gratitude to my dance teacher and mentor, Mrs. Anjana Rajan, who inspired me to become a researcher. In addition to her profound knowledge as an artist and journalist, I am most grateful for her



kindness, empathy, and compassion. I consider myself incredibly lucky to have her as my guru in dance and life. I am also thankful to my music teachers, Dr. Aruna Thampy, Ms. Gayathri Prabal, and Ms. Preethi, for expanding the horizons of my knowledge and inculcating in me the importance of critical thinking.

At IIT Indore, I am deeply indebted to the kindness of Dr. Dan Sathiaraj and his lovely family – Viji Ma'am, Johanna, and Josie for being so wonderful, generous, and welcoming. My dearest friends at IIT Indore, Krishnendu, Kaviarasu, Hussain, and Hemapriya were my home away from home all these years, and I cannot thank them enough for being there for me throughout. I am also grateful to Tinto and Tanushree for their kindness, friendship and for teaching me valuable lessons in ethics, professionalism, and pragmatism. I also thank Varsha, Lavvanya, Kanika, Nayan, Anuroop, Avanika, and Manjari, my close friends outside IIT Indore, for always cheering me on and believing in me. I convey my heartfelt gratitude to my friend, Tarun, for going above and beyond to help in times of need.

I am truly blessed to have the most wonderful partner and companion in my husband, Nithin. Throughout my Ph.D. journey, he was an ocean of patience, love, and understanding and stood by me every step of the way. I am also indebted to Nithin for giving me the most wonderful in-laws, Sreeja, Pradeep, and Nived. They were my biggest cheerleaders and strongest pillars of strength throughout this journey. Words cannot do justice to my feelings of gratitude towards them as family members.

Finally, I am immensely grateful to my parents, Gangadhara and Nalini, and my aunt, Padmavathy (*achamma*), to whom I owe everything I am today. My sister, Kirthana, who means the world to me, has been my biggest source of support during this journey. Her kindness and resilience inspire me to do better each day. I am also extremely thankful to Sushi, my pet, who brightens my days by being her goofy self.

Everything I am today and ever will be thanks to each of them.



*“I am not afraid of storms, for I am learning how to sail my ship.”*

—Louisa May Alcott

*Dedicated to my family;*

*My safe harbours, to whom I can always turn.*

# SYNOPSIS

## Introduction

This thesis studies the scripting of celebrity personas in the autobiographical writings of 20th-century Indian actresses by focusing on their identities as professionals. The hypothesis posits that in their autobiographies, 20th-century actresses craft their celebrity personas through self-fashioning, guided by their professional expertise, aimed at impression management<sup>1</sup>. The work proves this hypothesis through close reading and textual analysis of three key texts chosen as representative case studies of the autobiographical writings by professional actresses of this period (1930–2000): *You Ask, I Tell* (2013) by Hansa Wadkar (1923–1971), *Close-Up* (2010) by Zohra Segal (1912–2014), and *Climbing the Mango Trees* (2006) by Madhur Jaffrey (1933 –).

This work emphasises that for public figures who are professionals in performance-oriented fields like cinema, theatre, and television, the objective of autobiographical narration is self-fashioning and not merely confession for its own sake. The primary texts are examined for their autobiographical narrative strategies that respond to the broader understanding of their celebrity authors. The framework for analysis is built using theoretical paradigms of Persona Studies, with major conceptual definitions drawn from the key theorists in Celebrity Studies and Autobiography Studies. This thesis seeks to gain a deeper understanding of celebrity autobiographical writings and the complex intricacies of self-fashioning that they reveal. Given that the expression of celebrity identity is viewed as a performance shaped by specific situations, this work regards celebrity identities as dynamic and susceptible to change, or as Richard Dyer (2004) characterises it, “unstable” (14). The thesis contends that celebrity authorial selves ought to be understood through their personas rather than their public image, as the latter term fails to capture the complexity and dynamism of the celebrity persona adequately. Kim Barbour defines persona as a

“complex, multiple sense of self rather than a reflection of coherent, inner truth” (“Registers of Performance” 4). This knowledge of the term ‘persona’ is drawn from the works of Barbour, “Registers of Performance: Negotiating the Professional, Personal, and Intimate in Online Persona Creation” (2015), and *Women and Persona Performance* (2023) and Marshall et al. (2020), whereas the theory of registers of performance of persona is derived from Barbour (2015).

This research also draws on Guy Debord’s (2005) evaluation of “celebrity,” used synonymously with “star,” and connects it to Richard Dyer’s theories on “celebrity” and “stardom” from *Stars* (1998) and *Heavenly Bodies* (2004). Debord considers celebrities as “spectacular representations of human beings” (61) who are “specialists of apparent life” while serving “as superficial objects that people can identify with” (29). His emphasis on the appearance of a certain kind of life complements Richard Dyer’s definition of stardom as “an image of the way stars live” (Geraghty 98), highlighting the inherent artifice of celebrity self-fashioning. Dyer’s emphasis on “ways of living” also highlights the relevance of biographical information contextualising celebrity lives beyond their professional spaces. Through its analytical framework based on Persona Studies, this work views autobiographical self-fashioning as a method celebrities adopt to assume agency over their personas through authorship to generate appropriate impressions.

In their article “Life Writing and Celebrity: Exploring Intersections” (2019), Sandra Meyer and Julia Novak point out that celebrity life writing is derived from hagiographical writing. Thus, it contributes to the longstanding tradition of writing focused on extraordinary lives (149). Celebrity autobiographical writings, as genres of life writing, are also inherently performative and conducive to acts of reiterations and reinterpretations of the self. Since celebrity identities are intended for public consumption, autobiographical accounts help provide coherence and continuity of celebrity personas. Even in instances where there is a “sheer multiplicity of the [celebrity] images” based on “the amount of hype and the different stories told” (Dyer,

*Heavenly Bodies* 14), autobiographical texts help anchor celebrity personas to specific contexts, facilitating relevant interpretations. Therefore, while analysing celebrity autobiographical writings, it is essential to consider the multiplicity of their identities and related contexts, a concern that is central to this work.

Recognising the cinema actress as a professional is crucial to this research. According to Marshall et al. (2020), “[t]he concept of the professional, as it is deployed in several cultures represents a further sign and designation of some sort of augmented prestige and value that has clear relationships to work and labor [sic]...” (180). As it pertains to this thesis, ‘professional’ is more specifically defined as the individuals working in the field of the arts. However, the association of the label “professional” with artists and actors has been contentious and subjected to many debates over time. The concerns primarily originate from the inconsistent and unregulated nature of work in these fields. To address this, Marshall et al. (2020) rely on the everyday usage of the term ‘professional’ based on its synonymous association with occupation, expert knowledge, or generation of revenue (66). The present work, too, aligns with this idea and considers Hansa Wadkar, Zohra Segal, and Madhur Jaffrey as professionals whose identities as celebrities are influenced and informed by their work, demonstration of expertise, and generation of revenue. Acknowledging them as professionals aid in categorising and evaluating different aspects of their autobiographical writing and tracing the influence of their profession through their registers of performance of persona. This thesis uses this theoretical framework to conduct a more in-depth study of celebrity autobiographical writings.

Autobiographical writing, especially for women, is also very context-driven. Carolyn Heilbrun (1988) mentions four distinct shapes that a woman’s life narrative can take: autobiography, fiction, biography, or more liberal writing that cuts across genres. Heilbrun’s analysis grants considerable autonomy to the author, who ultimately determines the approach taken. One of the major factors that would

inform the approach to the writing or narration of life is the author's context. As Anshu Malhotra and Siobhan Lambert-Hurley highlight in their introduction to *Speaking of the Self* (2015), the context determines how an individual's subjectivity is formed and how they might decide to articulate it. Malhotra and Lambert-Hurley state, ". . . if we look at autobiographical practice as a "self in performance", we begin to appreciate the historical, social, and cultural milieu in which the self was imbricated, and what enabled gendered subjectivity and speech" (1). Connecting Malhotra and Lambert-Hurley's argument to Heilburn's reveals that for South Asian women, the context influences the formation of subjecthood, subsequently impacting their subjectivity. For instance, storytelling and performance traditions considerably influence the narrative progression as cultural components of the author's context, particularly for those involved in the arts. For 20th-century Indian actresses, their profession provided a significant context that shaped their subjectivity. Many actresses, including Wadkar, Segal, and Jaffrey, enjoyed careers spanning several decades. Actresses like Hansa Wadkar, without professional training, began acting at age 10 to support their families during dire financial circumstances. Wadkar's career lasted approximately three decades and witnessed many changes ranging from filmmaking techniques to newer technological advancements like playback sound. In response to this dynamic context, she adapted herself and emerged as Hansa Wadkar, the actress, and assumed the identity she was known for.

In contrast, Zohra Segal hailed from a conservative aristocratic family. Her professional decisions, from formal dance training to pursuing a career in the performing arts, were unprecedented, given her family background. Unlike Wadkar, Segal did not venture into acting to fulfil monetary needs and had a career longer than Wadkar. Segal became an actor via theatre, eventually transitioning into cinema and television. Thus, Segal's subjecthood was formed entirely within the performing arts, beginning at the age of 18 as a dance student in Germany and extending into her 90s in India and the UK, working in cinema, theatre, and television.

Like Segal, Madhur Jaffrey, too, did not venture into a career in acting out of financial necessity. Jaffrey was born into an affluent Delhi family and immigrated to London in her early twenties to study acting. However, while living in the US in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, she ventured into a career in food to support her children and attain financial stability. Later, she found success as a cookery show host and author of cookbooks. Jaffrey's subjecthood was formed through a context influenced by the dual influences of food and experience in the arts. Wadkar, Segal, and Jaffrey's professional aspirations and anxieties to remain rooted in their families are essential facets of being female professionals in the arts during this period. Consequently, their autobiographical writings aptly capture the dynamic context of the transient 20<sup>th</sup> century and serve as critical case studies to understand how women in performing arts thought about and articulated their identities.

Autobiographical writings by actresses form a distinct part of the women's autobiographical writing corpus in India. Binodini Dasi's *My Story* (1912) and *My Life as an Actress* (1923) are among the earliest known autobiographical texts by an Indian actress. Such texts opened a pathway for generations of actresses to contemplate their lives in relation to their professional experiences. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this tradition was further nourished by the contributions of pioneering actresses such as Leela Chitnis' (1912–2003) *Chanderi Duniyet* (1990), Snehaprabha Pradhan's (1920–1993) *Snehankita* (1973), Durga Khote's (1905–1991) *I, Durga Khote* (2006), Leela Naidu's (1940–2009) *Leela: A Patchwork Life* (2010), Anu Aggarwal's (1969–) *Anusual: Memoir of a Girl Who Came Back from the Dead* (2015), Neena Gupta's (1952–) *Sach Kahun Toh* (2021), and Deepti Naval's (1949–) *A Country Called Childhood* (2022). Some of these texts are written in regional languages, such as Marathi, while others are co-authored, featuring the actress narrating her autobiography and the writer(s) documenting it. These works establish the context for this study, situating the three primary texts and allowing for comparisons and parallels in self-



fashioning where relevant to evaluate the impact of their professions on their autobiographical approaches.

The existing scholarship on autobiographical writings by Indian women does not recognise celebrity autobiographical writings as deserving of a separate category and analytical framework. Thus, no assessment of the impact of celebrity authors' profession on strategies of self-fashioning is available. Scholarly works on autobiographical texts by Indian actresses presently read them through theoretical frameworks informed by women's writing and autobiography studies, as in the case of Hansa Wadkar, or postcolonial studies, diaspora studies, or food studies, in the case of Madhur Jaffrey. In comparison, Zohra Segal's autobiographical writings have received little scholarly attention, barring one article by Debashrita Dey and Priyanka Tripathi (2024) and a few book reviews.

Nevertheless, a few specific scholarly works on Indian women's autobiographical writings address the autobiographies of Indian actresses. For instance, Susie Tharu and K. Lalita's *Women Writing in India vol. 1* (1991) and *vol. 2* (1993) include discussions on Binodini Dasi's (1862–1941) *Amar Katha (My Story, 1912)* and *Amar Abhinetri Jiban (My Life as an Actress, 1924)* as well as Hansa Wadkar's *Sangtye Aika* (1970). Likewise, an edited volume on women's autobiographical writing by K. Purushotham titled *Ahead of their Times: Essays on Women Autobiography in India* (2020) includes a discussion on Binodini Dasi and examines the impact of memory, identity, and influence on the autobiographical expression of Indian women. Krati Sharma's *Indian Women Autobiographies: A Study of Gender Identity* (2012) features discussions on gender identity and devotes sections to the autobiographies of actresses Shaukat Kaifi (1926–2019) and Durga Khote. Sharma views them as trailblazers who forged their paths to attain professional success. Although works like these are instrumental in furthering research and academic discourse on autobiographical writings of Indian women, they do not emphasise the autobiographical writings by actresses as a distinct category of texts, leaving readers with an incomplete understanding of such works.

This study addresses this research gap by asserting the distinctness of the autobiographical writings by 20th-century Indian actresses and offering a more robust theoretical framework grounded in Persona Studies. It demonstrates how actresses carve out their autobiographies as tools for self-fashioning and persona construction by thoughtfully curating a public representation of their private lives that is recognisable and relatable to the intended reader/audience. As this research highlights, the actresses assume authorship of their own stories and influence the perceived values of authenticity and truth associated with the autobiographical mode of narration.

### **Research Objectives**

Through a Persona Studies-based theoretical framework, this thesis analyses Wadkar, Segal, and Jaffrey's autobiographical writings as case studies to examine how professional experiences shape the autobiographical strategies of 20th-century Indian actresses. As case studies, these texts contain valuable insights into how female professionals approached self-fashioning and impression management and crafted their celebrity personas accordingly. The primary research objectives of this thesis are developed around the following key questions:

- As artists working across different media formats, how does their professional status impact their strategies of self-fashioning in the 20th century?
- How do Wadkar, Segal, and Jaffrey redefine and reshape our perception of female professionals in artistic fields?
- What are the fundamental mechanics of autobiographical self-fashioning, i.e., what strategies and techniques are employed in crafting the celebrity persona through Wadkar, Segal, and Jaffrey's texts?
- To what extent do their personas in these texts align with or contradict their established public images as celebrities, and

what does this reveal about the broader genre of celebrity autobiographical writings by female professionals?

## **Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

The primary research methodology employed in this work is close textual analysis. Drawing on the works of Marshall et al. through “Persona as Method: Exploring Celebrity and the Public Self through Persona Studies” (2015) and *Persona Studies: An Introduction* (2020), and the works of P. David Marshall (2014), Pramod K Nayar (2009), and Katja Lee (2022), this thesis builds a theoretical framework for analysing the primary texts. Additionally, it derives the understanding of the terms “celebrity” and “star” from the works of Richard Dyer and Guy Debord, “impression management” from Erving Goffman (1956), and that of “television personality” from P. David Marshall (2014). Furthermore, this work draws the understanding of autobiographical self-fashioning and associated concepts from Anshu Malhotra and Siobhan Lambert-Hurley (2015), Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2024), and Sidonie Smith (1998).

A vital component of the theoretical framework is the concept of registers of persona performance. This concept is derived from the “Registers of Performance” theory in Barbour (2015) and Marshall et al. (2020). Analysing registers of persona performance in the techniques of autobiographical self-fashioning in Wadkar, Segal, and Jaffrey enables a precise assessment of how professional expertise shapes actresses’ intent and narrative strategies in curating their autobiographical selves. This research also aims to allay the reductive understanding that celebrity life-writings by Indian actresses are mere confessional narratives focused on revealing the scandalous and unpleasant aspects of their ‘real lives.’ Instead, it argues that the professional experiences of these actresses provide the context within which they effectively form and articulate their subjectivity.

## **Structure of the Thesis**

## **Introduction:**

**The introduction** traces the continuing tradition of autobiographical writing by Indian actresses, highlighting its key features and contextualising the three primary texts. It includes a detailed literature review that explores the theoretical foundations for understanding the intricate relationship between gender, work, and the act of autobiographical narration, highlighting the critical research gaps in existing studies on celebrity autobiographical writings. It concludes by proposing a theoretical framework grounded in Persona Studies to address the research gap and further the study of celebrity autobiographical writings.

## **Chapter One: Towards a Persona Studies-based reading of Celebrity Autobiographical Writings**

**Chapter One** develops the theoretical framework for studying the autobiographical writings of 20th-century Indian actresses. Starting with an analogy based on Richard Dyer's analysis of Joan Crawford's photograph by Eve Arnold, it highlights the plural and dynamic nature of celebrity identities and the necessity for adopting a more nuanced framework for studying these texts. It articulates the significance of the artifice of self-fashioning for celebrities and how it is a central function of celebrity autobiographical writings. The chapter outlines the fundamental concepts of "spectacle" (Guy Debord 29), the ideological function and understanding of stars as characters (Dyer, *Stars* 20–34; 89–159), and "registers of persona performance" (Barbour, "Registers of Performance" 57) and elaborates on the idea of the performance of the self through the autobiographical mode by celebrities. This chapter also explores the dynamic meaning of the female celebrity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century through an overview of autobiographical writings by contemporaries of Wadkar, Segal, and Jaffrey, highlighting the centrality of their professional expertise in articulating their selves. The chapter concludes with an emphasis that the writings of celebrities cannot be adequately analysed solely through the theoretical frameworks of autobiography

studies; a Persona Studies-oriented approach is also essential for understanding these texts.

## **Chapter Two: Hansa Wadkar's *You Ask, I Tell* (2013)**

**Chapter Two** studies Hansa Wadkar's translated autobiography *You Ask, I Tell* (2013), analysing Wadkar's interpretation of the meaning of the female celebrity/film star during the studio era of Marathi Cinema (the 1930s to 1950s). Her autobiography explores the binary between her professional success and turbulent personal life, offering a compelling take on the complexities faced by women in the Indian film industries, especially during the early to mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. She writes with an awareness of her public image and crafts her autobiographical persona with select details from her personal life, interspersing them with anecdotes from her professional life. Her autobiography displays distinct characteristics, including the oral narration of the text, her narrative tone, and cinematic quality peppered with dialogue and song lyrics. These characteristics highlight her expertise as a professional actress.

As one of the earliest examples of autobiographies of women actors that provide significant details on the professional demands of being an actor, the text articulates the liminal identity of a female professional in the film industry. Thus, this chapter explores Wadkar's autobiographical strategies through the theory of registers of persona performance to gauge her response to her existing public perception. Lastly, the chapter underlines the significance of Wadkar's text as a means for her to continuously reinterpret her celebrity persona as a professional actress through the thoughtful selection of anecdotes from her personal life to present a "public construction of the private" (*Persona Studies* 33).

## **Chapter Three: Zohra Segal's *Close-Up* (2010)**

**Chapter Three** analyses Zohra Segal's memoir *Close-Up*. Zohra Segal was a multifaceted artist whose long career spanned nearly eight decades. Her autobiographical narrative recounts her memories from her personal life and instances of professional success in the

domains of Indian dance, theatre, and cinema. Despite hailing from a traditionalist household, she chose to study Eurythmics in Germany and spent several years working with celebrated Indian dancer Uday Shankar's troupe as a dancer. Her collaboration with IPTA (Indian People's Theatre Association) and Prithvi Theatre led her to pivot into acting professionally. She wrote her memoir, *Close-Up*, a revised autobiographical account of her life following her co-authored autobiography, *Stages* (1997). *Close-Up* presents a unique, multifaceted narrative approach, reflecting her proficiency as an actress across different media formats.

In studying Segal primarily as a theatre actor, this chapter draws on the narrative characteristics central to Segal's work and examines their influence on her narrative style. The chapter argues that Segal's rhetorical approach questions the conventional narrative format of memoirs. It features a fragmented structure, with a prologue crafted like a dramatic monologue and chapters consisting of diary entries and letters as narrative constituents. The chapter highlights that her rhetorical narrative approach, guided by spectacle, melodrama, theatrical elements, and a specific combination of the registers of persona performance, reveals the influence of her professional experience as an actress. Additionally, it derives Segal's diachronic interpretation of the meaning of a female artist who began as an 'outsider' and later emerged as a celebrated figure in dance, theatre, and cinema, as presented through her memoir.

#### **Chapter Four: Madhur Jaffrey's *Climbing the Mango Trees* (2006)**

**Chapter Four** delves into Madhur Jaffrey's *Climbing the Mango Trees* (2006), a memoir deeply rooted in taste memories. Madhur Jaffrey (1933–) is a trained actress, renowned cook, and television personality born into an upper-class family in Delhi. Jaffrey is noted for her pivotal role in James Ivory's *Shakespeare Wallah* (1965) and prefers to be recognised as “an actress who can cook”. She credits her success as a professional expert in Indian cuisine to her trusted taste memories, which developed through her exposure to various cultural and culinary

practices at home. Her memoir, *Climbing the Mango Trees* (2006), chronicles her childhood years in Delhi and informs her readers of her initial exposure to food and the diverse flavours that constitute Indian cuisine — the deliberate choice of taste memories as the narrative thread is designed to highlight Jaffrey's professional status. As a seasoned television personality, her memoir and cookbooks are narrated with a direct and familiar approach conventionally followed by such professionals. The narrative structure and strategy employed in these texts are designed to ensure consistency in interpreting her identity as an expert in Indian cuisine.

By interpreting Madhur Jaffrey as a television personality, this chapter highlights the affinity of its narrative approach to the conventions of television shows. Through its evaluation of Jaffrey's registers of persona performance, the chapter posits that her direct address, desire to create familiarity, and the narrative thread guided by taste memories and pursuit of authenticity are intentionally rendered to project her expertise in Indian cuisine, thus validating her celebrity persona. The chapter illustrates that her narrative approach demands the reader to interpret her as a person whose identity was shaped by food and the experiences related to its consumption – which aligns with the typical narrative arc of someone recognised for her expertise in Indian cuisine.

## **Conclusion**

**The conclusion** features a brief overview of the chapters, a review of the research objectives, and an explanation of how each key objective was addressed through the chapters. It delineates the outcomes of the textual analysis of the primary texts, demonstrating the role of the celebrity authors' professional expertise in their autobiographical narrative strategies. The conclusion also reflects on the insights gained through the study. It suggests additional directions for applying the key findings to highlight the framework's relevance for analysing more contemporary celebrity autobiographical performances on digital platforms.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Impression Management is one of the primary theses given by Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). Goffman uses this term to denote how “individuals constantly ‘give’ and ‘give off’ or exude expressions that impress others present” (Smith 42).

## References:

- Barbour, Kim. ‘Registers of Performance: Negotiating the Professional, Personal and Intimate in Online Persona Creation.’ *Media, Margins and Popular Culture*, edited by Einar Thorsen, Heather Savigny, Jenny Alexander and Daniel Jackson, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp. 57–69.
- *Women and Persona Performance*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2023.
- Debord, Guy. *Society of the Spectacle*. Translated by Ken Knabb, Rebel Press, 2005.
- Dyer, Richard. *Stars*. BFI Publishing, 1998.
- *Heavenly Bodies*. Routledge, 2004.
- Geraghty, Christine. ‘Re-examining Stardom: Questions of Texts, Bodies and Performance.’ *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader*, edited by Sean Redmond and Su Holmes, Sage Publications, 2007, pp. 98–110.
- Goffman, Ervin. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Centre, 1956.
- Heilbrun, Carolyn G. *Writing a Woman’s Life*. Ballantine Books, 1988.
- Jaffrey, Madhur. *Climbing the Mango Trees: A Memoir of a Childhood in India*. London, Ebury Press, 2006.
- Jain, Jasbir, and Shobha Shinde, editors and translators. *You Ask, I Tell: An Autobiography*. By Hansa Wadkar, Zubaan, 2013.
- Malhotra, Anshu, and Siobhan Lambert-Hurley, editors. *Speaking of the Self: Gender, Performance, and Autobiography in South Asia*. Duke University Press, 2015.



- Marshal, P. David, Christopher Moore and Kim Barbour, editors. *Persona Studies: An Introduction*. Wiley Blackwell, 2020.
- Meyer, Sandra, and Julia Novak. "Life Writing and Celebrity: Exploring Intersection". *Life Writing*, vol. 16, no. 2, pp. 149–155. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14484528.2019.1539208>.
- Segal, Zohra. *Close-Up: Memories of a Life on Stage & Screen*. Kali for Women, 2010.
- Smith, Greg. *Erving Goffman*. Routledge, 2006.
- Smith, Sidonie and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography Now*. University of Minnesota Press, 2024.

# LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

## Published Papers

1. Gangadharan, Meghna, and Ananya Ghoshal. "Hansa Wadkar's Sangtye Aika: An Autobiography?". *IIS University Journal of Arts*, vol. 13, no. 4, 2024, pp. 87–101.  
<https://iisjoa.org/sites/default/files/iisjoa/October%202024/8th%20Paper.pdf>
2. Gangadharan, Meghna, and Ananya Ghoshal. "Conformity and Subversion: Autobiographical Strategies of Marathi Film Actresses in Shaping Their Celebrity Personas (1930s–50s)". *Marathi Film and Media*, special issue of *Studies in South Asian Film & Media*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2025, pp. 189–206.  
[https://doi.org/10.1386/safm\\_00089\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/safm_00089_1).
3. Gangadharan, Meghna, and Ananya Ghoshal. "The Memoir and the Mediated Self: The Crafting and Performance of Madhur Jaffrey's Persona in *Climbing the Mango Trees* (2006)". *Celebrity Studies*. [Accepted on May 21, 2025]

## Papers Under Review

1. Gangadharan, Meghna, and Ananya Ghoshal. "Life as Theatre: A Critical Appraisal of Zohra Segal's *Close-Up* (2010)". *IUP Journal of English Studies*. [Submitted on January 3, 2025]

## Conference Proceedings

1. Gangadharan, Meghna, and Ananya Ghoshal. "From Text to Screen: The Writing and Re-writing of Hansa Wadkar's (1923–1971) Life Story". *The IAFOR International Conference on Arts & Humanities – Hawaii 2024 Official Conference Proceedings*, 2024, pp. 187–196.  
<https://doi.org/10.22492/issn.2432-4604.2024.17>

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Research Objectives.....	15
Methodology and Theoretical Framework.....	16
Endnotes.....	25
<b>CHAPTER 1: Towards a Persona Studies-based reading of Celebrity Autobiographical Writings .....</b>	<b>26</b>
1.1 Introduction.....	26
2.2 Overview of Key Concepts.....	29
2.3 Exploring Celebrity Persona through Autobiographical Writings.....	32
2.4. Reading Celebrity Autobiographical Writings through Persona Studies-oriented Framework .....	37
2.5 Limitations .....	40
2.6 Conclusion .....	41
<b>CHAPTER 2: Hansa Wadkar's <i>You Ask, I Tell</i> (2013).....</b>	<b>44</b>
2.1 Introduction.....	44
2.2 Return to the Limelight: Hansa Wadkar and <i>Sangtye Aika</i> ...	50
2.3 Autobiography as a Site of Performance for Hansa Wadkar .	52
2.4 Scripting 'Hansa Wadkar': Looking at Autobiographical Strategies.....	63
2.5 A Cinematic Narrative: Looking at Wadkar's autobiographical strategies .....	69
2.6 Rescripting Hansa Wadkar: Shyam Benegal's <i>Bhumika: The     Role</i> (1977).....	78
2.7 Conclusion .....	84
<b>CHAPTER 3: Zohra Segal's <i>Close-Up</i> (2010).....</b>	<b>91</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	91
3.2 The Dramatis Personae of Zohra Segal .....	95
3.3 <i>Close-Up</i> : A Theatrical Narrative of an Actor's Life .....	98
3.4 Rehearsing and Perfecting the Performance of Zohra Segal	112
3.5 Conclusion .....	120
<b>CHAPTER 4: Madhur Jaffrey's <i>Climbing the Mango Trees</i> (2006) .....</b>	<b>124</b>
4.1 Introduction.....	124

4.2 Nourishing an Evolving Tradition: Contextualising Jaffrey's Work .....	127
4.3. Madhur Jaffrey: The Woman Who Taught the West How to Cook Indian Food .....	131
4.4. Scripting the expert: Jaffrey's autobiographical narrative strategies .....	137
4.5. Embodying the 20 <sup>th</sup> -century Immigrant Woman: Navigating Authentic Cuisine in a Liminal Kitchen .....	149
4.6. Conclusion .....	157
<b>CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>160</b>
5.1 Summary of chapter-wise findings .....	161
5.2. Addressing Research Questions.....	169
<b>APPENDIX – A .....</b>	<b>174</b>
Interview with Ms. Kiran Segal .....	174
<b>APPENDIX - B.....</b>	<b>182</b>
Interview with Ms. Madhur Jaffrey .....	182
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>185</b>
Primary Sources .....	185
Secondary Sources .....	185

## Introduction

*There are four ways to write a woman's life: the woman herself may tell it, in what she chooses to call an autobiography; she may tell it in what she chooses to call fiction; a biographer, man or woman, may write the woman's life in what is called a biography; or the woman may write her own life in advance of living it, unconsciously and without recognizing or naming the process.*

Carolyn G. Heilbrun, *Writing a Woman's Life* (1988; p. 11)

In *Writing a Woman's Life* (1988), Carolyn Heilbrun elaborates on the distinct shapes a woman's life narrative can take. She lists four options, ranging from autobiography to fiction to biography or more liberal writing that does not necessarily fall within a genre. What is fascinating about Heilbrun's delineation of the four ways is that she assigns significant autonomy to the author, who ultimately decides upon an approach. But what are the factors that influence these decisions? One of the significant factors that would inform the approach to the writing or narration of life is the context. As Anshu Malhotra and Siobhan Lambert-Hurley highlight in their introduction to *Speaking of the Self* (2015), the context determines how a person's subjectivity is formed and how they might decide to articulate it. Specifically, in the case of women from South Asia, the context enormously influences how their subjectivity is formed and articulated. Malhotra and Lambert-Hurley state, “. . . if we look at autobiographical practice as a “self in performance”, we begin to appreciate the historical, social, and cultural milieu in which the self was imbricated, and what enabled gendered subjectivity and speech” (1).

Connecting Malhotra and Lambert-Hurley's argument to Heilbrun's, it becomes evident that the formation of subjecthood enormously impacts how the narrative is articulated and the form it

adopts. This thesis studies the autobiographical writings of Indian actresses from the 20th century in three texts: *You Ask, I Tell* (2013) by Hansa Wadkar (1923–1971), *Close-Up* (2010) by Zohra Segal and *Climbing the Mango Trees* (2006), by Madhur Jaffrey (1933–). Wadkar, Segal, and Jaffrey’s subjecthood was formed through their professional context in the performing arts, and this thesis is devoted to analysing the influence of their professional expertise on their autobiographical strategies of self-fashioning.

The primary questions this thesis will engage with are focused on fostering an understanding of the actresses as female professionals in an artistic field. By looking into the mechanics or strategies of autobiographical narration, the thesis evaluates the extent to which the actresses rely on their professional expertise to craft their autobiographical narrative and celebrity persona. The authors of the selected autobiographical narratives negotiated their subjectivity within their professional space in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, studying their autobiographical strategies helps understand the intent with which they indulged in crafting and performing their personas. To understand the intent, the study of their registers of persona performance is helpful as it will uncover the strategic approach to persona performance and their readers’ expectations about the reception of this narrative.

At this juncture, it is pertinent to take an overview of what it meant to be an actress, a professional in 20<sup>th</sup>-century India. Acting was not necessarily deemed a “career”, especially for women who worked in the domain in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This was also not exclusive to India and women working in the performing arts. However, as Marshall et al. (2020) suggest, labelling the actresses as professionals was difficult. They argue that, “[t]he concept of the professional, as it is deployed in a number of cultures represents a further sign and designation of some sort of augmented prestige and value that has clear relationships to work and labor [sic] . . . ” (180). Connections with work and labour notwithstanding, associating this term with individuals in creative and artistic fields like theatre, cinema, or television is often debated, owing

to the inconsistent and unregulated nature of work across these domains. Additionally, there was also the component of the stigma attached to female performers in theatre and later cinema, which meant that women who entered the domain would do so under complex and trying circumstances. Reflecting on the status of the social status of the actress through the autobiographical accounts of Marathi film actresses, Meera Kosambi (2015) mentions,

...being an actress in these cases tends to be defined simply as being a working woman with a specific type of work (not even necessarily a career) which involved a social stigma and greater uncertainty than a regular permanent employment (which young, lower-middle-class women had just begun to enter under financial strain). The narratives shed light on the life conditions of the actresses and society's response to them (which were partly dependent on their original social background) and the working of the film industry. (350)

Therefore, venturing into cinema was not an easy choice for women. For the same reason, we can note the extraordinary emphasis by the film actresses from this period on their identities as ordinary, family-centric women rather than as celebrities living extraordinary lives framed by glamour and fame. Neepa Majumdar (2009) highlights the significance of nationalist ideals, which were enshrined in the core of understanding womanhood, permeating into the frameworks defining stardom in India. She says,

The result, of course, was a somewhat predictable realignment of star virtue with normative Hindu womanhood...Some of the clichés regarding this period include the social taboo on acting (for both men and women); the recruitment first of prostitutes and then of Anglo-Indians for female roles in silent cinema, and only later the gradual participation of “respectable” Hindu and Muslim women; and the moral taint of cinema as an institution. Most such accounts of early Indian stars make little or no distinction between stars and actors, or between stardom and popularity. (6)

Thus, engagement in the performing arts was far from being an acceptable career. Based on the work of Kosambi and Majumdar, it can be inferred that actresses, in most cases, did not pursue their careers out of passion. Acting was just another kind of work, a means to an end, usually financial. Then, is it possible to understand actresses as professionals?

If we look at the criteria that define the term “professional” further, we will come across some more key variables, such as its synonymous association with occupation, expert knowledge, or generation of revenue (*Persona Studies* 66). All these variables apply to actresses from the 20th century, as most of them had substantially long engagements with cinema, their primary occupation. This occupation brought them money, fame, and celebrity status, and the length of their engagement with cinema granted them expert knowledge. The discussions presented in this thesis will cover these attributes in greater detail. Therefore, in this work, the term “professional” refers to Indian actresses from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and based on the same parameters, the authors of the primary texts, Hansa Wadkar, Zohra Segal, and Madhur Jaffrey, are also understood as professionals and experts in their domain.

One of the earliest texts to illuminate what it meant to be an actress in a professional capacity is Binodini Dasi’s (1862-1941) *Amar Abhinetri Jiban* (1924), published serially in the magazine *Roop O Rang*<sup>1</sup>. Although Binodini Dasi is not conventionally considered a “professional” in the sense that the term is broadly understood today, it has been documented that she earned money for performing in plays (Bhattacharya, 1998, p. 3), which, in the context of the present work, aligns with the idea of being a professional in an artistic or creative domain. As a seminal text that contains valuable insights on autobiographical self-fashioning by a professional actress, Binodini Dasi’s autobiography paved the way for the succeeding generations of female professionals in theatre and cinema to write and publish about their lives in their own voices. Published over forty years after Binodini Dasi’s *Amar Abhinetri Jiban*, Hansa Wadkar’s *Sangtye Aika* is counted



among the 20<sup>th</sup> century's earliest published celebrity autobiographical accounts. Although the initiative was not originally hers, it was presented in her voice as she narrated it in 1960 and then again in 1970.

Unbeknownst to Wadkar, she was among the early pioneers of an autobiographical tradition later enriched by some of her contemporaries and close successors in the Marathi and other film industries. Important autobiographical texts from the Marathi film industry that followed Wadkar's include those by Leela Chitnis (1912–2003), Snehaprabha Pradhan (1920–1993) and Durga Khote (1905–1991). Leela Chitnis's *Chanderi Duniyet* (1990) spans four decades and details her journey as a successful actress with a tumultuous personal life. Snehaprabha Pradhan's autobiography, *Snehankita* (1973), refers to her reluctant entry into cinema and analyses the complexities of relationships and social challenges single women face. Durga Khote's *I, Durga Khote* (2006), deftly weaves in her experiences as an actress-turned-producer-turned-documentary filmmaker with glimpses into her life as a family-oriented individual. Following Durga Khote's book, several noted actresses across the country came forward with their autobiographical accounts. Leela Naidu's (1940–2009) *Leela: A Patchwork Life* (2010), Anu Aggarwal's (1969–) *Anusual: Memoir of a Girl Who Came Back from the Dead* (2015), Neena Gupta's (1949–) *Sach Kahun Toh* (2021), and Deepti Naval's (1952–) *A Country Called Childhood* (2022) are some of the prominent works by actresses who found success and recognition in the 20th century.

The autobiographical accounts of all these actresses reflect an awareness of the public nature of their work and an anxiety to appear as women of their time. They are committed to asserting their abilities as professionals, but not to the extent of distancing themselves from the accepted ideals of womanhood, which they were representing in their films/plays/and television programmes. While these autobiographical texts provided helpful information and context for rooting the present work, the choice to proceed with Wadkar, Segal, and Jaffrey's texts as representative texts and case studies was deliberate. A primary reason

was that, despite having had successful careers, some works like Leela Naidu's and one of Zohra Segal's early memoirs, *Stages* (1997), were co-authored. Hansa Wadkar's autobiography was also a collaborative work, but the document containing the details of the text's drafting process asserts that there was no editorial or authorial intervention by *Manoos* (1961–1991) (Majgaokar 41). Secondly, some of these texts were originally published in languages like Marathi and do not yet have authorised translations. Thus, to ensure that the analysis presented in the study does not miss the nuances of autobiographical expression, it was decided to choose texts that are either originally written in English or have an authorised English translation.

Wadkar's text brings to light the challenges of working professionally as an actress during a time that witnessed significant changes in the film industry. By the time she started working, filmmaking had progressed from silent films to talkies. A critical transformation that redefined cinema at this stage was the arrival of playback sound. Wadkar's subjectivity as an actress and a female cinema professional was defined in this milieu, and the autobiography succinctly conveys the challenges and victories she experienced along her journey. On the other hand, Zohra Segal made bold strides by starting professionally as a dancer, finding success as a dance director, and eventually emerging as an actor. She also transitioned from theatre to cinema to television during her career. Madhur Jaffrey, too, began her career as an actor with strong foundations acquired through her rigorous training at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art (RADA). Her dislike of the available food options in London prompted her to learn cookery. Many years later, during a time of financial hardships and a dearth of acting opportunities, her culinary skills enabled her to chart a new path, first as a cookbook writer and then as a successful cookery show host. Through their professional journeys, these three women emerge as ideal candidates whose lives encapsulate the spirit of the socio-culturally and technologically dynamic 20th century. Furthermore, their autobiographical texts continue to garner critical, artistic, and scholarly

attention, underscoring the importance of ongoing scholarly engagement.

To reiterate the primary hypothesis, the profession of 20th-century Indian actresses influences the articulation, creation, and performance of the persona, as reflected through their autobiographical writings. The current selection of autobiographical narratives by Hansa Wadkar, Zohra Segal, and Madhur Jaffrey was carefully chosen to prove this hypothesis. As 20th-century Indian actresses who began working in their respective domains of the performing arts at an early age or had long and extensive careers, their subjectivity was formed within their profession. This choice reflects the researcher's argument that the performers' professional expertise informs the narrative strategies. In other words, Wadkar's expertise in cinema, Segal's extensive experience in theatre, and Jaffrey's successful television career are vital to understanding their narrative approach and self-fashioning as presented through their autobiographical texts. The choice to put these three works together is guided by the idea that the hypothesis applies equally to all such works by professional actresses from this decade, and to prove it, autobiographical texts with mutually distinct narratives by professional actresses with varied experiences were chosen.

Furthermore, these works are central to the tradition of autobiographical writings by Indian actresses. As a tradition of writing, the autobiographical accounts of actresses are not considered a distinct category of work, but a part of autobiographical writings produced by Indian women. Therefore, the existing discourse on the autobiographical writings of Indian actresses is broadly based on analyses done through theoretical frameworks like autobiography studies, in the case of Hansa Wadkar, or postcolonial studies, in the case of Madhur Jaffrey. Certain early autobiographical writings by actresses like Binodini Dasi (1862–1941) and Hansa Wadkar were included in anthological works like Susie Tharu and K. Lalita's *Women Writing in India vol. 1* (1991) *vol. 2* (1993). However, these texts were only a part of the larger discussion on women's writing in India. Amidst more recent edited volumes on

women's autobiographical writing, K. Purushotham's *Ahead of their Times: Essays on Women Autobiography in India* (2020) includes a discussion on Binodini Dasi and examines the impact of memory, identity, and influence on the autobiographical expression of Indian women. Krati Sharma's *Indian Women Autobiographies: A Study of Gender Identity* (2012) features discussions on gender identity and devotes sections to the autobiographies of actresses Shaukat Kaifi (1926–2019) and Durga Khote. Sharma views them as trailblazers who forged their paths and attained professional success.

Scholarly works like Neepa Majumdar's *Wanted Cultural Ladies Only!* (2009) contextualise and discuss the phenomenon of female stardom in India between the 1930s and the 1950s. This book engages with the key discourses that shaped stardom in India during this period by highlighting the influence of Hollywood's celebrity culture, Indian nationalist ideals, and the variables of class and morality. In addition to highlighting the external machinery that created and shaped the discourse of stardom in India, Majumdar also refers to the influence of the actresses' own accounts of their lives on determining their public image and resultant class status. Additionally, she highlights how such texts influenced their on-screen roles as studios were increasingly predisposed to seek actresses based on their social status. Despite that, as Majumdar's work indicates, for actresses, professional association with cinema was a moral grey area, except for individuals like Devika Rani (1908–1994) and Durga Khote (1905–1991), whom the author counts among exceptions owing to their aristocratic backgrounds. She adds that because of the social backgrounds of Rani and Khote, their association with cinema was interpreted as their effort to elevate the status of the profession by making it respectable.

Majumdar's work is important also because it addresses the significant role of autobiographical and biographical information in constructing the star persona. She cautions the readers against expectations of outpourings of feelings in autobiographies by highlighting that fundamentally, autobiographies are texts that construct

the private sphere of the actresses' lives, in a narrative format, for public consumption. In other words, she emphasises the constructed nature of such narratives by arguing that "indirections and reticence are endemic to the practice of biographical discourse in India" and that the accounts of the private aspects of lives are marked by ". . . "conventions of self-effacement" or "selective silence" . . ." (Majumdar 44). Such arguments help contextualise the practice of autobiographical writing by Indian actresses and underscore the importance of intent in the articulation of their selves and the crafting of their celebrity personas.

Debashree Mukherjee's essay, "Creating Cinema's Reading Publics" (2013), traces the emergence of film journalism in Bombay. It discusses how, as a practice, film journalism was instrumental in determining how narratives were built around the industry and its professionals. Mukherjee highlights that the respectability discourse, as it took shape through journalistic practices, played a vital role in determining the public opinion and perception of cinema. Her work, along with that of Majumdar, Sarah Niazi, and Hrishikesh Ingle (2017), is extremely vital to understanding how this discourse particularly impacted female professionals like actresses. One of the main approaches taken by industry professionals and associated media practitioners was to emphasise the social and educational background of the actresses to convince the audience of the industry's commitment to recruiting individuals from "respectable" backgrounds, and autobiographical accounts were useful in propagating such narratives.

However, as autobiographical writings by artists whose profession subjected them to immense public scrutiny, these writings are more layered and complex as texts, particularly in how these actresses present themselves. Guy Debord (2005) describes celebrities as specialists of "apparent life", referring to their high public visibility, which ultimately contributes to higher public scrutiny. Actresses, in particular, can be understood as celebrities or stars who, as Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer (1947) mention, "epitomi[s]e the potential of everyone" in society (Marshall *Celebrity and Power* 9). Thus, their

approach to self-fashioning in their autobiographies is distinct and done with specific intention and a total awareness of their readers, who admire or identify with the celebrities in one way or another. In other words, unlike every other autobiographical narrative, the autobiographical writings of celebrities are composed with an awareness that they will be read, at least by a specific kind of readership that is familiar with the body of work produced by these actresses and has a sense of their public image. This awareness is visible in the autobiographical accounts published by actresses in film magazines like *Filmindia* (1935–1985) and *Filmland* (1930s–). Neepa Majumdar refers to an article by actress Sulochana (1907–1983), published in *Filmland* in 1934, and highlights how the article was publicised as one that would feature information on the private aspects of the actress’s life to lure readers. However, in reality, it did not fulfil what it claimed. This was merely a publicity strategy employed by the magazine, and it indicates how auto/biographical narratives of celebrities guarantee to bring in a certain amount of readership to the magazines/publishers. Examples of autobiographical writings of actresses published in magazines include Hansa Wadkar’s *Sangtye Aika* (1966) and Snehaprabha Pradhan’s *Snehankita* (1973), both of which were published in the Marathi weekly, *Manoos*.

These works are significant for this thesis to contextualise the overall workings of the industry of which the authors of the primary texts were a part. Furthermore, these works facilitate an understanding of what it meant to be an actress in the cinema companies of Bombay in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and the pressure points they sought to address or engage with while authoring their autobiographical accounts. As Majumdar, Mukherjee, Ingle, and Niazi’s works indicate, the respectability discourse was a vital stream within which the actresses had to articulate their subjectivity to legitimise their social status and status as professionals. However, Snehaprabha Pradhan’s (1941) articles published in *Filmindia* highlight how the double standards of the industry considered even educated actresses as “mere actresses”

(Pradhan 39–41) who were not of adequate social status. This was despite the consistent push by the studios and the media houses to populate the domain with women from “respectable” backgrounds. Thus, while the actresses had to be from socially respectable classes and portray idealised versions of womanhood that drew on nationalist ideals, their profession did not provide them with any assurance of similar social standing in real life. To navigate such complex media discourses, it was important for them to assert themselves through their autobiographical writings.

The existing scholarly works on Wadkar, Segal, and Jaffrey contain discussions and analyses from various perspectives. Aarti Wani’s article, “The Tamasha Film: Gender, Performance and Melodramatic Form”, published in *A Companion to Indian Cinema* (2022), examines the centrality of the *Tamasha*<sup>2</sup> film as a genre in the context of the development of the Marathi cultural identity. Her chapter discusses the role of the *tamasgirin*<sup>3</sup> characters in negotiating the forces of modernity and regional cultural identity. Through a brief discussion of selected tamasha films and their *tamasgirin* characters, Wani mentions Hansa Wadkar’s contributions towards Marathi cinema. In the chapter, she also refers to Wadkar’s autobiography and her having descended from hereditary performers, which made her social status different from her peers. Wani also refers to Wadkar’s initial apprehensions about accepting *Tamasha* films, which stemmed from the fear of being typecast in such roles and consequently likened to such women. Even though Wadkar overcame her apprehensions, her fears are indicative of the oppressive nature of the respectability practices adopted by the studios at the time. As the focus of the chapter is on the centrality of the *Tamasha* film as a genre in the context of the development of the Marathi cultural identity, it does not deviate into a discussion on Hansa Wadkar or the formation of her persona as a celebrity or her autobiographical strategies in the crafting of her persona.

Another vital text is Meera Kosambi’s *Gender, Culture and Performance: Marathi Theatre and Cinema before Independence*

(2015), which dedicates a chapter to the reconstruction of the lives of prominent actresses of Marathi cinema during its studio era. Kosambi provides detailed biographies of leading actresses from Kamalabai Gokhale (1900–1998) to Snehaprabha Pradhan (1920–1993), following a chronological order by birth year. This chapter also includes a detailed section on Hansa Wadkar. While Kosambi presents critical observations on the authorship of the autobiographies and the public perception of Marathi actresses, she does not engage in any discussion on the creation of the actresses' personas or examine the link between their public images and autobiographical self-representations. Kosambi uses autobiographies, when available, to help her readers develop a broader understanding of the status of the actress within the wider socio-cultural matrix of 1930s–1950s India.

The introductory essays published in both Wadkar and Durga Khote's autobiographies provide instrumental insights into narrating the self in an autobiographical format. Delving into the questions of the performative nature of autobiographical narration, self-fashioning, and the nature of the autobiographical form itself, these essays also reflect on the understanding of Hansa Wadkar as a celebrity and individual, as can be derived from the autobiography. Gayatri Chatterjee, in her introductory essay to Durga Khote's autobiography, refers to Hansa Wadkar's autobiography, appreciating her boldness and candour in the way she shares her struggles with alcoholism and experiences of physical and mental abuse. Jasbir Jain, in her introduction to *You Ask, I Tell*, comments on the fragmentariness of the self that comes out through Wadkar's autobiography and the difficulty in fitting this text within the contours of autobiographical writing. However, through a contextualisation of Wadkar's autobiography against the rich and diverse tradition of women's autobiographical writing in India, Jain develops a methodology to assess the nuances of Wadkar's narrative.

These essays emphasise the crafting of the autobiographical self and present an analysis of the authors as women of their time engaged in a specific profession. Chatterjee and Jain's essays do not attempt to



analyse Wadkar as a celebrity nor to situate these texts with the media and publicity discourses on Wadkar to reflect on the crafting of her persona and its performance through the autobiography.

A recent study titled ““Abhi Toh Main Jawan Hoon” (For I am forever young): Reflections on the agentic cinematic presence of Zohra Sehgal in British Indian films” (2024) discusses Zohra Segal’s contributions in giving voice to the older female members of the Indian diaspora. This research is guided by the theoretical frameworks relevant to the study of ageing and analyses Segal’s on-screen characters for their portrayal of autonomy and desire. However, it does not analyse Segal’s persona as a celebrity, nor reads the performance of her persona through her memoir. The book review of Zohra Segal’s *Stages* by L. Chatterji (1999) views the narrative of this co-authored autobiography as a text that celebrates Segal’s adventurous spirit and resilience by highlighting the challenges she faced while embarking on a career that went against the expectations of her family and society. The review also appreciates Segal’s candour in accepting her flaws and appreciates the co-author for contributing to a ‘truthful’ portrayal of Segal. The review also does not consider the text as an articulation and performance of Segal’s persona as a celebrity, nor does it reflect on how the narrative’s insistence on a consistent interpretation of her identity as an eccentric and lively individual, even at an advanced age. Mrinal Pande’s (2010) review of *Close-Up* again portrays Segal as a trailblazer with a distinct presence on the stage and screen. It appreciates Segal’s rewriting of the traditional representations of femininity on screen and the light-hearted and humorous nature of the text’s narrative. Additionally, Pande remarks on Segal’s iconic status and views her as a representative of the era of great theatre actors from India. These works constitute the current academic discourse on Zohra Segal and her autobiographical writings, and as can be deduced from the overview above, these works do not view her autobiographical text as a site that communicates her mediated self and neither do these works reflect on the influence of her professional engagement with theatre on the overall narrative of her memoir.

Corinne Bigot refers to Madhur Jaffrey's memoir, *Climbing the Mango Trees*, in her 2019 article titled "Diasporic Culinary Trajectories: Mapping Food Zones and Food Routes in first-generation South Asian and Caribbean Culinary Memoirs" and comments on how Jaffrey reflects on her complex culinary heritage and experiences resulting from her exposure to both Hindu and Muslim cultural practices at home and school. Bigot is more interested in evaluating Jaffrey's negotiation of her identity as a Hindu-Muslim hybrid by mapping Delhi through food memories gained from her experience of growing up. Jopi Nyman's article, "Cultural Contact and the Contemporary Culinary Memoir: Home, Memory, and Identity in Madhur Jaffrey and Diana Abu-Jaber" (2014), explores the connection between food and identity as expressed through Jaffrey's memoir. Nyman classifies it as a culinary memoir because the text uses nostalgia of tastes to piece her childhood together to give the readers an impression of a continuous identity through food. Through this vital research, Nyman approaches the memoirs of Jaffrey and Abu-Jaber through a comparative framework to elaborate on culinary memoirs. Nyman's work is vital to this thesis primarily because it links the author's identity with food and discusses its formation through the recollections stitched together through food memories. Shameem Black's "Recipes for Cosmopolitanism: Cooking Across Borders in the South Asian Diaspora" (2010) is another important essay which discusses Jaffrey's work. Black sees Jaffrey's cookbooks as vital texts that shape her diasporic identity and present her as a cosmopolitan figure. This chapter emphasises Jaffrey's flexible approach to cooking, characterising it as "rooted cosmopolitanism", meaning that her recipes are rooted in traditional knowledge of taste and cooking. Still, her approach is relatively modern and open to adaptation through a very flexible approach. Black also highlights that Jaffrey's work resists fetishising culinary and cultural practices by rooting them in experiences, both hers and those of other members of the Indian community she relates to. While both Nyman and Black highlight significant aspects of Jaffrey's work, their works do not study Jaffrey as

a celebrity or her memoir as a piece of autobiographical work that projects a mediated version of Jaffrey for public consumption.

To summarise the findings gathered from the review of the existing scholarship, while several academic works explore the context as well as the autobiographical writings of Indian actresses, they do not emphasise the distinctness of such narratives on account of being celebrity autobiographical writings that are created with specific intents and purposes. The scope of scholarly works like those by Majumdar, Mukherjee, Niazi, and Ingle's is limited to specific periods within the 20th century, i.e., the first half of the 20th century. While they provide vital context to understanding the formation of the subjectivity of actresses, they do not engage with the crafting and performance of celebrity personas beyond the 1950s. Furthermore, the influence of their exposure to the different technological innovations during this period in cinema, theatre, and television on articulating their selves through the autobiographical medium is also not focused upon in the existing research. Lastly, these works do not engage with the narrative strategies of the autobiographies to reveal the mechanics of autobiographical self-fashioning practised by actresses, resulting in the formation of their celebrity personas.

For actresses like Wadkar, Segal, and Jaffrey, who were active in the film, theatre, and television industries post-1930s, their professions were categorically evolving and acquiring new meanings as the nation and the corresponding society transformed from a colonised one to an independent country. The present work addresses these gaps in the research by focusing on the autobiographical strategies of Indian actresses from the 1930s to 2000s through a Persona Studies-oriented approach.

### **Research Objectives**

The autobiographical accounts of Wadkar, Segal, and Jaffrey are representative case studies supported by the autobiographical accounts of other actresses as secondary sources for validating the hypothesis and

research objectives outlined in this work. Therefore, the key research objectives for this thesis are explored through these questions:

- As artists working across different media formats, how does their professional status impact their strategies of self-fashioning in the 20th century?
- How do Wadkar, Segal, and Jaffrey redefine and reshape our perception of female professionals in artistic fields?
- What are the fundamental mechanics of autobiographical self-fashioning, i.e., what strategies and techniques are employed in crafting the celebrity persona through Wadkar, Segal, and Jaffrey's texts?
- To what extent do their personas in these texts align with or contradict their established public images as celebrities, and what does this reveal about the broader genre of celebrity autobiographical writings by female professionals?

However, such an approach does not disregard the existing body of criticism that studies such texts through the theoretical lens of autobiography studies and women's studies. On the contrary, even with a Persona Studies-oriented reading of these works, it is possible to trace the shifts in the role of women in society through their approach to self-fashioning. Being professionally active in film, television, and theatre in the 20th century, Wadkar, Segal and Jaffrey were constantly negotiating their subjecthood by thinking, reflecting, and talking about themselves. As society coped with a gradual shift where more and more women were entering the workforce and contributing to the economy in diverse ways, the dilemma of women divided between the forces of tradition and modernity came up from time to time, as can be witnessed through these narratives.

### **Methodology and Theoretical Framework**

This work considers autobiographical writings as sites of persona performance and pays specific attention to the performative

nature of autobiographical narration. It examines how Indian actresses from the 20th century harness the autobiographical mode of expression to craft their personas as celebrities. This thesis is primarily based on the qualitative research method of textual analysis. Drawing on the works of Marshall et al. through “Persona as Method: Exploring Celebrity and the Public Self through Persona Studies” (2015) and *Persona Studies: An Introduction* (2020), P. David Marshall (2014), Pramod K Nayar (2009), and Katja Lee (2022), this thesis builds a theoretical framework for analysing the primary texts. Additionally, it derives the understanding of the terms “celebrity” and “star” from the works of Richard Dyer and Guy Debord, “impression management” from Erving Goffman (1956), and that of “television personality” from P. David Marshall (2014). Furthermore, this work draws on the understanding of autobiographical self-fashioning and associated concepts from Anshu Malhotra and Siobhan Lambert-Hurley (2015), Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2024), and Sidonie Smith (1998).

A vital component of the theoretical framework is the concept of registers of persona performance. This concept is derived from the “Registers of Performance” theory in Barbour (2015) and Marshall et al. (2020). Analysing registers of persona performance in the techniques of autobiographical self-fashioning in Wadkar, Segal, and Jaffrey enables a precise assessment of how professional expertise shapes actresses’ intent and narrative strategies in curating their autobiographical selves. This research also aims to allay the reductive understanding that celebrity life-writings by Indian actresses are mere confessional narratives focused on revealing the scandalous and unpleasant aspects of their ‘real lives’. Instead, it argues that the professional experiences of these actresses provide the context within which they effectively form and articulate their subjectivity. These texts describe the persona as a collection of recognisable attributes that collectively render a public figure’s identity. Kim Barbour (2023) offers a more precise definition of the persona, drawing from Erving Goffman (1956) and Marshall et al. (2020):

Personas are ‘a projection and a performance of individuality [...] destined for some type of audience’ (Marshall et al. 2020, p. 3); therefore, they are social identity performances. Personas, produced by individuals, owe their ability to be meaningful to how their audience draws on sociocultural norms, stereotypes and tropes. (*Women and Persona Performance* 4)

Thus, personas are dynamic and adaptive as they evolve with their contexts. For celebrities, like actors and television personalities, personas are the roles they portray off-screen, i.e., a version of themselves curated for a designated audience. As Barbour indicates, for personas to be meaningful, they must be created with reference to something familiar to the target audience/readership. Since celebrities’ professional roles draw on several sociocultural norms and tropes, their personas must connect to their work to facilitate identification and better reach. Such personas are an amalgamation of recognisable characteristics drawn from their film/television roles and nuances that define them as individuals outside of work. This also includes a combination of verbal and non-verbal characteristics such as voice, posture, and behaviour.

To identify the mechanics of persona construction and performance, this thesis draws on the theory of Registers of Performance of Persona detailed in Barbour (2015) and Marshall et al. (2020). Barbour defines the theory in the context of digital personas of artists, which, in this thesis, is being drawn on and applied to autobiographical texts. Deriving from the concept of vocal registers (“Registers of Performance” 58), Barbour highlights the ability of the persona of an individual to move between various registers. She identifies three predominant registers within which artists express themselves through their personas.

The selective performance of different elements of the social and cultural construction of artistness occurs through all three of the registers of performance: in the professional register we see independence and preoccupation with work, displays of genius or skill,

the search for novelty or innovation; in the personal register we see a performance of rebellion against established norms and systems; in the intimate register we see the performance of emotional sensitivity and intensity. (“Registers of Performance” 61)

This thesis investigates the influence of the profession on celebrity autobiographical narrative strategies by identifying the various registers of performance of their personas. As professionals in a predominantly artistic domain, Wadkar, Segal, and Jaffrey’s personas embody ‘artistness’. Barbour views the artist as a predominantly social role “that exists outside of any particular individual creative practitioner” (“Registers of Performance” 60). In other words, Barbour views the artistness of an individual as distinct from their identity as a person and outside the realm within which they function as artists. Applying this idea to the authors of the primary texts would allow us to separate their professional identities as artists/performers from their identities as individuals outside of their work. Autobiographical texts facilitate bridging these two components of such individuals’ identities by selectively curating and crafting a persona for the benefit of the designated readers.

In the three main chapters, this thesis demonstrates how Wadkar, Segal, and Jaffrey draw on their artistness and professional expertise to craft and perform their personas. This work highlights how their similar narrative approaches are tailored according to their professional domains’ format and guidelines of performance. The chapters highlight how, as readers, we can glean their personas as cinema, theatre, and television actresses and how they present themselves as women of their time through the narratives of their autobiographical texts. This work also highlights how, in doing so, they subtly challenge the stereotypical portrayal of women of their time (Kosambi 350) without explicitly confronting it. Simply put, the autobiographical texts emphasise the ordinariness of their lives as family-centric women who had to take the responsibility of sustaining their families financially, but they do so through a narrative with a performative nuance.

The primary texts chosen for this study conform to the conventions of autobiographical writing through features like retrospective narration, the identification between the author and autobiographical subject, and conscious self-fashioning. The distinction between the authorial 'I,' subjectivised 'I,' and the autobiographer facilitates better analysis of the texts. With this approach, this thesis explores how, using autobiographical writing as a tool, these actresses construct their persona in response to their celebrity image. Here, the persona is distinguished from the image through the additional component of the actresses' intervention. As Marshall (2014) clarifies, an image is a relatively static and passive entity, and celebrities often have little to no role in its creation. Since persona is more dynamic and requires performance in interactive contexts, it features more initiative and input from celebrities. Thus, Persona Studies facilitates a more holistic understanding of self-fashioning in celebrity autobiographical writings.

As case studies, Wadkar, Segal, and Jaffrey, each in their own way, utilise their autobiographies as mediums for self-fashioning and perform their celebrity personas for a designated readership. By claiming authorship over their life narratives, they influence the perceived values of authenticity and truth associated with the autobiographical mode of narration. They curate public versions of their lives and identities while ensuring they remain identifiable and relatable to their designated readership. They may or may not align their narrative to the public perception that precedes their narrative, but ensure relatability by drawing from current/past interpretations of their identities. Fundamentally, as the audience, we interact with personas and not individuals. The purposefully rendered versions of the "private" lives of celebrities are often projected as their "real" identities. For instance, Neena Gupta, in *Sach Kahun Toh* (2021), declares it as her attempt to inform the reader of her authentic self; she says,

Sometimes, I get very angry when I read about myself in the papers.

The image the media and my fans have of me is very different from



who I am. The media doesn't know me. Nobody knows the real me. But writing a book would mean opening up and revealing my deepest, darkest secrets to the world. It would mean publishing all the mistakes I have made in my life...Confessing on paper that the strong, confident and self-assured Neena Gupta actually suffers from a severe lack of self-esteem. She's flawed. Chipped. Broken...My life's journey, not narrated by the media, but by Neena Gupta, herself. (Gupta 7–9)

Gupta explicitly states that the objective of her autobiography is to reveal her 'true self' by presenting her "rightful" interpretation of her identity. She attempts to merge the identities of the author and the subject of the autobiography and invites the readers to witness her 'real' self. She is also aware of the readership of her book and refers to them as her fans. Gupta's autobiography follows the first of the three tropes identified by Amelie Hastie in the autobiographical narratives of actresses:

A number of tropes, often intersecting, are common to autobiographies authored by female film stars and directors. First, of course, is the stated goal to set the record straight: these works, which spring from memory, are counter histories, works that mean to correct institutionalized histories about their subjects. Second, some writers act as self-conscious producers of the genre; that is, like the critics to follow them, they comment on the complex production of a life history, recognizing the emergence of both patterns and digressions at once. Third is the reproduction of a teleological narrative common to much fictional film: most actresses trace a directional path that led them to become stars. (Hastie 72–73)

As Neena Gupta states in her autobiography, the objective of her autobiography is to set the record straight about herself; it is meant to rectify the narratives of her life and persona assumed by her fans because of media narratives on her. On the contrary, Deepti Naval's memoir, *A Country Called Childhood* (2022), is admittedly a retelling of childhood. Naval introduces her memoir as thus:

Rather, I wanted to recreate my childhood for the reader. I wanted to take you through those corridors of memory, setting up things the way

I remember them. In that sense it is not a typical memoir — it is more like a screenplay. This book could simply be titled, ‘Stories from my Childhood’. And it would be apt. Because I feel life is all about stories; that I am the sum total of all the stories that impacted me since I was a little girl, stories from my early days. (Naval xi)

Naval’s memoir follows the third trope delineated by Hastie and recreates her childhood, mainly to give the readers a sense of the trajectory of events which led her to become the individual she is today, or, in other words, the individual the readers understand her to be today. As can be discerned from these discussions, broader patterns are at play that govern the autobiographical writings of actresses.

This work contests the perception that autobiographies are the only authentic source of information on celebrities. It establishes that such writings are only contributing texts to the paratextual material on celebrities and are crafted to generate specific impressions of such individuals. As the autobiography facilitates the drawing of identifiable versions of celebrities by tapping into the collective memories of the audience, it helps authors evade the pitfalls of unreliable memories. However, this does not mean that these are speculative narratives. On the contrary, autobiographies and memoirs are highly malleable sites for public individuals to present themselves.

The second chapter of the thesis studies Hansa Wadkar’s translated autobiography *You Ask, I Tell* (2013). It analyses Wadkar’s interpretation of the meaning of the female celebrity/film star during the studio era of Marathi Cinema (1930s to 1950s). Wadkar’s autobiography carries unique characteristics, such as the oral narration of the text, her initial reluctance to talk about her experiences, her tone of narration, and her insistence on wanting to be seen as a woman deeply rooted in familial and cultural values. As one of the earliest examples of autobiographies of actresses that provides significant details on the professional demands of being an actress, Wadkar’s autobiography is an articulation of the liminal identity of a female professional in the film industry.

Thus, this chapter explores Wadkar's autobiographical strategies to gauge her response to her existing public image and the crafting of her persona. The chapter emphasises the need to recognise this autobiography as a text through which Wadkar constantly crafts her celebrity persona as a woman who is a professional actress through the careful curation of anecdotes from her personal life to present a "public construction of the private" (Marshall et al. 33). This chapter argues against the existing critical readings of Wadkar's autobiography that assign spontaneity, lack of premeditation and presentation of a fragmented self as the core features of the text. This research correlates these interpretations by scholars like Jasbir Jain (2013) and Meera Kosambi (2015) as attributes that contributed to the crafting of Wadkar's image as an artist of her time. The characteristics of obstinacy, rebelliousness, and tendencies towards self-destruction through alcoholism, as highlighted by Jasbir Jain and Shobha Shinde (2013) and Kosambi, are seen here as indicators contributing to defining the artist in contemporary society. The chapter establishes that in the autobiography, Wadkar is essentially enacting or performing as Hansa Wadkar and does not necessarily provide a confessional account of her struggles as a woman who worked as an actress.

The third chapter presents an analysis of theatre and film actor Zohra Segal's memoir *Close-Up* (2011). In studying Segal primarily as a theatre actor, this chapter draws on the characteristics central to the kind of work Segal did in her career and examines their influence on her narrative style. The chapter argues that Segal presents a rhetorical approach that questions the conventional narrative format of memoirs by following a fragmentary structure, including chapters, diary entries, and letters, and tells her story through a narrative guided by elements of spectacle, melodrama, and theatricality. Additionally, the chapter extends this analysis by deriving Segal's diachronic interpretation of the meaning of a female artist who started as an 'outsider' and then became a celebrated figure in dance, theatre, and cinema, as presented through her memoir.

The fourth chapter delves into Madhur Jaffrey's *Climbing the Mango Trees* (2006), a memoir deeply rooted in taste memories. With the fundamental understanding of Madhur Jaffrey as a television personality, this chapter performs a critical analysis of the book and highlights the affinity of its narrative approach to the conventions of television shows. The chapter posits that Jaffrey's direct address, desire to create familiarity, and the narrative thread guided by taste memories are intentionally rendered to project Jaffrey's expertise in Indian cuisine, thereby validating her celebrity persona and understanding of the artist's identity. The chapter further argues that her narrative approach demands the reader to interpret her as a person whose subjecthood was shaped by food and the experiences of consuming food — which is also an anticipated narrative arc for an individual noted for her expertise in Indian cuisine. This analysis, which is objectively oriented towards assessing Jaffrey's autobiographical persona, aims to contribute to the broader argument of the thesis on how women in the performing arts utilise their professional experiences in positioning their autobiographical narratives. Furthermore, this chapter intends to showcase how this text not only teases out Jaffrey's culinary expertise but also weaves together her experiences growing up in Delhi with the city's cultural and gastronomic landscape. In juxtaposing her journey with the gastronomic evolution of the city of her birth, which itself has a reputation for being a destination for food lovers, Jaffrey validates the evolution of her palate and skillset.

In conclusion, this thesis explores the life narratives of three notable women performers from 20th-century South Asia, situating them within the broader context of autobiographical writings by female actresses and illustrating how their professional experiences shape their autobiographical approaches. The thesis highlights the shortcomings of autobiography studies in facilitating an understanding of autobiographical accounts crafted by actresses, as it argues, the theoretical framework does not take into consideration the careful crafting and performance of the celebrity persona. Consequently, the

thesis grounds the reading of the texts in a framework that considers a careful evaluation of the narrative strategies and the resultant personas constructed in these works.

Through a detailed analysis of Hansa Wadkar, Zohra Segal, and Madhur Jaffrey's autobiographies contextualised within the broader genre of autobiographical writings produced by actresses of Indian origin, the thesis posits that women engaged in such careers utilise their professional skills and experiences in deciding their autobiographical strategies. Specifically, regarding women actresses from the Indian region, this implies that expecting a consistent and unified understanding of their celebrity identities is unrealistic. Instead, as can be concluded from the fragmented narrative of Wadkar, the unconventional structuring of Segal's memoir, and the innovative, cook-book-like style of Jaffrey's text, the actresses of the 20th century were continually negotiating their personal and professional lives. Crafting their personas through their autobiographical projects meant they attempted to create an approach that blends the recognised, continually reinterpreted projection of their personal lives with their more widely recognised public lives.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Rimli Bhattacharya notes in her translation to Binodini Dasi's *My Story and My Life as an Actress* (1998) that Binodini Dasi's *My Life as an Actress* was first taken up by the magazine *Natya Rang* for publication in a serialized format in 1910, but it was abandoned after two issues. After 13 years, the magazine *Roop O Rang* took the initiative and published it serially in its entirety ( See Bhattacharya 23).

<sup>2</sup> Tamasha films are a genre of Marathi films which derive their structure from the Marathi theatre form tamasha. Shobha Shinde writes, Marathi cinema "made wide use of the Tamasha form for its dances, provocative songs, obscene, lewd gestures and the lavanis which found a good response from the common masses". (108)

<sup>3</sup> In "The Tamasha Film: Gender, Performance, and Melodramatic Form" (2022) Aarti Wani defines tamasgirin as a female dancer in *tamasha* films. (See Wani 282)

## CHAPTER 1: Towards a Persona Studies-based reading of Celebrity Autobiographical Writings

### 1.1 Introduction

In his book *Heavenly Bodies* (2004), Richard Dyer refers to a portrait of Joan Crawford (1906–1977) by Eve Arnold (1912–2012). While Crawford was one of the most celebrated Hollywood actresses of her time, known for her roles in Broadway plays and Hollywood films, Arnold was a reputed photographer. Her objective in such projects was to defy the objectification of female stars, as she was “committed to showing women ‘as they really are,’ not in men’s fantasies of them” (*Heavenly Bodies* 1). Dyer presents a fascinating analysis of Arnold’s photograph, which captures Crawford examining her reflection while preparing for a shoot. Crawford is shown seated in front of a mirror, carrying a smaller mirror in hand. She is observing her reflection in the smaller mirror, which offers a close-up that shows layers of make-up that mask her natural appearance. The photograph shows Crawford’s reflection from two angles, and in itself becomes the third viewpoint for observing Crawford. Analysing this thought-provoking photograph, Dyer highlights what he calls the process of “manufacturing images” for celebrities and poses some very pertinent questions:

The fact that the different mirrors throw back different pictures suggests the complex relationship between a picture and that of which it is a picture, something reinforced by the fact that both mirrors reflect presentation...Is this third Crawford the real one, the real person who was the occasion of the images? Is perhaps the smaller mirror image the true reflection of what the actual person of Crawford was really like, or can we know only that there was a real person inside the images but never really know her? Which is Joan Crawford, really? (*Heavenly Bodies* 1– 2)

Dyer’s observation succinctly conveys the complexity of understanding the identity of a professional actress. Professionals in this domain often have unstable and multiple identities<sup>1</sup>, which keep evolving with the

kind of roles they portray. Thus, it is a rather difficult task to comprehend which one would be the closest interpretation to how the person 'really' is. Dyer tries to make the point through the analysis of Joan Crawford's photo, which highlights the artifice of celebrity identities since they are 'made' or manufactured to achieve specific objectives. These identities are constructed with some publicly known aspects of such individuals' lives, some less known and some unknown. Dyer denotes these three aspects by assessing the three distinct impressions of Crawford gleaned by the viewer from three different viewpoints. Using Dyer's analysis as an analogy, it is possible to understand the significance of intent in determining celebrity identities. If Arnold's photographs are taken as texts documenting celebrity lives, her intention as the author, which was to portray her subjects "as they are", determines the outcome that the reader/viewer will access. Arnold's objective to portray her subjects "as they were/are" is a claim also echoed by celebrity autobiographical writings. However, such claims are challenging to accept, owing to the ambiguity in the meaning of being "as they are/were". Regardless, the interpretation given by the author of the photograph or autobiographical text is ultimately what the designated audience receives. This highlights the significance of intent in the production and consumption of celebrity life narratives, mainly autobiographical texts. Thus, texts documenting celebrity lives are deliberate and designed to leave certain impressions.

Walter Benjamin also alluded to the significance of intent in "A Short History of Photography" (1931). In this essay, Benjamin comments on the "optical unconscious" inherent within human beings as they go through life, where the minutiae of mundane things, such as how things are done or events occur, are lost due to our tendency to focus on things more broadly. In Benjamin's opinion, photography helps overcome this disadvantage by breaking down events or actions and drawing our attention to the minute aspects of life. With the help of the technology of photography, as Benjamin argues, it is possible to be conscious of or scrutinise these finer details.

As a corollary to the optical unconscious, Benjamin also draws our attention towards a very important idea — the significance of technique in photography and its influence on the narrative of the image produced. Benjamin refers to the photographs by the Scottish daguerreotypist<sup>2</sup> David Octavius Hill (1802–1870) and appreciates the staging of the photographs taken by him at the Edinburgh cemetery of the Greyfriars (Benjamin 204). Hill’s photographs, according to Benjamin, reveal the possibilities of art, which led him to contemplate “the connection between actuality and photo” (204). Although Benjamin was referring specifically to photography, his arguments can readily be applied to autobiographical writing, as both allow authors to transcend the optical unconscious by breaking down events and incidents and emphasising details as they articulate them in their writing.

Furthermore, celebrity autobiographical writings are especially able to do this because the curation of anecdotes works like the process of staging a photograph. Both in the case of photographs discussed by Benjamin and celebrity autobiographical accounts, there is the significance of the outcome, towards which the curation or staging of various components happens, which is determined by the author’s intent. In other words, what we can view from Hill’s photographs would be the outcome of the staging that he, as a photographer, did intentionally; similarly, for celebrities, the autobiographical account presents a similar staged version of their lives to give a specific kind of impression about them. Many celebrities who reflect upon the process of autobiographical writing offer details about this process of curation.

Actor Amol Palekar (1944–), in the introduction to his memoir *Viewfinder* (2024), offers an interesting analogy to describe the process, comparing the memoir to an ever-expanding sack into which he throws components from his life. He asks,

How much and what all should I pack into the sack? . . . What do I do with the trivial, scattered details? . . . How are these not important? But they may not find a place within the physical confines of this book. Everything lived, endured, felt, preserved, created and accumulated —



how will I decide what's disposable, what's essential and what isn't needed? (Palekar xi–xii)

Palekar's dilemma reveals the deliberate process of choosing and curating the celebrity memoir. The performative nature of a celebrity's identity and its expression through autobiographical writing relies significantly on the process, which facilitates self-fashioning<sup>3</sup>, an artifice. This artifice helps project a celebrity author's identity and facilitates favourable interpretation. To use Erving Goffman's (1959) term, autobiographical texts facilitate "impression management" for celebrities. Thus, the objective of autobiographical narration is self-fashioning and not merely a confession of the larger and minute details of celebrity life.

Considering celebrity autobiographical writings as a distinct category of texts, this chapter aims to create a theoretical framework to examine the nuances of celebrity self-fashioning and persona performance. Since the primary texts chosen are of Indian actresses from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, their professional expertise forms one of the most essential contexts within which their subjectivities were formed. To reiterate a point made in the previous chapter, the context of professional expertise shapes their strategies for autobiographical self-fashioning. Thus, the primary objective of this thesis is to examine the influence of the profession on the autobiographical narrative strategies of Indian actresses. For this purpose, this chapter is devoted to the creation of a theoretical framework guided by Persona Studies. Before delving into the nuances of the framework, let us look at some key foundational concepts that will shape both the framework as well as the analysis.

## **2.2 Overview of Key Concepts**

The central arguments of this study are rooted in the understanding of celebrities via Guy Debord's (1931–1994) thesis on stars as "spectacular representations of human beings" (Debord 61), Dyer's theorisation of stars as a social phenomenon, and Erving Goffman's theory of "impression management" (1959). Guy Debord, in his book *Society of the Spectacle* (2005), argues that stars are experts of

an “apparent life” (29). He emphasises the visual and spectacular aspects of celebrities’ lives as they draw significant scrutiny from their exposure to the public. Debord’s analyses find a suitable companion in Richard Dyer’s assessment of celebrities in his two books, *Stars* (1998) and *Heavenly Bodies* (2006).

For Dyer, celebrities or stars are “. . . a case of appearance — all we know of them is what we see and hear before us” (*Heavenly Bodies* 2). Dyer’s argument underlines the centrality of appearance and, by extension, the performance of that appearance for celebrities. For instance, when celebrities make public appearances, they emphasise their appearance through external factors like make-up, attire, posture, and body language; in addition to this, they also take great care to maintain their persona so that they are recognised not just for their appearance but also for their conduct of themselves. In this manner, when they interact with the public through their work or allied media appearances like interviews, stage performances, or other shows, they continue the performance of their identity, which they have curated.

Autobiographical writings are similar instances of public performances for stars. As Neepa Majumdar highlights, stardom can be understood “both as forms of public presentation of the self and modes of circulation and exchange of knowledge about individuals” (Majumdar 8). Pramod K Nayar also considers celebrities as people who “circulate as images” (Nayar 2). Majumdar draws our attention towards the conflation of a star’s identity through a continuing portrayal of the character essayed on and off the screen, a kind of staging that she calls the frontal mode of address. She says,

First, there is the collapsing of the metaphoric foreground and background, the surface and depth, of star identities, which is produced by a reduction in the gap between on-screen and off-screen information about them. In the studio era, this took the form of an emphasis on a star’s professional identity at the cost of private, “inner” information. (Majumdar 143)

In the Indian film industry during the 1930s–1950s, as Majumdar highlights, there was a greater emphasis on the professional identity as there were intensive discourses on the respectability of the star. Therefore, it was not encouraged to highlight the contrast between the professional and personal aspects of the actresses' lives. Thus, a continuity between the on-screen and off-screen identity was preferred.

Through autobiographical writings, such continuities allow the readers to understand celebrities with the help of a familiar frame of reference. As a result, celebrities retain value and presence in the minds of their audience. When we look at the autobiographical accounts of earlier or later 20th-century actresses like Durga Khote or Zohra Segal, respectively, we can note that the significance of this continuity is not lost entirely. The actresses, through autobiographical strategies, strive to maintain their personas as celebrities unless, of course, otherwise required. It further implies that the author's interpretation, even if drawn from the audience's expectations, restricts the number of possibilities that can be derived from such texts, as they are carefully curated narratives<sup>4</sup>.

Consequently, the objective of celebrity autobiographical writings is impression management. Erving Goffman's thesis of impression management, as presented in his book *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (1959), argues for the centrality of modelling our behaviour in response to specific contexts in the impression generated in the minds of others. Greg Smith states that Goffman's impression management thesis deals with "the dramaturgical aspects of expressive conduct" (Smith 42) based on the impressions that people "give" and "give off" (35). In other words, through this theory, Goffman draws our attention to the nuances of conduct when in the presence of others. The perception of our identity varies according to our conduct in different situations, especially in the presence of others. For celebrities, the variation in conduct as per the situation leads to a plurality in the impressions they are required to "give off" according to the context within which they interact with others. Consequently, considering

celebrity identities as plural and multi-dimensional would lead to a better understanding of them as individuals, and studying celebrities through their public image would not suffice as the image feels more restrictive and is often constructed by other entities with little to no contribution from the celebrities themselves. Therefore, understanding celebrity identities as they are rendered through their personas is a better approach for studying celebrity autobiographical accounts as well.

### **2.3 Exploring Celebrity Persona through Autobiographical Writings**

The studies on autobiographical writing post-1980s have made the boundaries of the genre broader and porous. In her 2018 book, *Autobiography: A Very Short Introduction*, Laura Marcus advocates for including works including performance, photography, and self-portraiture within the ambit of autobiography. In her book *Autobiography* (2001), Linda Anderson contemplates the eligibility of scholarly works like writings on critical theory and literary criticism to be considered autobiographical. Hence, it is only fitting to recognise the various forms of autobiography, including life writings of autobiographical nature as intermedial<sup>5</sup> texts. As intermedial texts, they adapt to the author's intention and identity by combining the autobiographer/author's expertise with the fundamental conditions of autobiographical writing, as defined by Philippe Lejeune (1989). According to Lejeune, a text can be considered autobiographical if it is a "retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality" (Lejeune 4).

In such narratives, Lejeune adds, the author and the narrator should be identical, which means that the author should be able to identify with the principal character. More recent studies by Katja Lee (2022) and Smith and Watson (2024) problematise the identification of the author with the subject by highlighting a tripartite division among the subject of the autobiography, the narrative voice denoted by 'I' and the author who exists outside the text (Lee 1). Anshu Malhotra and

Siobhan Lambert-Hurley (2015) add that in South Asia, it is important to consider the ideas of performance and performativity:

For an inherently confessional genre — an artifice insofar as it is about self-fashioning — the idea of performance teases out the choices made in terms of forms and narrative strategies employed, and the audiences addressed. In other words, if we look at autobiographical practice as a “self in performance”, we begin to appreciate the historical, social, and cultural milieu in which the self was imbricated, and what enabled gendered subjectivity and speech. (1)

The parameter of self-fashioning and its inherently performative nature is critical to understanding autobiographical writings from the South Asian context, as highlighted by Malhotra and Lambert-Hurley<sup>6</sup>. Since the primary texts chosen for the present study are autobiographical writings by professional performers who identify themselves as actresses, the artifice and the performative nature of self-fashioning must be taken as critical aspects of autobiographical expression.

The memoir, as an autobiographical genre, has been subjected to various debates and discussions regarding its position within the broader category of the autobiographical genre. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson trace the development of the memoir and arrive at the currently accepted understanding of the memoir as “life writing that takes a segment of a life, not its entirety, and focuses on interconnected experiences” (Smith and Watson 271). Smith and Watson’s definition emphasises the memoir’s focus on interconnected experiences. This position makes it a suitable genre for celebrities who use it to trace and narrate their experiences, giving their readers a sense of who they are through a curation of thematically connected anecdotes. As none of the definitions given thus far refute the autobiographical nature of the memoir, this thesis considers memoirs as autobiographical writings. However, it is not the objective of this work to reject the distinct characteristics of the genre or to suggest any synonymy between autobiographies and memoirs. Rather, it attempts to highlight the crafting and performance

of celebrity personas and considers autobiographies and memoirs as autobiographical writings.

In its exploration of strategies of self-fashioning and the influence of the professional expertise of the celebrity author, this work ventures beyond the insights offered by autobiography studies by rejecting the singularity of the self as made apparent through autobiographical narration. This work argues that an agreement between the author and the subject cannot be easily claimed in the case of autobiographical writings of professional performers because their identities are, as Richard Dyer (2004) highlights, unstable and subject to change. Therefore, this thesis is theoretically grounded in Persona Studies, which offers a more flexible framework for analysing identities through the concept of persona. P. David Marshall, Christopher Moore, and Kim Barbour, in their foundational work, *Persona Studies: An Introduction*, venture a step further from Richard Dyer in *Stars* (1998) and *Heavenly Bodies* (2004) in offering the term ‘persona’ instead of an image to understand the performance of identity by individuals in different contexts.

The term ‘persona’ is more effective as it also takes into account the actor’s or individual’s role in creating and performing their identity. As a term, it also better encapsulates the unstable nature of celebrity identities while incorporating their intentional contributions to the crafting and performance of their selves. According to Marshall et al., the persona:

...has all the appearances of being an individual, but it is in fact the way an individual can organise themselves publicly. Persona is a projection and a performance of individuality. This form of projection and performance is destined for some type of audience, some community and some collective. (*Persona Studies* 3)

Thus, as a projection of identity, the persona is intentional in that it is created for performance catered to a defined audience. Similarly, this work treats the autobiographical persona of celebrities in their

autobiographical writings as personas. These personas represent the identity of the celebrity author, albeit curated with specific parameters for a well-defined audience that constitutes their readership. Using this specific form of persona performance rendered through the autobiographical text, they may also choose to amend or alter the meaning of their celebrity selves as understood by their audience.

This thesis applies the theory of persona to explore the narrative strategies adopted by the celebrity authors of the primary texts, viz. Hansa Wadkar, Zohra Segal, and Madhur Jaffrey, to understand the nuances of their autobiographical narrative strategies. Two key concepts applied in this context are the definition of the “Professional Persona” and Kim Barbour’s (2015) theory of “Registers of Persona Performance”. Marshall et al. (2020) engage with the various meanings of the term “professional” to theorise the professional persona. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the application of the term professional to individuals employed in the performing arts has been debated. This work considers actresses professionals by virtue of their skills, expertise in their craft, and generation of revenue. Consequently, the celebrity persona they create and perform through their work and their autobiographical writing is understood as the professional persona in the context of this work.

To understand how the performance of the professional persona is executed through autobiographical writing, this work relies on Kim Barbour’s (2015) theory of “registers of persona performance” as it helps to pinpoint the influence of the profession in autobiographical self-fashioning in celebrity narratives. Marshall et al. (2020) draw from Barbour’s work to highlight the three registers of persona performance, i.e., the professional, the personal, and the intimate. This theoretical lens helps decipher the mechanics of celebrity persona crafting, and understand the perception the author wanted to create of themselves. In this work, the primary texts are analysed to determine the specific combinations of the registers of persona performance that they demonstrate. This is because, in autobiographical writings, the tendency

of the authors to take the personal and intimate registers of persona performance is higher. However, due to the nature of the profession of actresses, their autobiographical writings, as this work argues, have distinct narrative characteristics that highlight their professional experience and expertise.

Through its reading of the three primary texts, the thesis highlights that the professional register is the primary register of performance chosen by the actresses. As individuals who lived most of their lives in the public domain, their professional identities as actresses are widely accepted. To return to Richard Dyer's analogy presented at the beginning of this chapter, the three versions of Joan Crawford captured in the photograph can also function as a metaphor for the three sides of the celebrity author that an autobiographical text weaves together. The more prominent reflection of Crawford signifies the professional register of celebrity performance, i.e., the version highly familiar to the readers, the reflection captured in the smaller image that gives away the layers of make-up points to the individual underneath the "mask" of the performer. This backstage self is represented in the autobiographical text through the personal register. The third, relatively unknown version of the celebrity, denoted by the blurry silhouette of Crawford's back, can be associated with the intimate register, which is largely unfamiliar to the readers and exists outside the text.

Through their autobiographical writings, these writers draw from the existing understanding of their identities based on their work in cinema, theatre, and television, which in turn contribute to developing their personas and highlighting their professional identity. However, women from the dynamic socio-cultural context of the 20th century had to address the so-called feminine aspects of their lives through discussions regarding their families, husbands, and children. They were actively engaged in their professions, portraying characters that embodied women's experiences in their era, and from which they also drew personal identification. Thus, they needed to maintain relevance and come across as relatable and 'ordinary' individuals. The intimate



register in celebrity life narratives is often promised, as it offers great prospects to enhance readership and create curiosity among the readers. However, an overemphasis on the intimate register might render the celebrity's identity obscure, as these details may introduce a disconnect between their existing interpretation in the public domain and the aspects of their life away from the public domain. The thesis contends that authors introduce a balance between the three registers of performance as they craft their personas through their autobiographical writings so that the version of them that reaches the readers can still ensure identification and relatability.

#### **2.4. Reading Celebrity Autobiographical Writings through Persona Studies-oriented Framework**

The academic discourse on autobiographical narratives in/from the South Asian region indicates the presence of diverse methods and approaches to storytelling, irrespective of genres. Also, owing to factors such as exposure, technological advancement, particularly in media, and changes in the socio-political mores of society, these storytelling conventions have also gone through changes. It implies that when there are changes or developments in the lives of individuals, the way they connect with their contexts changes, and as a result, the way they narrate their lived experiences also changes in tandem. Whether a narrative is orally transmitted or written down, life narratives and the act of narrating them remain entirely performative in the sense that they are consciously curated. The narrator always assumes a role and/or an identity, which may even be their own, and an audience who is/are being addressed or spoken to.

Globally, the 20th century marked a period when technological innovations were rapidly influencing society and the patterns of dissemination and consumption of information. The arrival of film technology, radio, and television brought new modes of storytelling, allowing people to experiment with the new technology and adapt

existing conventions to suit the new medium(s). As a result, the medium influenced the content and vice versa. This movement also impacted the presentation of the self as the celebrities acquired wider visibility and access to an audience. With the accompaniment of recognition and fame, they came to be associated with the various roles they performed in plays or films, impacting their public perception. Thus, specific mannerisms, body language, and personality traits came to be associated with the identities of celebrities, which conclusively determined their self-fashioning strategies in their autobiographical accounts.

This thesis contends that in the autobiographical writings of Indian actresses like Wadkar, Segal, and Jaffrey, their professional status influences the nature and approach of self-fashioning. As autonomous individuals newly entering the workforce through specialised professions like cinema, theatre, and television in such a transient time, articulating their identities through autobiographical self-fashioning was a highly complex endeavour.

As David Arnold and Stuart Blackburn (2004) highlight, life histories arise from complex interactions between the autonomous self and the notion of the self in society. For actresses like Wadkar, Segal, and Jaffrey, their professional lives were one of the primary gateways for social interaction that facilitated an understanding of their subjectivity. Hansa Wadkar understood her identity as a professional through her projects with reputed studios like Prabhat Film Company (1929–1953) and Bombay Talkies (1934–1954). Meanwhile, Zohra Segal's association with Prithvi Theatres (1944–1960) and her work in cinema and television in London and India helped her craft her persona as a performer. For Madhur Jaffrey, her contributions to the culinary field, whether on television or through her cookbooks, solidified her identity as a performer and public figure.

Gender plays a crucial role in shaping subjectivity and affects the development and expression of professional identities. Narrative strategies in autobiographical writings are helpful sites for identifying

the same. Arnold and Blackburn highlight the prevalence of “silences, codes and ellipses” (16) in such narratives, particularly in those composed by women, with an added disclaimer that these can be indicators of censorship — be it self-imposed or simply added as a cautionary measure because narrating one’s life is an endeavour that can invite a lot of attention and censure. Majumdar (2007) also refers to the presence of “indirection and reticence” (44) as components of Indian biographical narratives. This was particularly true in the case of the autobiographical writings of actresses, as Majumdar highlights, despite the curiosity and interest of the audience in the private lives of actresses. As professionals, actresses were discouraged from sharing too much of their personal lives in the early 1950s for fear of scandals that would ruin the efforts of those invested in making cinema a respectable field of work. Therefore, Majumdar says, “[i]n the case of Indian stars, private information was regularly deflected back to a professional context” (2). Such strategies in the autobiographical accounts of actresses may be aimed at avoiding controversies or reorienting their celebrity personas.

In this work, the focus is on the performance of their identities as professionals as manifested through autobiographical self-fashioning. This thesis determines their autobiographical strategies by examining the narrative strategies such as structure, voice, type of anecdotes, presence/absence of narrative flow, and narrative format. Understanding autobiographical strategies would help decipher the author’s intention in following a specific approach to self-fashioning. Since autobiographical texts are understood as texts created with intent and deliberation, the narrative strategies offer valuable clues to uncover the author’s perception of the self that is offered to the readers. Upon close reading and literary analysis of the chosen primary texts, it was found that professional expertise is a critical factor guiding the autobiographical narrative strategies. Hansa Wadkar’s fragmentary narrative moves with a cinematic vision, whereas Zohra Segal’s memoir captures her multifaceted persona and preserves her image as the witty, profound, and theatrical old woman, and Madhur Jaffrey’s memoir is

narrated with an undercurrent of food memories, showcases her depth of familiarity with Indian cuisine. Each of their personas outlined above reflects their professional identity, as will be elaborated in greater detail in the specific chapters.

As mentioned previously, the key hypothesis of this work hinges on the understanding that professional expertise influences self-fashioning for individuals working in the performing arts. To test this hypothesis and to ensure that it applies to celebrities from diverse professional affiliations across the 20th century, the autobiographical writings of Hansa Wadkar, Zohra Segal, and Madhur Jaffrey have been chosen. Although they were all born within the first half of the 20th century, their contexts, training, and career trajectories are all mutually distinct. Hansa Wadkar made a name for herself during the Studio Era (1930s–1950s) of Marathi cinema. In contrast, Zohra Segal established herself as an actress in theatre in the 1940s before exploring the opportunities in cinema and television. Owing to the differences in their experience and how they became actors, the way Wadkar and Segal express their expertise is also mutually distinct.

On the other hand, Madhur Jaffrey was trained to be an actress and prefers to identify as one professionally, but she made a better name for herself in the realm of cookery. She established herself as a professional expert on Indian food through her cookbooks and equally famous cookery shows. The way she crafts and performs her persona in her memoir is strategically based on her experience and identity in this domain. Applying and proving the hypothesis through these three texts helps generate a theoretical template that facilitates a better understanding of the autobiographical narrative strategies of female celebrities, regardless of their professional domain.

## **2.5 Limitations**

The primary focus of this work is on the influence of the professional expertise of Indian actresses on their autobiographical

strategies through which they craft and perform their personas. Therefore, this theoretical framework based on the theories of Persona Studies will not help address questions directed at uncovering truth or falsehoods in celebrity autobiographical narratives. This framework will also not be useful in pinpointing the real personas of the celebrity authors, as this work does not seek to disprove or privilege certain components of the celebrity personas of Wadkar, Segal, or Jaffrey over others.

Although this work considers biographical texts, including media narratives, interviews, and other texts, important to thoroughly understand celebrity personas, its focus on the crafting and performance of the celebrity persona limits its engagement with such texts. Since the focus is on the intent and autobiographical narrative strategies of celebrities, the framework does not delve too much into contextual and peripheral biographical narratives of these celebrities. Only where required are these resources cited and used as supporting material.

The emphasis of this work on the autobiographical strategies of Indian actresses also prevents it from delving too much into some additional significant discourses that form the broader socio-historical context of Indian performing art forms. Therefore, a focused application of the theoretical framework to understand the autobiographical strategies limit discussions on the discourse of respectability, social hierarchies, labour, and economic aspects of working in the performing arts domains. However, these discussions are contextually referred to and included, albeit in a limited capacity.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

This chapter is devoted to developing the theoretical framework for analysing the primary texts chosen for this thesis. It begins with an

analogy based on Richard Dyer's analysis of Eve Arnold's photograph of Joan Crawford to highlight the plural and dynamic nature of celebrity identities and the significance of intent in shaping Celebrity Life Narratives. Thereafter, drawing on Walter Benjamin's key arguments from "A Short History of Photography", it emphasises the importance of intent by connecting it with what Benjamin defines as staging in the composition of photographs. Connecting these ideas to concepts of self-fashioning and the influence of professional expertise, the chapter defines some key concepts central to the theoretical framework.

In this chapter, some fundamental concepts including celebrities as forms of spectacle (Guy Debord 2005), the definition and function of stars (*Stars* 1998) and (*Heavenly Bodies* 2004), impression management (Goffman 1956), persona (*Persona Studies* 2020), and registers of persona performance are discussed as part of the formation of the theoretical framework on which this thesis is grounded. These sets of definitions and explanations function as the foundation for the study of the primary texts.

The subsequent section of the chapter discusses the application of the framework to autobiographical writings of 20th-century Indian actresses and the relevance of reading celebrity autobiographical texts of the performance of the self through the autobiographical mode by celebrities. It explores the dynamic meaning of the female celebrity in the 20th century through an overview of autobiographical writings by contemporaries of Wadkar, Segal, and Jaffrey, highlighting the centrality of their professional expertise in articulating their selves and emphasising the need for a Persona Studies-oriented approach is also essential for understanding these texts.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Richard Dyer in *Heavenly Bodies* (2004) mentions that the entire star phenomenon is “profoundly unstable” because of the plurality in their images and the prevalence of contradictory and multiple narratives on them. (See *Heavenly Bodies* 14).

<sup>2</sup> Refers to photographers who captured images using the diorama invented in 1812. David Octavius Hill was one of the daguerreotypists whose photographs are discussed in the essay. (See Puppe 286–287).

<sup>3</sup> See (Malhotra and Lambert Hurley 1)

<sup>4</sup> Richard Dyer (2004) also highlights the limited interpretability of stars by saying, “Audiences cannot make media images mean anything they want to, but they can select from the complexity of the image the meanings and feelings, the variations, inflections and contradictions, that work for them”. (2004, p. 4)

<sup>5</sup> Similar to intertextuality, intermediality refers to interconnected relations between literature and visual art forms. (See Herman et. al. 361)

<sup>6</sup> Anshu Malhotra and Siobhan Lambert-Hurley, in the introduction to their book *Speaking of the Self: Gender, Performance and Autobiography in South Asia* (2015), mention how the genre of autobiography forms the only pathway to the past for some individuals. Through autobiography, they argue, that individuals can weave in their personal experiences with events of historical significance to locate themselves in time.

## CHAPTER 2: Hansa Wadkar's *You Ask, I Tell* (2013)<sup>1</sup>

### 2.1 Introduction

Celebrities frequently use autobiographical narratives to bridge their public image with their personal identities, allowing fans and readers to perceive them as relatable and authentic individuals. The autobiographical narratives are intentionally created texts that serve as vital links between their frontstage and backstage selves (Goffman 69). Through the connection between the two facets of the celebrity identity, autobiographies facilitate consistency in the performance of the celebrity persona. However, consistency does not mean that the celebrity identity remains the same. One of the crucial functions of celebrity autobiographical writing is facilitating impression management by allowing them to tailor their personas according to the requirements. In other words, as authors of their life narratives, celebrities use their agency and modify their personas. Their agency is a significant variable used to authenticate or reinvent their public selves.

This chapter focuses on the autobiographical account of Marathi film actress Hansa Wadkar, best known for her works during Marathi cinema's Studio Era (~1930s–1950s). Her autobiography is a complex text that has been subjected to variegated scholarly analyses over time, some of which have problematised and discussed its unique attributes, including its mode of production. It serves as a typical example of autobiographical texts written by Marathi actresses from this time and presents an idea of the female professional in cinema. Some of Wadkar's contemporaries who have also written autobiographies include Durga Khote (1905–1991), Leela Chitnis (1912–2003), and Snehaprabha Pradhan (1920–1993). Like Khote's autobiography, *I, Durga Khote* (2006), Wadkar's autobiography also projects its author as a working woman of her time whose identity is rooted in family values. Like her peers' autobiographical accounts, Wadkar's autobiography, too, abstains from discussions on glamour, boldness, social status, or



extraordinary aspects of a celebrity's life. She uses the autobiographical medium to direct the readers' attention towards her interpretation of herself as an individual by emphasising her values and opinions. Her autobiographical persona draws from her on-screen roles and her audience's memories of her and amalgamates it with a persona of her crafting. This approach allows her to retain her relevance as a celebrity representing the cultural codes that prevailed during her time.

This chapter studies Wadkar's autobiography as a performative text, which lends her the space to craft and perform her celebrity persona. Celebrity personas are generally composite entities formed from film roles and related extra-cinematic material such as biographical information published in tabloids, interviews in magazines, social media posts and interviews, or other similar appearances on television or radio. The actors strive to generate an impression of themselves through such autobiographical narratives. As strategically curated accounts, they respond to the actor's existing public image by conforming to or subverting it. In intervening strategically in the discourse on their lives, celebrities also invariably influence the creation of their legacy.

The chapter develops its arguments through late actress Hansa Wadkar's (1923 – 1971) *You Ask, I Tell* (2013), viewing it as a site of the crafting and performance of her persona. The discussions presented in the subsequent sections also highlight the influence of her professional expertise, i.e., cinema, on her narrative strategies. The discussions view her proficiency in the cinematic medium as a critical factor that influences the narrative strategies of her autobiography. The autobiographical account was produced and published years after Wadkar retired from films, nearly three decades after being professionally active. However, Wadkar's autobiography has received sustained interest over time through its different iterations, which were published at different points in time. This continuous circulation of the text resulted in her persistent presence in the collective memory of the Marathi film audience, even after her demise. The Marathi versions of

her autobiography, first published in *Manoos* (1961–1991) across four issues starting from November 1966 and in the later book version published in 1970, were both published within her lifetime. The process of producing the narrative, as documented by *Manoos*, mentions her steady involvement in the process. However, its later iterations through Shyam Benegal's film *Bhumika: The Role* (1977) and the English translation of the autobiography *You Ask, I Tell* (2013) were posthumous and could not involve her in their production. Thus, despite Wadkar's physical absence, her celebrity status was sustained through the reproductions of her autobiographical account across various formats.

During the production of the Marathi versions of the autobiography, Wadkar was in her post-celebrity stage as per Ruth A. Deller's (2016) theory of the fame cycle. According to Deller, fame is a cycle containing six stages (2), wherein the fifth stage is labelled as "post-celebrity," a category that belongs to former celebrities who are "no longer as publicly visible as they once were" (4). Due to the retrospective nature of narration of life writings, it is a popular vocation among individuals in the post-celebrity stage of their careers. In the present times, as Deller argues, former celebrities are subjected to media interest through projects that seek to find where they are now or what happened to them. Wadkar was similarly brought back into the public discourse through the autobiography *Sangtye Aika*. Its editor, G. Majgaokar, conceived the project with a presumption that Wadkar's life would be an eventful one that merits telling. In his editorial essay accompanying the first instalment of her autobiographical account, he invokes the public image of Wadkar through her performances in *Ramjoshi* (1944), *Vanshacha Diva* (1949), and *Sangtye Aika* (1949) and remarks, "For no particular reason, the editor feels that her life would have been complicated and extraordinary. Her flamboyance expressed through her roles must be original!" (Majgaokar 41).

With assumptions largely guided by Wadkar's flamboyant and boisterous public image drawn from her roles in *Tamasha*<sup>2</sup> films, a team of editors from *Manoos* approached Wadkar in September 1966 with their proposal to publish her life story in their magazine as an article. As Majgaokar highlights, this proposal was guided by their belief that a "curiosity" (41) exists in the minds of the Marathi public about her. He further proceeds to justify their project by stating that it was part of their efforts to bring out *true* stories:

Why shouldn't one who is working in the Marathi film industry write an autobiography? Even in our Marathi film industry, there are many such persons with rich experiences. If their truthful biographies are published, then our literature will be enriched, and it will restrict the unnecessary and shallow praise for American actors and actresses<sup>3</sup>.  
(41)

Here, Majgaokar expresses his concerns about the Marathi youth's apparent curiosity about the lives of Marilyn Monroe (1926–1962) and Brigitte Bardot (1934–). In this light, he justifies the magazine's efforts to publish the autobiographies of regional celebrities like Wadkar as the righteous way to tackle the increasing obsession of the youth with Western celebrities.

In his editorial note, Majgaokar introduces Wadkar by drawing readers' attention to her work in *Ramshastri* (1944), *Vanshacha Diva* (1950), and *Sangtye Aika* (1959). Wadkar essayed the role of a *dasi* in *Vanshacha Diva*, from which Majgaokar recalls a scene where Wadkar's character is "harvesting the crops, bent down in a revealing manner" (41), drawing a connection between the sexualised portrayals of women by Wadkar, Bardot, and Monroe. Additionally, he mentions her work in *Sangtye Aika*, where she was cast in the lead role of Chima, a *tamasgirin* who is undaunted in her pursuit to avenge her father's death. In introducing Wadkar through these three characters, Majagokar alludes to the fact that Wadkar lives in the minds of the Marathi audience as the disrupter of "...the stereotype of a woman that was allowed to be portrayed by a woman" (41). This observation clearly shows that

Wadkar's celebrity persona was constituted by a continuum of characters across films of a specific kind, which strongly influenced her perception as a celebrity.

In drawing examples from Monroe and Bardot's life narratives, Majgaokar compares their celebrity personas with Wadkar's. Monroe was known for roles that presented a bold and sexualised portrayal of femininity. Lena Englund quotes Łuksza in her discussion on the public image of Monroe:

The pin-up-like visual imagery combined with stories about a persistent, ambitious and hard-working girl with a modest background and a difficult childhood, a girl who — despite her inherent shyness — was both fame-hungry and love-hungry. (Englund 4)

Majgaokar's comparison suggests that, like Monroe, Wadkar was also perceived in a similar light as an ambitious and hard-working professional from a family of more humble means. Her autobiography suggests that, like Monroe, she was also perennially searching for love and domesticity. Distancing herself from the existing public perception of hers, Wadkar describes herself as a hard worker and perfectionist who prides herself on not being asked for "retakes" of her scenes (Wadkar 34). She informs the readers of her credibility and resultant acclaim as an actor by recalling an interaction with V. Shantaram (1901–1990) after the release of *Sant Sakhu* (1941):

The trial show of *Sant Sakhu* was also held that day. After the show, I apprehensively approached Anna in order to take leave of him...He said, 'Please sit down'. He came close to me and patted me on the back and said, 'You have given a fine performance'. Overwhelmed, tears rolled down my cheeks. I did not have any words. I quickly bent down, touched his feet and came out. Anna, who never praised anybody, had praised me! I felt proud of myself. (Wadkar 36)

Similarly, the reference to Brigitte Bardot while discussing Wadkar's public image suggests that she was perceived as an actress suitable for portraying an emancipated sexuality. In Bardot's case also, Diana Holmes highlights, "...for the public, there was a constant interplay

between the fictional characters she played and her ‘authentic’ self” (Holmes 43). A similar expectation of continuity between Wadkar’s frontstage self and her “authentic” or backstage self can be gleaned from her reference to an incident during the performance of a drama wherein her refusal to dance caused the crowd to turn into a mob.

This resulted in the crowd’s fury . . . By now I had mustered sufficient courage and asked them, ‘Who told you that I would dance? It was not mentioned in the advertisements.’ . . . Someone suddenly shouted, ‘*Arre-wah-re wah!* Is this the way to talk? Hansa and no dance? Has that ever happened? (Wadkar 90–91)

This incident points towards the significant impact of an actor’s roles influencing the scripting of their celebrity personas. Her portrayal of *tamasgirin* characters in *Tamasha* films required her to perform *lavanis*<sup>4</sup>, which led to her synonymous association with the dance form as well as her perception as an icon who embodies rustic sexuality. Therefore, her refusal to dance on stage during a play was not taken well by her audience because they expected her identity as a celebrity to be a continuation of what they were already familiar with.

Interestingly, in the early days of her career, she was known for essaying predominantly demure characters in films like *Vijayachi Lagane* (1936) and *Sant Sakhu* (1941). Her career saw a radical shift after *Sant Sakhu*, and she gained significant popularity for her bolder and assertive characters in *Tamasha* films. However, when Majagaokar and the team from *Manoos* went to interview Wadkar, she had retired from her profession and was also much older than the Hansa Wadkar they remembered her as. Her life and circumstances had completely changed. She was now living with her long-term friend and confidante, actor Rajan Javale, and was no longer desirous of being associated with her earlier image as an actress in *Tamasha* films. Through Majaokar and his team’s initiative of publishing her autobiography, Wadkar rescripted her persona and questioned her audience and readers’ reductive understanding of her identity. Her autobiography, thus, can be seen as a counter-narrative of her life that was narrated in her own voice and

carried her interpretation of her identity as a celebrity. Drawing from her extensive professional experiences, she devised her own strategies of self-fashioning and narrative structuring and legitimised her reinterpretation of herself by foregrounding her agency as the author. To understand her autobiographical narrative strategies better, let us first understand her celebrity persona, which existed before she reinterpreted it through her autobiography.

## **2.2 Return to the Limelight: Hansa Wadkar and *Sangtye Aika***

Cinema post the Dadasaheb Phalke era saw young women between ten and fourteen years old being recruited to perform in front of the camera. Thus, for such women, exposure to a new medium began at a very young age, which was also the case with Hansa Wadkar. She entered the film industry at the age of ten, starting as an actress essaying leading roles. She continued working in cinema and theatre till her late fifties. Her autobiography is an important text because of its inception, production, and reception. It was the product of an idea germinating in the mind of G. Majgaokar in 1966, who was the editor of the Marathi weekly *Manoos* (1961–1991). Majgaokar wanted to publish autobiographies of actors from the Marathi film industry, and the first person chosen to be approached in this context was Wadkar. The editor was also mindful to document<sup>5</sup> the production process of this autobiography, so, as readers, we are aware that Wadkar narrated it orally to the team of editors, who then compiled and read it back to her and finalized the drafts after her approval. Therefore, as per the account published in this editorial, the authority to control the narrative remained with Wadkar, and the editors were not allowed to introduce changes. As a result, Wadkar's autobiography retains the characteristics of a spoken narrative and has a performative quality that can only be introduced by an experienced storyteller.

Wadkar was an actor who mastered the medium in her long and successful career in cinema, as her filmography also suggests. She was chosen for a diverse array of films. She started her career during the studio era, wherein filmmaking was primarily done by companies or

studios with a fixed cast and crew. Over time, Wadkar worked with many studios, such as Minerva Movietone Studios (1936–1950s), Prabhat Studios (1929–1953), and Bombay Talkies (1934–1953), which made many well-known films. One can divide her career into two phases, wherein the first half begins with *Vijaychi Lagane* (1936) and concludes with *Sant Sakhu* (1941), and the second phase comprises the films and plays that followed her performance after *Sant Sakhu*. Looking at her career through these two distinct phrases is helpful because there is a marked difference in the kind of characters she played in both phases.

As Ashish Rajadhyaksha highlights, she was known for the “demure ingénue look that graced nearly every social Marathi cinema ever since” (239). This can be witnessed through the promotional material of Bombay Talkies’ *Nav Jeevan* (1939), her first film with a major role, which addresses her as “a smiling beauty with a golden voice from Maharashtra” (*Filmindia* 75). The following excerpt from the “Studio Close-Ups” section in the same issue gives further details on the public perception of her:

The new social picture under the production (Bombay Talkies) is called “Nav Jeevan” and Hansa Wadkar, who has hitherto been playing small roles in other companies has been given the golden opportunity of leading this picture under excellent direction. (Patel 59)

The perception of Wadkar as a young actress was that of an individual capable of doing well in a film, navigating its trajectory toward success through her talent and beauty. Over time, this led to similar roles, at times in multi-starrer films with well-known studios.

Eventually, her first collaboration with the reputed Prabhat Film Company came through the film *Sant Sakhu* (1942). A mythological film on the eponymous saint’s life. It tells the story of a woman oppressed and mistreated by her in-laws. A promotional image published in the November 1941 edition of *Filmindia* presents a still of Hansa Wadkar with the caption, “Hansa — Prabhat have made art their

goddess. Here is Hansa flaming with the spirit of Divali. Hansa's titular role in "Sant Sakhu" proved to be very popular" (37). This remark suggests the cementing of her image as the demure leading lady with the success of *Sant Sakhu*, which also led her to be typecast.

After *Sant Sakhu*, she ventured into *Tamasha* films, where she played more boisterous and flamboyant roles, bolstering her fame and making her a household name, synonymous with *lavani*. Her celebrity persona as an actress underwent its first major overhaul after Prabhat's *Ramshastri* (1944). In this film, she was seen as Shyama, a *dasi*<sup>6</sup>. This was unlike her past roles and proved a turning point in her career. Her performance was well-received and led to a collaboration with director V. Shantaram in *Lokshahir Ramjoshi* (1947). This film further paved the way for her entry into *Tamasha* films. The success of her performances in films such as *Pudhcha Paool* (1950), in which she essays a materialistic dancer Mogri, *Mi Tulas Tuzhya Angani* (1955), which sees her in a negative role and *Sangtye Aika* (1959), wherein she plays Chima, a *timasgirin* who vows to avenge her father's death, gave her celebrity image a provincial appeal.

Owing to the primarily rural setting of such films, her performances labelled her as an actress known for playing only specific roles in films with a country setting. As a result, she was not seen as a society lady like her peers but as a woman who represented the context shown in her films. Moreover, as she came from a family of hereditary performers, her social status was in stark contrast with that of her peers like Durga Khote, Leela Chitnis, and Snehaprabha Pradhan. Thus, the *Tamasha* films created an "intertextual framework" (Marshall, *Celebrity and Power* 90) for interpreting her celebrity persona, and she continued to be understood through a palimpsest formed from out of her characters from similar films.

### **2.3 Autobiography as a Site of Performance for Hansa Wadkar**

The autobiography is a genre that greatly eludes easy and concise definitions since it permits the inclusion of different styles and genres of



texts that contain narratives about life or lived experiences. In the Indian subcontinent, particularly, it has a diverse range of presentation formats. This diversity is largely due to the advancements and changes in modes of communication over time. A predominant presentation format that has existed across time is the format of oral narration. Orality, as a feature of narratives told or performed before they are written down, is indeed a significant aspect of Wadkar's autobiography that cannot be overlooked. This changes how a narrative, or autobiographical account, is rendered because it presents a set of features, as identified by K. Ayyappa Paniker (2003), characteristic of narratives found in India. These features include interiorisation, serialisation, fantasisation, cyclicalisation, allegorisation, anonymisation, elasticisation of time, spatialisation, stylisation, and improvisation. This approach indicates that the expectation that the narratives arising from the Indian context would be linear, continuous, and orderly is misguided. Thus, analyses that problematise narratives due to a lack of linearity and coherence ignore the Indian context, privileging staple conventions.

In women's life narratives from the Indian context, especially if they were/are artists and performers, we ought to consider the influence of the performing art form they are most familiar with through their careers, for autobiographies may not strictly originate as written texts in such cases. Moreover, complex variables like literacy, education, and social location must also be factored into when analysing such texts. For professional performers, more than written-down literary works, their exposure to modes of performance — theatre, dance, puppetry, and music, would have more potent influences on how they tell their stories. Therefore, any study of such works should consider these variables quite seriously.

With the understanding that analysing life narratives of autobiographical nature as literary texts alone can be immensely limiting, it is pertinent to also factor in the author's context and lived experiences. For life narratives of cinema artists such as Hansa Wadkar, whose life experiences originate from within a specific regional cultural

space, such as the film industries of Maharashtra, the context becomes a significant factor to be taken into consideration. The context helps to understand why a text has been narrated in a particular manner and whether it continues an existing tradition of telling stories or charts its own territory. In Wadkar's case, this is relevant because her experience with the medium of cinema will influence how her account is structured and rendered. This uniqueness of her story has been problematised by Jasbir Jain, one of the scholars who translated her work into English. She finds the fragmentary nature of Wadkar's autobiography and the collaborative nature of its production complex, making it elude easy classification. Jain alludes to the fragmented self of Hansa Wadkar as one of the key reasons why the autobiography appears non-linear and episodic. She says,

Wadkar's autobiography has been seen as episodic and the self comes through as fragmentary, but underlying all this is a subtlety through which the various transformations of the self are portrayed...The autobiography works through all these selves, conflicts, tensions, contradictory moods and reflects upon truth in a manner that no organised, co-ordinated, and self-initiated autobiography may be able to do. (Jain xiv-xvii)

Jain sees the characteristics of the autobiography, including its fragmentariness, episodic structure, and orality, as contrasting attributes that account for the ill ease of classifying the text into genres. However, she does not pose it as a problem, but instead marks these as features of the autobiography, which makes it distinct and worthy of the readers' attention. However, existing theoretical discourse on autobiography studies problematises the expectation of the self to be rendered as a complete or whole entity devoid of fragmentary characteristics. Sidonie Smith, in her essay, 'Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance', draws from the works of Judith Butler and builds an analogy of the formation of the 'self' and the performance of it in autobiographical texts. Smith says,

Every day, in disparate venues, in response to sundry occasions, in front of precise audiences (even if an audience of one), people assemble, if only temporarily, a “life” to which they assign narrative coherence and meaning and through which they position themselves in historically specific identities...Autobiographical narration begins with amnesia, and once begun, the fragmentary nature of subjectivity intrudes. After all, the narrator is both the same and not the same as the autobiographer, and the narrator is both the same and not the same as the subject of narration. (Smith 108–109)

Here, Smith remarks on the ‘assembling of the self’ in response to specific occasions, implying that the ‘self’ is a part that is being essayed by a person. She also refers to amnesia; alluding to the fact that memory, which is the conduit through which certain anecdotes and situations are brought to the narrative, is highly unreliable. Therefore, as an entity primarily created through language or narrative with information drawn from memory, which is plagued by amnesia, the self will be distinctly fragmented. Smith clarifies this by saying that the autobiographer, the narrator, and the subject of the autobiography are not the same people, which means that as an act of narration, it is subject to the lapses and gaps in memory and any coherence whatsoever given to the idea of the self-manifested through the autobiographical narrative may be an interpreted or mediated version. The self, thus, is assembled using clues from the memory. This correlates with the definition of the persona as a projection of self that is constantly updated as per the circumstance. Therefore, in this work, the self, as presented through autobiographical texts such as Wadkar’s, corresponds to her persona.

Wadkar’s autobiography, *You Ask I Tell*, is the English translation of *Sangtye Aika* by Jasbir Jain (1937–) and Shobha Shinde (1955–). The original text was published in Marathi in 1966 in *Manoos* in a serialised format. *Sangtye Aika* (1959) was the title of one of Wadkar’s most popular films, and it loosely translates to “Listen to what I say”. In 1970, these articles were compiled, revised, and published in a book format by Rajhans Prakashan, a Pune-based publication house, also led by G. Majgaonkar, the editor of *Manoos*. Since its inception, the

text has carried the label of an autobiography. It was published in *Manoos* with the subtitle “*Ek Navinyapurna Atmakatha*,” loosely translating to “an innovative autobiography”. When it reappeared as a book in Marathi in 1970, the subtitle was removed. But for the English edition, a modified version of the subtitle was added, and it reads: *You Ask, I Tell: An Autobiography*. These instances indicate the text’s distinctness from the usual conditions of an autobiographical text. Despite the unique features, the overall structural framework of both the versions of *Sangtye Aika* and *You Ask, I Tell* align with the broader conventions of life writing.

Wadkar’s autobiography demonstrates that she was quite aware of her fame and the accompanying discourse on her life. The episodic nature of the autobiography, as it was published in *Manoos*, ensured consistent audience engagement through its frequency as it allowed Wadkar to unravel the nuances of her life little by little, fuelling the readers’ anticipation, which in turn generated publicity for both the magazine and her status as a celebrity. This approach helped her economise the public consumption of her celebrity persona while regulating the narrative surrounding it. By publishing her story, *Manoos* was also drawing from the readers’ expectation of bringing out a certain kind of “truth” that could be revealed from the life narratives of a performer known for essaying certain types of characters.

But Wadkar not only seemed to be aware of such expectations, but she was also prepared to subvert them. Her autobiographical persona seeks to be likened to her characters from films like *Sant Sakhu*, a woman who is a devoted wife and a mother first and not a woman of a career known for her roles in *Tamasha* films. However, she was repeatedly denied the opportunity to live as she wished. In the autobiography, she mentions multiple incidents to support her claims, such as her initial success and earnings (Wadkar 11, 22, 30), marriage, and pregnancy, following which she wanted to leave the industry permanently (30) but was ultimately coaxed into signing more projects by her husband due to financial mismanagement (30) and the failing

health of her parents due to alcoholism (66, 74). In sharing such episodes from her life, she consciously reorients her image in the reader's mind. Furthermore, towards the end of her book, she assumes the role of a conscientious mentor towards young women who wish to enter the film industry. She tells her readers that entering the industry would ensure the deprivation of a chaste and happy married life, alluding to her own experiences in this context.

The serialised nature of her autobiography emphasised her command over the cinematic mode of storytelling through the fragmentary narrative flow (Jain xiii). As a seasoned artist, Wadkar captures her readers' interest in her narrative arc by not divulging everything at once and instead keeping them waiting for the subsequent instalments, which also helped *Manoos*. She tells the readers of her professional successes and personal losses, portraying a picture of her as a woman who desired to live as a householder, i.e., a wife and mother, but instead had to continually work to support her dependent, alcoholic parents and abusive husband. Through her autobiography, she rejects the perception of her as a decadent star and seeks to be understood as a woman of her time: domestic and renunciant. Wadkar's candour, particularly regarding her amorous relationships, alcoholism, and experiences of mental and physical abuse, is both widely appreciated as a bold act (Chatterjee xxvi) and vehemently criticised as a series of questionable assertions (Santhosh 2012).

The cinematic nature of the narrative, stemming from Wadkar's extensive career as an actor, also found validation through Shyam Benegal's cinematic adaptation, *Bhumika: The Role* (1977). Despite being an adaptation of Wadkar's autobiography, the film features significant departures from the film's narrative. However, Benegal cites Wadkar's text as an inspiration. Benegal's adaptation demonstrates that cinema as a medium of storytelling and entertainment was steadily gaining popularity in the 1970s. Hence, the reach of the stories told through cinema was widespread. Thus, *Bhumika* is the first posthumous

reinterpretation of her persona, and its success profoundly impacted the public perception of Wadkar.

Influenced by the intrigue created by *Bhumika* towards Wadkar's persona, Jasbir Jain collaborated with Shobha Shinde and produced the English translation of Wadkar's autobiography titled *You Ask, I Tell: An Autobiography* (2013). This book was published decades after *Bhumika*'s release and *Sangtye Aika*'s publication, which marks the sustained presence of Wadkar's persona in the collective memory of the public. Through the translation, she was once again brought back into the discourse in the 21st century. The translators drew from the existing versions of Wadkar's personhood and contributed to them through their minute analysis of her narrative style. It further led to renewed curiosities about Wadkar's persona that continue to fuel academic and other kinds of interventions into her celebrityhood and public personhood. Together, these texts constitute the celebrity ecology of Hansa Wadkar, and the following sections present a deeper analysis of each of these texts.

Both the Marathi as well as the English translation of this text are designed to provide a certain impression of Wadkar. For instance, both texts include a few pictures. The original version, as published serially in *Manoos*, features two photographs of Wadkar as part of the segment. Out of these, one is in profile, and the other is captured as a long shot. The photo captured in a long shot portrays her in a reclining posture with two artificially added studio lights focused on her as if alluding to her place in the limelight. The close-up portrait differs slightly from this as we see her as a typical Marathi woman in her mid-forties, thoughtfully gazing ahead. Both photographs seem to have been taken during the time of the interview. Therefore, they do not attempt to present Wadkar as anyone other than how she presented herself when publishing the autobiography, which is consistent with what the autobiography claims to do.

Furthermore, these pictures can be taken as her interpretation of her self, which she also presented through her autobiography. In other words, the autobiography features a clear separation between Wadkar as the narrator and the protagonist of the story. There are several instances where she inserts her own judgements and opinions, often on her own behaviour, relationships, or other general observations pertaining to the professional aspect of her life. These interventions indicate that she was constantly interpreting while narrating, ensuring that the impression of her subjectivised self is created in a specific manner. For example, she uses phrases such as “I understood nothing. At that time, I did not understand the meaning of marriage” (Wadkar 4). “I did not comprehend anything” (4). “Sometimes I was stubbornly childish” (11). “I was in demand” (12). These indicate Wadkar’s awareness and evaluation of her naivete, which she also brings to her readers’ attention, thereby fine-tuning the impression they already may have of her. The photographs are also performative and indicative of this act of introspective retrospection. In other words, her posture and the overall composition of the photographs suggest to her readers a certain maturity about her, which she then puts into words through her evaluations of her past. In an introspective tone, she reflects upon her past behaviour and choices and offers her opinions while narrating the autobiography.

In comparison, *You Ask, I Tell* contains a curated set of images that provide the readers glimpses of Wadkar’s professional life through photographs, which the translators Jain and Shinde sourced from the National Film Archive of India, Pune. This text was published many decades after Wadkar’s death; therefore, Wadkar was not part of its making, and neither had any say regarding the selection of the images. The images were largely selected by the translators, with the intention of curating an impression of Wadkar that they derived from the Marathi versions of the autobiography and her films. The collection of photographs includes some taken from the sets of Wadkar’s films, an image of Minerva Movietone Studios, a double-spread image of the Prabhat Studios set, posters of Wadkar’s films *Modern Youth* (1937),

*Pudhcha Paool* ('The Next Step,' 1950), *Sangtye Aika* ('Listen to What is Being Said,' 1959), and *Sant Sakhu* ('Saint Sakhu', 1941). The front and back covers also contain images from *Sangtye Aika* and *Pudhcha Paool*. Thus, Wadkar is portrayed as a professional — an actor with decades of experience working in a string of successful films produced by major studios of the time. Since one of the translators, Jasbir Jain's early interest in Wadkar's story stemmed from her interest in exploring the life of a female artist, the translated text's efforts to emphasise Wadkar's professional life are visible through the curated images.

These two distinct impressions of Wadkar created by the iterations of the same story indicate that autobiographies are crafted to create a certain impression about their subjects. As a celebrity autobiography, the text is written with a specific readership in mind. The translation helped widen this reach by also bringing into the fold people who are not familiar with Marathi but are aware of Wadkar and/or her films or the studios she worked with. Thus, Wadkar's autobiography, regardless of its iteration, is a narrative consciously produced for consumption by a specific audience. In such cases, as Sidonie Smith explains, the audience is constituted by "a community of people for whom certain discourses of identity and truth make sense" (Smith 110). Thus, to connect with such an audience, it is imperative that the autobiography projects an image of Wadkar that is recognisable or familiar. This, in turn, means that the autobiographical narrative would contain a "specific recitation of identity" which "involves the inclusion of certain identity contents and the exclusion of others; the incorporation of certain narrative itineraries and intentionalities, the silencing of others; the adoption of certain autobiographical voices, the muting of others" (110). It challenges the labels of candidness that are associated with Wadkar's autobiography specifically because it has been branded as a very frank and unostentatious narrative where the actor does not attempt to hide anything. On the contrary, the text contains carefully measured information designed to highlight certain aspects of her private life and to leave out certain impressions on other elements. These



narrative fragments are then threaded together with her professional experiences through the narrative. Yet, the association of candidness and authorial control of Wadkar is part of the Marathi texts, and the same is reiterated in the translated autobiography. This appears to be a strategic move to generate interest in the text, as celebrity autobiographies are always subject to the audience's interest in uncovering truths about them, and the impression of authorial control over a narrative reassures the readers of the genuineness of the narrative.

Wadkar's involvement in the editorial process is not evident in the text itself, as it is narrated in the first-person mode and does not indicate the presence of the editorial team to whom she narrated her story. In a note by the editor, G. Majgaokar, the readers are given insights into the various events and routes associated with the process. Needless to say, Majgaokar insists that the final say in selecting and curating what went into the articles and the book rested with her:

The details of the interview were decided and two or three representatives of *Manoos* would write down what Hansabai was telling, word by word. She would eloquently tell us everything; we would write it down. Though we would feel tired while writing, Hansabai would go on tirelessly. Whatever she said, we wrote. All her memories were collected and connected sequentially. We would then read it back to her. After making the corrections and changes suggested by Hansabai, we would read it to her again. After three weeks of continuous toil, this autobiography was finally complete — as told by Hansabai — in her own original words<sup>7</sup>. (41)

These details are designed to highlight Wadkar's narrative autonomy, particularly in deciding the extent to which she allows her readers' gaze into her life. Her narrative is like a planned and rehearsed performance of her persona, which may have moments of improvisation in the form of interesting anecdotes. Still, overall, it is carefully constructed with a particular outcome in mind.

Furthermore, these aspects of the narrative do not align with Jain's assertion that Wadkar's narrative is an unplanned autobiography

that has been rendered without any agendas. Texts like autobiographies and memoirs are always purpose-driven. Amelie Hastie indicates three primary tropes familiar to autobiographical writings by actresses in particular.

First, of course, is the stated goal to set the record straight: these works, which spring from memory, are counter histories, works that mean to correct institutionalized histories about their subjects. Second, some writers act as self-conscious producers of the genre; that is, like the critics to follow them, they comment on the complex production of a life history, recognizing the emergence of both patterns and digressions at once. Third is the reproduction of a teleological narrative common to much fictional film: most actresses trace a directional path that led them to become stars. (72–73)

Out of the paths mentioned by Hastie, Hansa Wadkar's autobiography follows the first one, wherein she attempts to set the record straight. This means that the objective of her autobiography is to correct the kind of public image the readers have of her by presenting her version. Moreover, as mentioned earlier, the autobiography has been consistently described as one that Wadkar narrates in her own voice, which also grants her a certain autonomy in convincing her readers of its authenticity.

Furthermore, in continuing the discussion on the usage of photographs, it is interesting to note that there are no images from her personal life in any version of the text. What we encounter in the autobiography is a continuing performance of her public persona, which is also the role she plays while narrating it. In other words, the autobiography is narrated by Hansa Wadkar, who is a character being played by the skilled actress's self that exists outside the text as the autobiographer. Therefore, the autobiography itself is a site of performance where, by telling her readers the 'truth' about her life, she attempts to re-orient them towards her interpretation of her self.

Jain's ill-ease of classifying it as an autobiography may also arise from the inadequateness of the existing theoretical conventions of

autobiographical life narratives to offer tools to appraise a text like Wadkar's critically. Firstly, this text did not originate from within a post-1770 European context, and the narrative conventions that the author would be familiar with are quite different from the context specified by Lejeune (4). Secondly, as can be observed in Paniker's assessment, being a narrative rendered by a person from a regional Indian context, it tends to give more weightage to space over time, as per the existing conventions of storytelling, resulting in inconsistencies in its form and content. Finally, as a performer-author, the narration is a performance which is profoundly informed by her area of expertise, i.e., the cinematic narrative.

The impact of cinema on literature has been part of the scholarly discourse in the past few decades. Primarily, the influence of the narrative techniques of cinema, such as montage<sup>8</sup>, changes in perspective, scenes, and shots like close-ups, have been used by scholars to analyse structurally and study forms of literature such as novels. Martin Puchner refers to Sergei Eisenstein's essay that traces the influence of the novels of the nineteenth century on cinema. Puchner remarks that the "relation between film and the novel has had a history of multiple crossings and translations since both depend on a narrative as well as a visual syntax" (1); according to him, then, it is hardly surprising that there is textual visuality in genres of literature like the novel and visual narrative in cinema. Let us look at the influence of the medium of cinema on an autobiographical text like Wadkar's.

#### **2.4 Scripting 'Hansa Wadkar': Looking at Autobiographical Strategies**

Hansa Wadkar's autobiography is useful for witnessing how celebrities have certain autobiographical strategies with which they attempt to modify their public image. It follows one of the three tropes identified by Amelie Hastie: "[f]irst, of course, is the stated goal to set the record straight: these works, which spring from memory, are counter histories, works that mean to correct institutionalised histories about their subjects" (72).

Wadkar's autobiography attempts to do exactly that. She foregrounds the values of agency that are extended through the autobiographical medium. Known for her bold, boisterous, and flamboyant roles in *Tamasha* films and her troubled personal life, Hansa Wadkar was understood as a decadent star and a typical victim of the dubious ways of the film industry.

To reiterate, Wadkar's autobiography was written in collaboration with the editors at *Manoos*. It traces her journey from her birth to her entry into films at the age of ten and through to her life as a householder in her late forties. She narrates her story with an awareness of her readership and confidence in her talent as a performer, which she uses to distance herself from her celebrity image. The later chapters in her autobiography indicate this awareness of her perception as a film star. She says, "I had given up all my bad habits. I was happy that I could do so but people in the film industry did not believe that I had given up my old ways" (Wadkar 92). This oft-repeated claim of renouncing old habits and having "turned towards God" (Wadkar 94) is a part of her emphatic appeal to her readers to connect the image of Hansa Wadkar to the persona she is crafting through her autobiography.

Intending to convince the reader of her 'true' persona, she tactfully states her affinity towards her performance in *Sant Sakhu*. In multiple instances within the autobiography, she describes Sakhu as her favourite role. She says, "I merged in that role so completely that I forgot my own existence. I lost my identity. I began to think I was Sakhu" (Wadkar 35). In other words, she asks the readers not to lose the connection between Hansa Wadkar and Sakhu and to continue to interpret with the image of her performance as Sakhu in mind. To support her claim, she additionally talks about her positive experience while shooting for the film. She shares how she made wiser financial investments, avoided indulging in alcohol, and was mentally and physically focused on doing her job well. These instances indicate that she was at her optimal self while shooting for *Sant Sakhu*.

Furthermore, she also shares about her repeated attempts to quit working in cinema to live like a housewife, which were painfully thwarted by her family's financial mismanagement and abusive attitude. She reveals in the early chapters of the autobiography that she saw marriage as a potential way out of her career.

When married life began, I thought I would stop working in films; the film line was a nagging irritation in my life. We would now spend a happy married life. I was content. But this was not to be...In the end, I decided to resume work in movies. A simple, contended family life did not seem to be in my destiny. (Wadkar 21–22)

Here, she shares how, despite her best efforts, her circumstances and family members did not cooperate. She had hoped that a pregnancy would allow her to finally live the life she wanted, only to be disappointed more than once. Then, she tried to quit again after the death of Himanshu Rai (1892–1940) while on contract with Bombay Talkies, only to return to films on a temporary contract with Prabhat Talkies shortly after (Wadkar 30). She again tried to quit after giving birth to her child after *Sant Sakhu*, and still, her family forced her to return to work (40). Undeterred in her pursuit of domestic life, she left home with a man she met at a hotel and lived as his unofficial third wife in rural Maharashtra (76) for a few years.

Another facet of Wadkar's autobiography is that it is more focused on the ordinary aspects of her life — i.e., it facilitates an understanding of her as an individual with family and relationships like the members of their audience. Her profession is considered a job and not something extraordinary. Her personal life is marred with tragic moments, which are carefully portrayed through the narrative, ensuring that she does not come across as merely a victim of her circumstances. Scholars like Meera Kosambi blame her tragic personal life and private moments of agony on her obstinate nature (Kosambi 362) and overlook the fact that these specific moments are strategically curated to give a certain impression of Wadkar and her genuine attempts to pursue a different life. Instead of presenting herself as the victim, Wadkar

informs the reader of her sincere attempts to find a loving companion and live a domestic life, which only works out much later. By insisting on her domestic desires, she portrays herself as a woman of her time with family-centric values. The primacy of these values is also evident from her approach to her professional engagements. For instance, she speaks highly of her experiences with two of the most prominent film studios of her time — Bombay Talkies and Prabhat Film Company — as organisations where people looked after each other like family. She shares her experience working with Bombay Talkies during her pregnancy as follows:

Compared to the family, the girls at Bombay Talkies were caring, even the men were very considerate. The girls would get different things for me to eat. Their concern gave me a sense of deep happiness. It was more pleasant to spend time with those girls than with my family.  
(Wadkar 27)

These anecdotes illustrate the significance she gave to the idea of a family through her positive experiences working in places that espouse similar ethos. However, it does not suggest that her professional experiences were only largely positive. In her autobiography, she also clarifies that her professional success came at the cost of personal happiness. Thus, she advises young girls against pursuing an acting career. She says:

My experience makes me say this. I can claim with authority that the moment a woman joins this profession, no matter how virtuous and pure, a Sati Savitri or a pativrata — she cannot remain the same. The love of family, husband and the film business cannot go together.  
(Wadkar 101)

This excerpt from the very end of her autobiography makes the narrative come full circle, starting with a discussion of her family and ending with an emphasis on the importance of a loving husband and family for a woman. Thus, through frequent iterations of affinity towards domestic life, Wadkar consciously moves away from her celebrity image as a decadent star and victim of the hedonistic lifestyle stereotypically

attributed to film actors. By making the relatively unseen and ‘private’ aspects of her life evident, she complicates her audience’s reductive understanding of her. She offers a solution through her carefully curated persona in the autobiography, which is written in her voice (Majgaokar 41). Her authoring of the autobiography, therefore, is her attempt to re-negotiate with her public image as a celebrity.

Meera Kosambi additionally remarks that this tendency of early Marathi film actresses’ autobiographies to “resemble other women’s narratives” implies a lack of “performative identities” as they merely seek to portray themselves as ‘women of their times’ and only “secondarily as actresses” (Kosambi 350). Similarly, Jasbir Jain also claims that Wadkar’s autobiography is an unpretentious narrative where she does not hold back, implying, like Kosambi, a lack of performative identity and intent (Jain xv–xvii). While Kosambi is correct in saying that early film actresses present themselves as women of their times, she fails to read the autobiographical selves as performative identities. Similarly, Jain misses seeing Wadkar’s act of narration with carefully curated detail as a performative act designed to construct a specific impression.

In Wadkar’s case, she crafts her persona in a mix of professional, personal, and intimate registers, where she devotes a significant portion of the narrative to craft the personal and intimate registers of her persona performance. Overall, her narrative appears balanced between the three registers, but a unique aspect of her narrative technique is that the entire autobiography is narrated in a cinematic style. Even her life’s personal and intimate aspects have been narrated cinematically, ultimately emphasising her professional register. The cinematic narrative style characterised by its fragmented structure, tendencies to indulge in flashbacks and flash-forwards, and insertion of dialogues all ensure that the autobiography reflects the abilities of Hansa Wadkar as a professional. On the other hand, her emphasis on the personal and intimate registers of performance shows her as a woman with a strong

connection to her family life. Like her peers, she also presents herself as a woman closely connected to her family but reluctant to forego her career.

In the last section of the autobiography, she makes remarks on the addictive nature of a career in acting, “[o]nce the intoxication of working with paint on your face and the accompanying experience, the accompanying atmosphere, takes possession, it becomes an addiction. Life without it is an unbearable longing” (Wadkar 102). Her reference to her profession as an addiction extends from a discussion highlighting the evils of working in this domain as a woman. These sentences suggest that she was passionate about her career, but she did not consider it the factor defining her identity as an individual. The last chapter, in particular, suggests that she would rather have her readers view her as a woman who is happier when surrounded by family. She goes on to highlight all the positive lifestyle changes she has made since leaving her career to show that she does not identify with that persona of hers anymore, even though she is proud of her professional achievements. Her autobiography suggests that that is not her “real” self. Instead, she wants her readers to see how she was always actively trying to live like a householder, like any other 20th-century married woman. Her desire to be understood in this manner can be sensed from her insistence on having changed her habits and routine by adapting to a more home-centric life with Rajan Javale.

In the autobiography, she also reflects on her fame as she recalls being thronged by crowds at times (Wadkar 100) — a reflection on the extraordinariness and fame that her profession brought her. However, in distancing herself and her persona from her profession, she is remarking that she would prefer to be seen as a family-centric woman and parent for the ordinary aspects of her life. This is an example of Wadkar’s intent as the author to emphasise ordinariness so that she can maintain her relatability as a public figure. Marshall (*Celebrity and Power* 86), John Ellis (95–96), and Pramod K Nayar (54) concur that an emphasis on the



extraordinariness of the actor distances them from their audience. It is to remedy this and to connect with their audience that celebrities often take to publishing autobiographies and crafting their persona in a specific manner. Authors like Gayatri Chatterjee argue that such qualities of autobiographical writings allow the readers to locate the text within the rich tradition of women's autobiographical writings from India, where the author's subjectivity is presented relationally with family members (Khote xxv). As Chatterjee rightly observes, this points to the complex process of formation of women's subjectivity. A glance at the published interviews and biographies of more recent actresses, such as Sharmila Tagore (1944–) in *Film World* (April 1976) or Hema Malini (1948–) in *Film World* (January 1976), will indicate that female celebrities are always portrayed and understood relationally. There is visible anxiety on the part of Indian actresses, regardless of their generation, to be seen as individuals with an obvious domestic side to justify the credibility and respectability of their profession.

By looking at Wadkar's autobiographical strategies, it is possible to derive an understanding of what it meant to be a female professional in an artistic field during her time. She was among the early group of women who entered the workforce as professionals across diverse fields, so they had to navigate their sociocultural spaces during a transitory phase in Indian history (1930s–1950s). Such women's identities were also in flux as they had to negotiate with the traditional perceptions of women as sisters, wives, and mothers who were expected to be homely and responsible for the nurturing and propagation of cultural values to progeny while finding their footing as professionals. Besides, the actresses, in particular, were engaged in a profession with a certain social stigma and were instrumental in redeeming their public perception as professionals and that of the entire industry as a respectable place of work.

## **2.5 A Cinematic Narrative: Looking at Wadkar's autobiographical strategies**

The different versions of Wadkar's autobiography were published in 1966, 1970, and 2013, and although innovative, hers was not the first instance where the lines between textual and cinematic storytelling were blurred. In his essay, Martin Puchner (1999) shows how the novel influenced cinema, which in turn influenced novels by referring to Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1856) and Charles Dickens' oeuvre (1836–1870). Puchner elaborates on the influence of cinema on the novel by giving examples of Adam Thorpe's *Ulverton* (1992) and *Still* (1995). His evaluation of "cinematic novels" helps us understand that the cinematic mode's availability and ubiquitousness as a storytelling model permeated not only novels but also other forms of literature, including life narratives.

In India, cinema's arrival radically changed how stories were told and consumed by assimilating existing regional conventions, where visual elements were highlighted in the narratives. This is evident from the beginning of cinema in India, with the age of silent films and the initial phase of the talkies, during which cinemas focused on mythological stories. Such films utilised the visual and fantastic aspects of Indian mythological stories and brought them to life through the cinematic format. The regional narrative conventions specific to India, including those followed in Marathi theatre and other performing art forms from the region like *Tamasha*, strongly impacted cinematic storytelling. The formats of such performing art forms were carried over to cinema despite newer technologies coming into the picture. This can be seen not only in the selection of stories that were adapted into the new format, like Phalke's mythological films *Raja Harishchandra* (1913) and *Mohini Bhasmasur* (1914) or Prabhat Films' *Udaya-kal* (1930).

Similarly, the influence of the existing regional theatrical storytelling formats on the cinematic mode can be noticed in how the cinematic narration of the plot was conceptualised and executed. For instance, films like Phalke's emphasised theatricality, effects, dialogue delivery, costumes, and movement like stage plays, even in front of the camera. The visuality inherent in both the narratives and the storytelling

conventions was enhanced through the instruments of cinema, such as the camera, lighting, sets, sound and playback in the 1930s. Therefore, storytelling became more visual, life-like, and captivating. By the time Wadkar was drafting her autobiography, she had an extended exposure to the cinematic medium and the experience of working in biopics. Some of her most noted films of Wadkar's career have been biographical films like *Sant Sakhu* (1941), *Ram Shastri* (1944), *Lokshahir Ramjoshi* (1947), and *Sant Janabai* (1949). She says,

I regard Sant Sakhu, Ramjoshi, Pudhcha Paool and Mee Tulas Tuzhya Angani as marking the four important stages of my film career. Sant Sakhu is my favourite movie. I like my role in it the best. In Ram Joshi I worked under the direction of Anna (V. Shantaram). (60)

Her experience working with films of this genre informed her how the cinematic medium facilitates the telling of life narratives and how to present them through the cinematic medium best. Her awareness of the narrative progression of the cinematic format is also revealed through certain opinions that she shares in her autobiography; for instance, she recalls her disagreement with the way a song sequence was shot for her film *Sangtye Aika* (1959):

Jaishree Gadkar and I had to sing a long duet. It was a very long song...The shooting was completed in two and a half days as Jaishreebai had to go out of town at the time. She was made to stand on one side and all her shots were filmed. In the whole duet we did not have a single shot together. What kind of pleasure would the performers or the viewers derive from this kind of work? (97)

Her opinion reflects her understanding of the technicalities of filmmaking, particularly its storytelling aspects, like scene composition, which can help determine how certain parts of the film can be shot to derive better impact. These experiences are transmitted onto her autobiographical narration, and consequently, her autobiography reflects her skills as an experienced artist through its narrative framework. Therefore, her autobiographical narrative follows one of the

significant tropes found in autobiographical accounts of actresses highlighted by Amelie Hastie (2007):

These works produce and display knowledge outside of film culture, but they also rely on their authors' roles in film history to reveal this knowledge; film culture and history thus become a platform for other displays or embodiments of knowledge and expertise, often entangled with a kind of expert self-reflection...we can track the inherent compatibility between autobiography and the subject's expertise in her field, whether that's the production of films or of stardom, the hobby of making fudge, or, as is more often the case, some combination of practices. (Hastie 2)

As Hastie argues, the autobiographer's expertise in her professional domain significantly influences the act of autobiographical narration, even in how she reflects on her past. Therefore, as a celebrity autobiography of an actress, Hansa Wadkar's autobiography is also an example of her contemplation on her own image both within and outside of cinema. It reflects how she thinks and articulates this evaluation of her own persona, which has the most visible impact on the medium:

I do not wish to think of the past but when I do remember, it moves like a panorama in front of my eyes, like a movie of my life. Where was I and where have I reached! (Wadkar 100)

Her evaluation of her journey is apparent in these words. Another cinematic description of her fame follows this —

I remember those days when people used to collect on the roads to see me. The scene is before my eyes when people thronged both sides of the road to see me pass. It still makes me feel on top of the world. Even at the time, it gave me the feeling of walking on air. (100–101)

The word 'scene' stands out in the extract above. It shows that while she is referring to instances from her life, she is reassessing and reconstructing them through a tool of cinematic narration — the scene. When one reads this extract, it can be immediately translated into visuals where people throng the streets to see a celebrity. Such scenes often appear in films that feature the making of a film as part of their story

even today. Recent examples from Indian cinema where one can see such instances of celebrities being thronged by a large group of fans to reflect fame and stardom include scenes from *Om Shanti Om* (2007), *Katha Parayumbol* (2007)/*Billu* (2009), *Fan* (2016) and *Jailer* (2023).

Another cinematic instance from her text comes from the fifth chapter, wherein she refers to the making of *Ramjoshi* and quotes a song, the shooting process of which was physically and mentally taxing for her. Interestingly, Wadkar does not describe the choreography but directly shares her experience shooting the song. Considering the oral narration of the autobiography, it only seems apt that Wadkar may have enacted this part with the dialogue spoken as she prepared it for the film, and the editors from *Manoos* may have taken down the dialogue that she narrated.

Wadkar was a trained singer and mentions having rendered playback vocals for various films. As *Ramjoshi* is one of her well-known works, she directly references the scene, quoting from it to help her readers remember it exactly. In the autobiography, this segment contains excerpts from a dialogue (*sawaal-jawab*/question-answer) between Ram Joshi, played by Jairam Shiledar (1915–1992), and Bayabai, the character Wadkar was essaying.

You have spent your life reading the *panchang*

Why do you fill us with fear?

How long will your firefly sparkle

Before my crescent bindi? (51)

She adds that she and Shiledar had completely immersed themselves in their roles. Inserting excerpts from the film in the form of dialogue or song lyrics also contributes to the narrative's overall fragmentedness of Wadkar's autobiography. It lends the narrative a cinematic movement where it progresses scene by scene. These "scenes" from Wadkar's life outside cinema are interspersed with those from her working life. In a similar vein, Amelie Hastie lists the memoirs of Hollywood stars like

Louise Brooks (1906–1985), Gloria Swanson (1899–1983), Lillian Gish (1893–1993) and Ethel Waters (1896–1977) as examples to indicate that when actresses tell their stories, be it of success or decline, they tend to “reflect upon themselves as images” (2), which is how the discourse of celebrities moves within the public domain. The cinematic, fragmented narrative style shows that the autobiography moves through scenes where Wadkar’s reflections of herself are revealed as cinematic fragments including stills or scenes. She states, “[p]eople adored me, critics praised me. I earned a name for myself in the film industry. I achieved fame. I may be neglected today, but the memories of my glorious past are engraved in the mind” (100–101). Thus, like Hastie’s remark on the autobiographical writings of Hollywood stars, Wadkar’s narrative also traces a complete arc of her life as an actor, which includes narration of phases of success and decline.

In the excerpt quoted above, we can see that Wadkar, as the autobiographer, uses the narrative voice to distance herself from her subjectivised self, which is the central character of the autobiography. Like Katja Lee (2022) highlights the distinctness of the three “I”s in autobiographical narration, Wadkar’s distancing of herself from the “I” representing her subjectivised self allows her to appear more objective, letting her examine, appreciate and criticise her autobiographical self from past to present which generates an impression of truth as the autobiography is narrated in her voice. In this sense, Wadkar’s autobiography complies with the narrative strategies of female film professionals’ autobiographical writings. Hastie adds, “[t]his trope — of a woman contemplating her own image on and offscreen — inevitably persists across the memoirs of women who worked in film production and later wrote about their experiences” (2).

Thus, working in cinema is a powerful experience that allows professionals to locate their present selves at a somewhat objective distance and see their past selves through images projected from their memories and experiences. It adds a performative dimension to the text and makes the autobiographical self-performative as well. In such

autobiographies, the performer performs herself for an audience, engaging with this performance, albeit through a different medium — the written word.

In general, as scholars like Anshu Malhotra and Siobhan Lambert-Hurley have discussed in their book *Speaking of the Self* (2015), there is a strong significance of the context generally in South Asian women performers' autobiographical self-fashioning:

... if we look at autobiographical practice as a “self in performance,” we begin to appreciate the historical, social, and cultural milieu in which the self was imbricated, and what enabled gendered subjectivity and speech. (2)

Both Wadkar's life and her idea of ‘self’ were created within the cultural context of cinema, particularly because she started her career as an actor at the age of ten. Thus, her knowledge of storytelling is primarily derived from cinema, which makes the narrative framework of the autobiography resemble that of a film.

Furthermore, Wadkar's autobiography is also consistent with the five components of a narrative are highlighted by Gustav Freytag (1816–1895) in his Freytag's Pyramid, which is one of the conventional ways in which a dramatic narrative — both for film and theatre are constructed. Wadkar's autobiography can also be divided into exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. The first two chapters of *You Ask I Tell* constitute the exposition, wherein the readers are introduced to Wadkar and given details about her family background, her childhood home in Sawantwadi<sup>9</sup>, her family's financial circumstances, which led her at the age of ten to join the film industry and work instead of completing her education. These chapters also give us a detailed account of her early experience in films and the remuneration she was receiving. Chapters three to seven correspond to “rising action” where she elaborates on her experiences as a Marathi film actor working on renowned projects and being associated with the most well-known studios of the time. These chapters trace her growing

fame, her growth as an actor, her financial independence, and the repercussions of all these factors on her personal life. They also include accounts of her multiple miscarriages, the constant financial obstacles that prevented her from leaving cinema to live the life of a householder, and the gradual disintegration of her married life.

Chapter eight marks the climax of her autobiography, wherein she leaves her husband and child following a fight and moves into a hotel. She meets Joshi and chooses to go with him to his home in Marathawada<sup>10</sup> instead of going back home to Mumbai. This is yet another bold attempt on her part to secure a family-centric life, which she was not able to attain through her marriage with Bandarkar. However, the oppressive patriarchal regime of Joshi's Marathawada household only makes her feel stifled, because of which she begins to think of ways to escape and return to her life in Mumbai. At the end of three years, she manages to sneak a letter to Bandarkar through a fisherwoman, asking him to come and rescue her from Joshi's house. Her return to Mumbai is also an emotionally traumatising journey as she is raped by the magistrate, ruining her hopes of peacefully re-entering her old life.

Chapter nine corresponds to the concept of falling action and includes accounts of her experiences upon returning to Mumbai, attempts to go back to film and theatre and working on a few projects. It also tells of her experience reconnecting with her daughter and finding a supportive partner in Rajan Jawale, with whom she spent the rest of her life. Chapter ten marks the resolution of her narrative arc with her returning to her present, telling her readers about how she left her old habits, changed herself entirely, and finally achieved what she always wanted — life as a family-oriented householder after choosing to live with Jawale. She also reflects on how much the work ethics of the Marathi film industry have changed and makes her displeasure evident regarding the general behaviour of film personnel during that time. She compares the studio environment in Marathi cinema of the 1960s and 70s with that which she experienced during the peak of her career. Her



autobiography ends with her advice discouraging young women from pursuing a career in cinema, taking the example of her own self and mentioning that a quiet family life and a successful career in cinema do not go in tandem.

The components of Freytag's pyramid are not only found in the overall narrative structure of the book but also in the narration of specific incidents. For instance, the following fragment from chapter two resembles a dramatic sequence from a film:

One day I was performing puja in honour of Lord Shankar. I liked performing Lord Shankar's puja right from the days of my childhood. In the middle of this, my mother and I started a violent quarrel. Fuming, I picked up the gods and said, 'I will leave home.' This caused a miscarriage of my three-month pregnancy. As a result, I had to stay with my mother for the next three months. (21)

In the above excerpt, particularly the descriptions of actions as they are interspersed with what was said, make it a very vivid scene for the reader to imagine. Thus, Wadkar's experience in cinema is visibly portrayed through her approach to storytelling with a clear cinematic vision; in individual fragments of continuous narratives of any episode, such as the one mentioned above, there is a beginning, middle, and end, and it is possible to break it down into components that would align with the components of Freytag's pyramid. Wadkar's narration also incorporates elements of theatricality and melodrama, which moves the readers as they would experience while watching a film. The text constantly converses with the reader like a performance piece does with its audience.

The fragmented, non-linear quality of the text also resembles the movement of cinematic narrative as it progresses through disconnected components such as shots, stills, and sequences. When edited and compiled together, the entire text conveys a complete narrative, just like in Wadkar's case. Hastie rightly argues, "...the woman's expertise concerning her own life story and her place of labour ultimately manifests itself in a kind of knowledge about the production of history,

one that inherently intertwines fact and fiction, reminiscence and prophecy, the temporality and the structure of film forms” (3). Thus, it is expected that the medium of cinema would have a significant influence on her narrative; after all, life narratives are also read as life histories, which not only talk about the lived experiences of a person but also include significant clues about the context within which the author’s subjectivity is formed, which in Wadkar’s case was the Marathi film industry between 1933 and the 1950s. In telling her story, she also delivers what *Manoos* initially wanted — an insider’s perspective on Marathi cinema, thus revealing her professional expertise.

## **2.6 Rescripting Hansa Wadkar: Shyam Benegal’s *Bhumika: The Role* (1977)**

In 1977, noted film director Shyam Benegal (1934–2024) made the film *Bhumika: The Role*, inspired by *Sangtye Aika*. Owing to Wadkar’s autobiography’s existing unique narrative format, which resembles that of a cinematic narrative, the text finds a natural counterpart in the film. Interestingly, Wadkar’s reassessment and dismantling of the genre of autobiography by giving a cinematic structure and narrative progression to it finds resonance in the narrative format of the film, which, too, progresses through fragments. In this sense, *Bhumika* maintains its fidelity to Wadkar’s text while also showing how an actress recollects their life experiences. Benegal’s film presents a reinterpretation of Hansa Wadkar as Usha/Urvashi. Veteran actress Smita Patil essays this role.

Though cited only as an inspiration, by adapting the story into a film, Benegal, Satyadev Dubey, and Girish Karnad<sup>11</sup>, validated Wadkar’s vision and perception of her life as a cinematic panorama (Wadkar 100). Benegal also hints at this by alluding to the cinematic quality of the autobiography in his interview with the British Film Institute and discusses the significance of the text in the way it tells us about a very transient and exciting age in the Indian film industry<sup>12</sup>. Benegal mentions his realisation of the cinematic potential of the text and his unconventional approach to making a film based on it.

Interestingly, when the film was in its initial stages of scripting, the makers could not procure the required amount of film stock. This led them to resort to using a combination of different film stocks, including tinted black and white, black and white, ORWO<sup>13</sup>, and Kodak monopak<sup>14</sup> colour stock. Benegal mentions in his interview that because of this unique situation, he decided to rearrange the narrative sequence of the entire film in a way so that they could make the best use of the available film stock. He decided to construct the narrative timeline of the film according to stock so that each type of film could correspond to a particular period from Wadkar's life and also to the kind of film stock that was being used in the film industry during that time.

Benegal saw in Wadkar a guide to the past of the Indian film industry, which he wanted to bring to life. His unique approach to shooting, with a combination of film stock, was also his way of validating Wadkar's autobiography as an important source of information on Marathi and Indian cinema between the 1930s and 1950s. Besides, this unconventional approach puts the film in a dialogue with the text. For instance, in the autobiography, there are many instances where Wadkar distances her authorial self from herself as the subject of the autobiography and tries to weigh and evaluate her past actions, arriving at thoughtful conclusions and judgements. In the film, Benegal re-creates these moments of deep introspection through mirror scenes.

The nine mirror scenes in the film, not all of which are of the protagonist, have been placed at critical junctures. Usha's mirror scenes also mark moments of change and resolution, where she resolves to respond in particular ways after reflecting on her actions thus far. For instance, in the autobiography, the moment she leaves her husband before going away with Joshi is critical. Wadkar mentions that she stayed at a hotel suggested by Rajan Jawale, where she met Joshi. In the film, Usha leaves her husband and goes to a hotel, standing in front of the mirror for a critical moment. In the autobiography, this is the point where Wadkar expresses her dilemma — whether to go back to her

dysfunctional life or to run away and start anew, both alternatives weighing heavily on her mind. The scene from *Bhumika* conveys this dilemma through a closeup of Usha looking at her reflection in the mirror without any verbal communication through dialogue. Patil's performance conveys to the audience the conundrum Usha was facing and how she was also questioning her act of leaving her husband, wondering whether it was the right thing to do. Wadkar mentions in the text that she used to be critical of women who were leaving their husbands or deciding to divorce them and points out the irony of how she ultimately had to leave Bandarkar after realising that their marriage was irreparably damaged. The text, in this manner, converses with the film, which complements it through its visuals. In other words, *Bhumika* helps the readers get familiar with Wadkar's autobiography and *see* certain aspects of Wadkar's life that the autobiography only tells.

But the film does not call itself a direct adaptation, and neither does it go beyond a certain point in Wadkar's narrative; it also does not feature an interview-type or conversational meta-narrative as it happened with the drafting of her autobiography. Nevertheless, similar to the text, the film also progresses through a network of memories through flashbacks and flash-forwards. The time leaps in Wadkar's narrative are a feature of it being an orally narrated recollection from her life, and Benegal re-creates it through his creative usage of film stock and editing. In the film, Usha's recollections of her past are not always narrated.

However, it is important to acknowledge that while Benegal honoured certain aspects of Wadkar's autobiography, he also rewrote many parts of it, misleading the viewer on the overall persona of Hansa Wadkar. Mainly, his rewriting of the protagonist and moulding her into a "feminist icon" distances the film from the text. This rewriting was Benegal's way of responding to his socio-political context of the 1970s. In its entirety, the film has many more instances of departure from Wadkar's text, be it subplots or characters. For example, in the autobiography, Wadkar mentions that her parents hail from the

community of hereditary practitioners of performing arts, with her father descending from the *Kalavantin*<sup>15</sup> community and her mother being the daughter of a devadasi. In contrast, in the film, Usha's father is a Brahmin. Another instance comes from the seventh chapter of the autobiography, in which Wadkar mentions an incident where she went for a ride on a motorcycle with director-actor Raja Paranjape (1910–1979). At the time, she was in Pune for the shooting of *Sant Janabai*, and both she and Paranjape were under the influence of alcohol.

When our drinking session was over, Rajabhau took out his motorbike, I got on behind him and Rajabhau started to drive at a terrific speed...I egged him on, 'Drive faster, drive faster.' Rajabhau pressed the accelerator...Moving at such a high speed, the motorbike suddenly skidded. We were both thrown off. Rajabhau was badly injured. I, however, got away unscathed. (65)

Wadkar mentions her friendship with Raja Paranjape since working on *Pudhcha Paol*, clarifying that she had only worked with him on two films — *Pudhcha Paol* and *Parijatak* (1951). She states that she had much trust and respect for him as a director and that that was all there was to their relationship. While Wadkar is silent on the nuances of her relationship with Paranjape, Benegal takes creative liberties and interprets this relationship differently for the film. He portrays Sunil and Usha in an extramarital affair. Sunil is the character based on Paranjape and is essayed by Naseeruddin Shah (1950–).

Furthermore, he also changes the motorbike accident incident that Wadkar mentions entirely and instead rewrites it as a failed suicide pact between Usha and Sunil, wherein they book a hotel room to die by an overdose of sleeping pills. In the film, Usha takes the pills, but Sunil does not, and when the pills fail, and Usha wakes up, she finds a note from Sunil admitting to his inability to see their promise through. However, with this incident, as with the motorcycle incident, their relationship ends.

One more instance of Benegal's significant departure from Wadkar's narrative happens in the part where she writes to Bandarkar

from Marathawada to rescue her from Joshi's house. In the autobiography, Wadkar mentions the disturbing account of being raped by a magistrate while leaving Marathawada. Benegal removes this instance from the corresponding sequence of the film but writes it into an earlier scene portraying a forced abortion. The film shows that Usha, like Wadkar, had to undergo multiple abortions of her pregnancies because of her husband's lack of faith in her fidelity. However, Wadkar does not mention any instance of sexual assault during such medical processes. Additionally, Joshi, in Wadkar's narrative, is a man with two surviving wives and a few children. In the film, the character inspired by Joshi, Kale, essayed by Amrish Puri (1932–2005), is shown to have a bedridden wife, a mother, and one child.

These departures from the text do indicate Benegal's creative liberty, but they also take away from Wadkar's autobiographical agency. Despite the rewritings, the characters and the situations can quite clearly be traced to the book. However, the similarities notwithstanding, Benegal only cites Wadkar's text as a source of inspiration for the film, denying the text its rightful status as a source of adaptation. This endangers Wadkar's autonomy as the narrator-author of her autobiography and counteracts not only the purpose of Wadkar's telling of her story but also the effort of Majgaokar and his team from *Manoos* in bringing out narratives like hers. Majgaokar mentions in his editorial that their initiative was to ensure that the voices of such experienced artists from their regional films are heard and that their stories can be told to a larger audience. Therefore, the autonomy and editorial agency were the narrator/writer's by design. Benegal's rewriting changes this very critical aspect of the autobiography.

Benegal's *Bhumika* also received a lot of accolades, including the national award for best screenplay, which was shared by Benegal, Karnad, and Dubey. Smita Patil (1955–1986), who essayed the character inspired by Wadkar, was also honoured with the national award for best actress for her performance. These accolades earned the film and its story an important place in the history of Hindi cinema. But, because of

the accolades received by the film and the reputation of Benegal himself as a well-respected director, the modern-day audience is likely to be misadvised on the story of Wadkar. The publication of Wadkar's autobiography led to renewed interest in her life and work in the following years.

In a filmmaking masterclass video with the British Film Institute, Benegal explains that when *Sangtye Aika* was recommended and read out to him by a friend familiar with Marathi, he could instantly realise the text's potential to be turned into a film. But, his rewriting of Wadkar's autobiography is particularly severe regarding the details of the identity and lineage of the character inspired by Wadkar. By making his protagonist the daughter born to a Brahmin father and a mother descended from the family of hereditary practitioners, Benegal succumbs to the caste hierarchies that were already in place in the film industries at the time. We can infer from Sarah Niazi's<sup>16</sup> article on the discourse of respectability in Marathi cinema of the 1930s that reputed studios like Prabhat were conscious in ensuring that they were recruiting actors, particularly female actors from 'respectable backgrounds' and that they were able to provide a family-like idyllic atmosphere for the said 'respectable women.' Meera Kosambi (2015) also reiterates this point by stating, "[t]he women who entered the entertainment industry belonged either to upper caste families with connections to the literary-cultural scene, or to families of traditional women entertainers" (372).

While the studio was devoted to producing social films on topical issues like women's empowerment, the discourse of respectability indicates that the artists' caste location and social background influenced the kind of roles they received. As is clear through Niazi's argument, such studios also prided themselves in being facilitators of social mobility for actresses engaged with them. They actively mobilised the respectable public perception of the female actresses they hired through their films and marketing strategies.

However, in Benegal's film, which was made in the 1970s, the rewriting of Wadkar's identity and social background is particularly serious because, in the autobiography, Wadkar seems to embrace her identity and her lineage. Even though she did not aspire to continue the family tradition and establish herself as a singer, she did not try to conceal it. Therefore, the reinterpretation of Wadkar by rewriting Usha's social location was not justified, particularly because Wadkar came from a family of hereditary practitioners with connections in the film industry — her paternal aunts, Sushilabai and Indirabai, were already in the film industry. Sushilabai was married to Master Vinayak Rao (Wadkar 1), and Indirabai had taken the stage name Wadkar (6), which Hansa also took when she started as an actor. This was common practice and seen as an acceptable way of entering the film industry as an actor.

By reinterpreting Hansa Wadkar as Usha, Benegal may inadvertently have taken the story away from Wadkar, endangering her agency and voice as the author of her own story. The poignant silences, candid confessions, and certain omissions Wadkar introduced are all punctuated with inferences. Benegal's rewriting ultimately ends up reading too much into it and changing it entirely. Thus, though Benegal tried to honour Wadkar as an artist and a feminist icon (in his perception), he ended up appropriating her voice and agency and inadvertently spoke on her behalf instead of letting her speak through her own story. Wadkar's name, unfortunately, was not included in the list of collaborators and was only cited as an inspiration.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

Autobiographies like Hansa Wadkar's are highly contextual and need to be read as such. These are not standard literary autobiographies, and thus, it would be difficult to find sufficient grounds for compliance with the existing theoretical frameworks of autobiographical writings. Hansa Wadkar begins her autobiography by mentioning her familial roots. She was a descendant of a family of hereditary performers and was raised in Sawantwadi and Mumbai. Her paternal grandmother was a renowned courtesan, and her maternal grandmother was a *devadasi*.



Her father was among those who broke tradition and chose to marry. Due to the alcoholism of both her parents, Wadkar grew up in financially strained circumstances, which forced her at the age of ten to begin working as a full-time actor. Though she wanted to complete her education, marry, and live as a householder, her financial circumstances forced her to continue working. The many instances of domestic and psychological violence and many miscarriages, as well as her addiction to alcohol and tobacco, repeatedly prevented her from quitting her career in films realising her dream of living as a householder.

However, she found success and adulation as an actor, which caused, in her words, her addiction to working in cinema. She says, “[o]nce the intoxication of working with paint on your face and the accompanying experience, the accompanying atmosphere, takes possession, it becomes an addiction. Life without it is an unbearable longing” (102). Her work in cinema, particularly in *Tamasha* films, led her to become a household name synonymous with the folk-dance form *Lavani*. One such film of Wadkar, *Sangtye Aika* (1959) became one of the most commercially successful films in the history of Marathi cinema. A theatre in Pune, Maharashtra, is said to have played the film continuously even after two years of its release<sup>17</sup>.

Reading *You Ask, I Tell*, it becomes evident that Wadkar was not a litterateur, and neither was she required to be one to demonstrate her skills as a storyteller, for she was already familiar with the cinematic tradition of storytelling. Her long and successful career, in which she worked on a range of films, allowed her to be well-versed in the contours of cinema, giving her a unique cinematic vision. This influence of the medium is visible in her autobiography. Furthermore, her autobiography was also unique because it was a product of her collaboration with the Marathi weekly *Manoos*. She orally narrated her story as it came to her, and a team of editors noted it down and read it back to her, and finalised it only with her approval. Being an orally narrated account of her life, it heavily relied on her memories. This and the fact that she was trained in cinematic storytelling make the autobiographical narrative

disconnected and fragmentary, wherein their very visual and cinematic quality leads to them moving in disconnected segments resembling frames in films or acts in plays. Also, being the life narrative of a performer and being a text that was orally narrated, the text has a distinct performative nature, making the narrative very vivid and conversational.

The text is also a site of performance for Wadkar's autobiographical self. This autobiographical self is the subject of the autobiographical narrative and, like a character, represents her through various stages of her life. This chapter examined how Wadkar employs a combination of the different registers of persona performance by emphasising more on the professional register through anecdotes and the overall narrative structure, displaying it through the narrative styles of presenting personal and intimate anecdotes. The autobiography allows Wadkar to distance herself and critically examine and evaluate her actions, thereby tracing her growth as an actor and individual. As a site of performance, the autobiography was her final one, which she used to deeply reflect upon the many previous stages of life that preceded it. The arc of a Marathi actress' successful career and tragic life reaches its conclusion on the page through Wadkar's narrative, and one can find elements of theatricality and melodrama in the text. The text can also be divided into parts that align with Freytag's classification of the components of a dramatic text. The text can also be said to have a performative quality because any section of the text can be converted into a monologue or dialogue and performed. Also, Wadkar admits to thinking of her past as a motion picture of her memories playing in her mind.

The initial Marathi version of the autobiography, published in *Manoos* across four parts, carries the subtitle 'an innovative' autobiography. This subtitle not only suggests that the contours of autobiography are dynamic but also indicates the possibility of innovative approaches to life writings and narratives. In the case of life writings produced by individuals engaged in the performing arts, as Amelie Hastie argues in her book, there are bound to be thematic and

stylistic overlaps owing to their experience and expertise in their field of professional affiliation. This further implies that the dimension of performance is implicit for women engaged in professions associated with the performing arts. Thus, the method with which the 'self' is represented in such works features a kind of self-fashioning, as discussed by Malhotra and Lambert-Hurley in their book.

Another reason for the difference in the approaches to life writing observed between the narratives by women from the Indian subcontinent and elsewhere in the world is a difference in literacy and familiarity with the literary approach to narrating life. There is also a diversity of expressions owing to cultural practices and performance traditions, which results in their dissonance with the theoretical paradigms that govern the structure and flow of life writings from other parts of the world. Talking about one's life, whether as an oral narrative, written text, a musical composition, a choreographed or theatrically performed piece, or a self-portrait, is a performative act and is influenced by the existing performance and storytelling traditions and their interaction with modern media and communication technologies.

Inspired by her autobiography, Shyam Benegal made his film *Bhumika: The Role*, albeit with significant rewritings and departures from Wadkar's version of herself and the events. Benegal's film focuses more on the different kinds of roles that the protagonist plays, both in cinema and in life, in her search for a meaningful life of her choice. As Benegal saw in *Sangtye Aika* of Hansa Wadkar, a feminist icon and a pathway into the past of Indian cinema, he was inspired to turn the autobiography into a film. However, he rewrote many aspects of Wadkar's story and autobiographical self to create Usha, who was the feminist protagonist relevant to his context as a filmmaker in the late 1970s. Benegal only credits the text as an inspiration and shies away from calling his film an adaptation. He rewrites scenarios from the text and presents a reinvented version of Wadkar through his character, Usha, who, in pursuing her individuality, understands the fruitlessness of her dependence on men. He chose the award-winning actor Smita

Patil, who was already well-known for portraying strong feminist characters while also being engaged in working towards women's rights.

As the film was made during a difficult period, wherein there was a scarcity and resultant difficulty in procuring film stock, Benegal had to reorient his approach to making the film. He went back to the text, and in getting to explore the dynamic past of Indian cinema through Wadkar's autobiography, he chose to re-orient the narrative of the film by using different varieties of film stock, each corresponding to the timeline of the narrative as well as the prevalent technological conventions in filmmaking in India. This helped Benegal create a dialogue between his film and Wadkar's autobiography by recreating the narrative driven by memory and, therefore, prone to fragmentariness and non-linear flow. The film won the National Award for Best Screenplay and Best Actress. But Wadkar's text was only credited as an inspiration. However, in significantly rewriting the story and citing the text only as an inspiration, Benegal inadvertently endangers Wadkar's autonomy and studied reflection of herself. He rewrites not only Wadkar's character and origins but also several situations she mentioned in her autobiography. Furthermore, Wadkar's autobiography features punctuated silences, wherein she exerts her authority as the author/narrator and leaves out certain things. These situations have been reinterpreted and presented in *Bhumika*, giving viewers a different version of Wadkar. Due to such severe departures from Wadkar's text, Benegal's *Bhumika* risks misadvising the modern viewers whose first point of contact with Wadkar's story is, in most cases, the film.

The English translation of Hansa Wadkar's autobiography by Jasbir Jain and Shobha Shinde, published in 2013, was a direct consequence of the success of Benegal's film. The translators were drawn towards Benegal's exceptional sketch of the female artist burdened by "the differences of gender where artistic creativity was concerned and the cramping lack of sympathy and exploitation" (p. ix). Jain's lucid introductory essay, which explores the idea of speaking of the self to others, and Shinde's detailed 'Note on the History of Marathi

Cinema’ contextualise the book well and help the readers understand Wadkar’s unique approach to storytelling better. They helped 21st-century readers reach the story of Hansa Wadkar, who brought her extensive knowledge of storytelling in a different medium, that is, cinema, and applied it to her autobiographical narrative, making it a text that cannot be understood through autobiographical theories alone, away from its socio-cultural and historical context.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Parts of this chapter have been published in “Hansa Wadkar’s Sangtye Aika: An Autobiography?” in *Journal of Arts*, IIS University Jaipur, vol. 13, no. 4, 2024, and *Conformity and Subversion: Autobiographical Strategies of Marathi Film Actresses in Shaping Their Celebrity Personas (1930s–50s)*. *Marathi Film and Media*, special issue of *Studies in South Asian Film & Media*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2025.

<sup>2</sup> *Tamasha* films are a genre of Marathi films which derive their structure from the Marathi theatre form *tamasha*. Shobha Shinde writes, Marathi cinema “made wide use of the Tamasha form for its dances, provocative songs, obscene, lewd gestures and the *lavanis* which found a good response from the common masses”. (108)

<sup>3</sup> Translation by the author, edits by Mr. Dnyanesh Mirikar.

<sup>4</sup> *Lavani* is a dance form from the Indian state of Maharashtra. The songs on which this dance is performed are melodious with short, poetic and erotic lyrics. Meera Kosambi mentions that the format of these compositions were used to comment on relevant sociopolitical events as well.

<sup>5</sup> The editor of *Manoos*, G. Majgaokar, published an editorial in the same November 1966 issue of *Manoos*, in which the first instalment of Hansa Wadkar’s autobiography was published. In this, he writes about the process that went behind this series. He also provides some details on his motivation behind an initiative of this kind.

<sup>6</sup> A servant or slave (female).

<sup>7</sup> This passage has been translated by the author.

<sup>8</sup> Montage is a technique of filmmaking wherein shorter clips are placed in succession, which are then combined to create a sequence.

<sup>9</sup> The official website of Sindhudurg district states that Sawantwadi is located in South-West Maharashtra. It is a municipality of the Sindhudurg district in Maharashtra’s Konkan region.

<sup>10</sup> Marathwada corresponds roughly to the present limits of the Aurangabad district of Maharashtra.

<sup>11</sup> Scholar and playwright Girish Karnad (1938–2019) is credited with the screenplay writing of *Bhumika* and Satyadev Dubey is credited with writing the dialogues for the film. Benegal also mentions that the Marathi playwright Vijay Tendulkar (1928–2008) suggested revisions to the script.

<sup>12</sup> “Bhumika: Masterclass with Shyam Benegal”. *YouTube*, uploaded by BFI Events, 18 June 2012, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=UeMpq7AVcVE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UeMpq7AVcVE)

<sup>13</sup> ORWO, short for Original Wolfen, was a German manufacturer of black-and-white film products established in 1964.

<sup>14</sup> Kodak Monopak Colour is a type of colour film stock manufactured by Kodak that was used for shooting films.

<sup>15</sup> According to the article “Entrenched Fissures” by K.A. Geetha, *Kalavantin* refers to a non-Brahmin sub-caste within the *Devadasi* community.

<sup>16</sup> See Niazi 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Priyadarshi. “Chitrapat Pareekshan: Chetana Chitra ‘Sangtye Aika’”. *Manoos*, June 1961, pp. 35-37.

## CHAPTER 3: Zohra Segal's *Close-Up* (2010)<sup>1</sup>

### 3.1 Introduction

Among the Indian actresses who achieved professional success in the 20th century, Zohra Segal's career had a remarkable trajectory, spanning over eight decades. Segal was born into an aristocratic, orthodox Muslim family from Uttar Pradesh, where a career in performing arts was unheard of. She graduated from Queen Mary's College, a famous purdah school in Lahore, at 18 and chose to train as a dancer. She completed her diploma in Eurhythmics under Mary Wigman at her dance school in Dresden, Germany, partly out of her desire to escape marriage and partly to fulfil her dream of studying in Europe. Upon graduating in 1933, she got to work with Uday Shankar's dance company, touring extensively worldwide as part of his ensemble. Eventually, in the late 1930s, she was appointed an instructor in his dance school in Almora.

Although dance was the field which paved the way for her career in performing arts, it was through theatre that she pivoted professionally into acting. However, the experience of performing with Shankar and his team gave her crucial initial exposure to discipline, rigour, and conduct, which defined her approach to work until the very end. Her work ethic and expertise as a dancer, instructor, and choreographer<sup>2</sup> brought her success, but she achieved the highest recognition in acting, which she always called her "first love".

After moving to Bombay in the 1940s at her sister Uzra Butt's (1917–2010) suggestion, she got acquainted with and joined the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA). During this time, she also worked in the film industry in Bombay, where her training as a dancer led her to "strange and exotic roles," which she found distasteful due to "the emphasis on "sex" and the "box office"" (Segal 7). Her sister, who was then working with Prithviraj Kapoor's (1906–1972) theatre company, Prithvi Theatres, as a leading actress, was instrumental in helping Segal

realise her dream of becoming an actor. She remarks that she was initially unimpressed with their production of *Shakuntala* (1944) but was convinced of the merit of Prithviraj Kapoor and his theatre company as soon as she watched their play *Deewar* (1945). The play was instrumental in her choosing to become an active part of Prithvi Theatres as an actor and dance director for the subsequent years. Through theatre, her longtime professional identity as an actor was cemented.

Over time, though she remained professionally attached to the performing arts<sup>3</sup>, fame, and celebrity status only came to her after she “retired” at 63. She associates her celebrity status with the time that followed her entry into British television through *Parosi* (1977). She notes how her performance as Mrs. Chowdhry became so popular that she was often recognised in public places like airports, cinema halls, and even on the streets of London, where young children would run to her when they saw her (Segal 251). Many more television, and radio shows and films followed, and she remained extremely busy and successful well into her nineties. Her tryst with stardom continued when she returned to India in September 1987, as she eventually rendered significant roles in Indian films and theatre productions.

Segal’s career effectively captures the zeitgeist of being a professional actor in the 20th century as she consistently adapted to different narrative mediums, making her mark in each of them. Her readiness to adapt to the demands of theatre, cinema, and television made her remain relevant even in the 21st century. Her subjectivity was imbricated within this pervasive context of performing as an actor across mediums and genres. The experiences recounted in her memoir, including her experiences working on films, television shows, and plays, contain details on the demands faced by an actress on both professional and personal fronts. Together, these experiences shaped her understanding and approach to performance and narration, as is made evident through *Close-Up*.



As a text that is categorically labelled as a memoir, *Close-Up* is a fascinating text due to Segal's unconventional approach to drafting her narrative. Memoirs, as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2024) mention,

“Historically, memoir was understood as *mémoire* (*les mémoires*), recollections by the publicly prominent who chronicled their social accomplishments...These recollections often bracketed one moment or a period of experience rather than an entire life span and offered reflections on its significance for the writer's previous status or self-understanding” (7)

As a memoir, *Close-Up* captures the life narrative of Segal, an actress who, by virtue of her profession, was a public figure. However, the text is unique in that it both complies and deviates from the norms that typically define a memoir. It is closer to the autobiography in the time span it covers, tracing Segal's life from her family tree to the last few decades of her life, during which she was also drafting the text. It is also a fascinating text because Segal dismantles the conventions that govern autobiographical narration, typically found in memoirs, by introducing fragmented, episodic, and epistolary components instrumental in taking the story forward. *Close-Up* also aligns with Nancy K. Miller's (2000) analysis of the memoir as a genre that moves between the “private and the public, the subject and the object” (2). Thus, Segal's memoir is not designed to give a complete and wholesome picture of the author. It highlights the author's intention of the extent to which the reader/audience can access details about her and her life. This indicates that Segal's choice of publishing her autobiographical narrative as a memoir instead of an autobiography is deliberate and designed to make use of its malleability<sup>4</sup> as a genre and claim agency over her life narrative.

To understand Segal's autobiographical strategies that contribute to the crafting and performing of her celebrity persona, this chapter closely examines the narrative structure and approach to trace the influence of her professional expertise as an actor. As seasoned performers, celebrities like Segal publish their autobiographical writings

with the awareness that the work will be read. Furthermore, Segal has, on occasion, admitted that everything she did was for an audience (Menon 233). It reveals that while crafting her narrative, Zohra Segal was working with an anticipated interaction of the text with its designated reader. To ensure this, it is important that the memoir presents to its audience a persona of Segal that they can identify or connect with.

The present chapter, thus, engages with Segal's self-fashioning techniques that influence the memoir's narrative strategies. The initial part of the chapter presents an overview of Segal's persona as crafted through her cinema, television, and theatre performances. Though Segal was constantly engaged in the public production of her "self" as a celebrity, the performance of oneself through an autobiographical medium for celebrities requires an integration of the frontstage self with the backstage self. The memoir facilitates this by connecting the frontstage self, a composite of film, television and dramatic roles and public appearances, and the backstage self, primarily formed out of those elements of her life that are not accessible to her audience, such as her familial relationships, habits, and behaviour at home.

Segal notes in her co-authored autobiography *Stages* (1997) and her memoir *Close-Up* that she achieved fame and celebrity status after she ventured into television and cinema. To understand her persona more comprehensively, this chapter takes an overview of the persona of Zohra Segal through the synchronous study of her memoir with biographies authored by Ritu Menon (2021) and Kiran Segal (2012). This lends clarity to the analysis by evaluating Segal's persona as a sum of her interpretation of herself and that rendered by others. However, before venturing into the various aspects of Segal's autobiographical strategies, let us first look at how Zohra Segal is currently interpreted as a celebrity.

### 3.2 The Dramatis Personae of Zohra Segal

Zohra Segal is known as “the grand old lady of Bollywood” owing to the significant number of films in which she was cast as the aged mother or grandmother. Debashrita Dey and Priyanka Tripathi (2024) mention her distinct identity that resulted from her performances in British Indian films. They mention that in Indian cinema, she was always presented as:

...the amicable granny in the Hindi films Mani Ratnam’s *Dil Se* [From the heart; 1998], Sanjay Leela Bhansali’s *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam* [I have given my heart away, darling; 1999] and *Saawariya* [My love; 2007], R. Balki’s *Cheeni Kum* [Less Sugar; 2007], and others. (Dey and Tripathi 6)

However, Dey and Tripathi add that she appears differently in Hindi films, where she is usually seen in “the endearing yet submissive role of the protagonist’s mischievous and wise grandmother, displaying a special affection for young couples in love” (6). Regardless, with her fine performances in such roles, she became a household name. Ritu Menon notes,

With rare exceptions — *Jewel in the Crown*, *Firm Friends*, her early films — Zohra was cast as what Jill Williams called “the funny granny,” and it was a role she made her own...what Zohra did was to give it an added twist: she improvised...Over time, she not only made the feisty granny role her own, she made her over in her own image — irreverent, forthright, spirited. And no one has managed to replace her as the irascible old woman in family dramas. (Menon 230, 237)

Her expertise in the effortless portrayal of the “funny granny” tropes can be traced to her extensive experience essaying character roles on stage with Prithvi Theatres. Even when she transitioned from theatre to television, her affinity towards the performance style of theatre, which had now become a central component of her persona, did not leave her.

Segal’s biography by Ritu Menon also highlights that her approach to understanding and performing any given character was derived from her experiences as a thespian. Menon refers to her

conversation with dramatist Roshan Seth, who views some of Segal's performances as exaggerated. Seth says that Segal's theatrical grounding in the Prithviraj Kapoor style of acting was "many of her over-the-top performances, that when 'you are not given the tools to do the job, you think excess energy will do it for you'" (Menon 233). Seth's criticism notwithstanding, the dramatic and excessive style of rendering characters indeed became a signature style of Segal, and her performances were favourably received by the audience. Her approach to interpreting characters remained even when she transcended mediums and worked in cinema and television productions.

However, as her autobiographies and biographies indicate, the spirited persona and theatricality were not just professional traits but central components of her identity. She is known for being adept at switching into another role, another person at an instant, even in non-professional settings. Her daughter, Kiran Segal, notes, "Till today, whenever Ammi is playing with a kid, it is always her who becomes the 'child' in their little game, and the kid she is playing with becomes the parent, elder sister or some voice of authority" (15). This indicates her predisposition to becoming another character or assuming a role in the act of play, even in non-professional settings. Therefore, her profession was a strong component of her identity and everyday self, a significant part of her persona.

At times, her adeptness at going into character left the onlooker confused. Kiran Segal notes that as a child, she had difficulty dissociating her mother from the characters she essayed and found it hard to watch her render certain roles. Referring to *Deewar* (1945), where Segal played the role of a British woman, she says,

As the foreign woman in *Deewar*, her portrayal used to embarrass me. In the play she wore Western clothes, kept smoking a cigarette and flirting with men...Even now when she is flirting or being naughty with the opposite sex, I cringe; my brother and I really suffer! . . . Being her daughter, I just can't and very often when she is uttering

these embarrassing comments to an interviewer, if I am in the same room, I just walk out. (Kiran Segal 82)

Kiran Segal's observation indicates that Segal could successfully adapt her persona as per the requirements of the audience, giving them what they expect. While all her on-screen roles were reinterpreted and recast in her image, her identity as Zohra Segal was also infused with the characteristics of the women she played. This two-way diffusion of characteristics contributed to the cementing of Segal's persona, leading to her being chosen for essaying many more characters of similar nature. We can find suitable examples in the dramatic and sarcastic personality of Amitabh Bachchan's mother in *Cheeni Kum* (2007) or Shahrukh Khan's spirited grandmother in *Dil Se* (1998). Segal was, in this sense, tailoring her performance to her audience using a persona that absorbed the characteristics of several past roles that she performed. Segal maintains this consistency even through her memoir. Her identity as the mischievous, witty, and funny person, both on and off the screen, was part of her "constructed personage" (*Stars* 97). As Dyer (1998) mentions, a coherent identity as a celebrity is crucial since consistency of character tends to help get work and ensure box-office earnings (98). Thus, Segal maintains her persona performance through her memoir, conveying seamlessness between her on-screen and off-screen persona.

As per her autobiographical accounts, *Stages* (1997) and *Close-Up*, theatricality was a part of her personality. Throughout *Close-Up*, even in some anecdotes from her childhood, like her conversation with her cousin Mahmood, who asked her to enact the reaction of a girl receiving a letter from her beloved (Segal 38), also reflects her innate spirited nature, given to dramatic actions and expressions. Her letters to her uncle from when she was a student in Dresden contain suitable examples to demonstrate this. She writes, "[t]hat letter of yours arrived just in time to prevent my committing suicide! You see, I was in a dreadful state of mind" (Segal 41). Similarly, another fragment from a later letter, also included in the memoir, shows glimpses of her inherent

expertise in dramatic storytelling. She writes to her uncle to inform him of the successful completion of her diploma. She says,

Dear Memphis, there are three ways in which I could give you yesterday's news. I could say, "Uncle, I have passed". That would be keeping my little attic window shut. I could also say, "Mamoosaheb!! Just fancy! There were *fifteen* of us who went in for the Diploma. All of them have been studying dancing for over *three* years. I, inspite of having been here *barely* more than 2 years and not knowing a *word* of German before I came, or even having set eyes on this sort of dancing and only twice seen real Indian dancing, have passed, beating all of them but one, and stood second out of the whole lot!! This would be opening my whole window and letting out stale air. The third way of giving you the news is: "Memphis dear, an Austrian girl and myself came second out of fifteen candidates. Three failed...So I can do nothing but be thrilled and grateful at the result. I now have the right to teach amateurs and professionals". This you would call letting out sweet scent and taking in fresh air to turn into perfume!! All three are typical sides of my nature; you choose the one you like best. (Segal 47)

Her three ways of delivering the news of her successful completion of the diploma to her uncle foreshadow her dramatic flair, suggesting to the reader that she was meant to be an actress. The presence of the letter early into *Close-Up* serves this very purpose. These instances can be taken as examples of her efforts to maintain her persona and to give her reader an impression that her personality has always been innately theatrical and that it was no surprise that she became a successful professional actor. This is a typical narrative mode that can be found in the autobiographical writings of actresses, where they construct their autobiographical account as a causal narrative (Hastie 76), suggesting that their choice of profession was a fated outcome.

### **3.3 *Close-Up*: A Theatrical Narrative of an Actor's Life**

Segal's longest professional affiliation came through her work in theatre. Her career in theatre began through her association with Prithvi Theatres, starting with their second production, *Deewar*, in

which her character instigates the division of property between the two brothers in the play, a barely masked allusion to the partition of India and Pakistan, which was to follow two years later. Her association with Prithvi Theatres was essentially through her contributions as a character actor and dance director.

Initially, Segal did not have intentions to join the company in a professional capacity. After watching *Deewar*, her impression of their productions completely changed. She realised that the plays were not reproductions of any other playwright's works but performances based on scripts produced in-house largely based on the stories that Prithviraj Kapoor came up with. Their originality made her feel that she had to be a part of their company somehow. Her persistence made the initially sceptical Kapoor relent, allowing her to join as the dance director. Eventually, the role of the antagonist in *Deewar* came her way when the actress who originally essayed the role left the company for a career in films.

Since that production, Segal remained associated with Prithvi Theatre, building her foundations in the melodramatic and political theatre that the company specialised in. Prithviraj Kapoor was earnest about addressing the issues pertaining to communal harmony, and most of his productions between 1945 and 1949 had themes addressing these concerns. Segal played the leading lady opposite Kapoor only in *Pathaan*, and almost rendered character roles, such as Bari Bi in *Gaddar* or Gajmukhi Bua in *Ahooti*, while also taking care of her responsibilities as the dance director of the productions. However, Segal's acting career was only in its initial stages during her time with Prithvi Theatres and Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), to which she was associated briefly and also served as the Vice President between 1945 and 1947.

The first significant break in her career in theatre came during the tragic death of her husband, Kameshwar Segal (–1959). A few years later, after resigning from her professional commitments to Prithvi

Theatres and her role as the director of the Natya Academy in Delhi (1959–1962), she received a fellowship to study a ten-week course at the British Drama League in London. For Segal, it was an opportunity to refine a skillset in which she had no formal training but was continually practising as a professional for over a decade and a half. Ritu Menon notes,

Zohra's interest was in acting, and here the requirement that all students analyse what they know of acting was most instructive. Zohra reviewed her previous experience of performing intuitively, 'seeking from within for inspiration'; at the League she learnt how to hone those instinctive probes, learnt what it was to really act (Menon 123).

Her efforts at the academy were recognised by awarding a Star Certificate. In her interview with Kapila Vatsyayan (1928–2020) in the programme *Bharat Ek Khoj* (1988) in the episode "Zohra Segal Unmasked" (1988), she remarks that the receipt of the Star certificate gave her much confidence as the only previous recipients from India were theatre personalities like Ebrahim Alkazi (1925–2020) and Habib Tanvir (1923–2009). This experience helped her hone her skills in a more professional capacity as she continually adapted to different storytelling formats, including cinema and television. The memoir, too, bears an imprint of this as a site of performance which allowed her to lean on her expertise and refine the performance of her persona.

### 3.3.1 Monologue

Her affinity for acting and her extensive experience as a theatre actor is also evident through the structure of Zohra Segal's memoir, *Close-Up*. While the sub-title suggests it is a memoir of 'a life on stage and screen, the text is a reflection of her experiences as a performer. It highlights her expertise gleaned from her professional experiences as a thespian, which also paved the way for her career as an actress. *Close-Up* begins with a prologue-like chapter titled 'The Third Bell.' The title alludes to the bell that signals the beginning of a play's first act. Its text flows like a monologue that introduces the audience to the text's premise informing them about what is to follow. The premise, in this case, is a



narrative of Segal's life experiences, and true to the manner in which monologues are drafted, she uses it to draw the reader to the present, her present, when she is reflecting on her lived experiences and is in the process of writing them down. She intersperses each anecdote with humour and philosophy, revealing her character to the readers who already have a perception of her as a celebrity. She says,

Sitting on my balcony in the afternoon, watching the setting sun, I feel that all the members of my generation are popping off like corn in a cinema hall...I sometimes think that life is a big joke. Here I am, having brushed my teeth daily, had a bath every day, oiled, combed and washed my hair religiously, carried out a routine of breathing and physical exercises, spoke the truth as I see it...even to myself...and yet, what is life? A body deteriorating from day to day... (Segal 7)

Segal begins the chapter with a commentary on the irony of her life, concluding that regardless of how strictly and religiously she had lived, she, ironically, couldn't escape the frailties of old age. Her philosophical reflection throws light on the meaninglessness of the meticulous efforts taken by celebrities to maintain their physical appearance and extraordinary status. She informs/assures the reader that, ultimately everyone grows old and faces the bodily limitations that accompany ageing in the most ordinary way. In doing so, she assures the reader of truth in the memoir as she has now consciously stripped away the façade of extraordinariness that accompanies the celebrity status of actors. Furthermore, Segal's narrative voice, which represents her through the pronoun "I", functions like the jester characters in Shakespeare's plays who always comment on the events of the plays without directly influencing them.

In her seminal work on the Dramatic Monologue, Ina Beth Sessions remarks that:

A perfect dramatic monologue is a literary form which has the definite characteristics of speaker, audience, occasion, revelation of character, interplay between speaker and audience, dramatic action and the action which takes place in the present. (Sessions 508)

Sessions also describes the imperfect monologue as fulfilling some, if not all, of these criteria (508). This applies to Segal's "Third Bell" and as per Sessions' criteria, it can be understood as an imperfect monologue which fulfils some, but not all, of the criteria. Let us examine "The Third Bell" in detail according to the criteria given by Sessions.

Through its narrative flow that intertwines introspection with humour, the monologue reveals the character of Zohra Segal, the author, represented through the narrative voice. For instance, she says,

In my Will [*sic*], I have said that when I die, I do not want any kind of ceremony, either religious or artistic. In case the crematorium authorities refuse to keep the ashes, my children should bring them home and flush them down the toilet. "Finito le comedia!" (Segal 8)

This humorous statement reveals Segal's philosophical thoughts about the significance of a human being's existence after death, regardless of whether they are celebrities or not. It also indicates her lack of interest in prolonging the course of mourning as traditionally carried out in Indian homes. The disinterest also reveals her awareness of her status as a public figure, as prolonged public mourning is routinely observed in case of celebrity deaths. These statements segue into more serious revelations of her desire to reunite with her family and teachers in the afterlife.

The next component, as per Sessions' criteria, is the audience. Segal's monologue has an implied audience, and only once is the second-person pronoun of 'you' mentioned. The implication of speaking to an audience comes through articulation, i.e., the way she weaves together many anecdotes and reflections which have largely shaped her life. In the chapter, the first instance of a rhetorical address to an audience comes when she reflects on matters of faith. She says,

After all, religion is only a hook to hang on to in the hour of need. But my faith is that this hook, this support, should be found within oneself. Tell yourself that you have the courage to surmount all difficulties and

you will discover that your innermost courage will help you face every calamity. (Segal 8)

While the address is indirect, i.e., she is not in a direct dialogue with an audience, and neither is she responding to any question or comments addressed to her, it is evident that she is speaking these lines to an implied audience, i.e., the reader. However, a few paragraphs later, as she continues to speak of death and the afterlife, she breaks the flow, commenting on how her narrative has taken a morbid turn. This part shows her awareness of speaking to an audience. She says, “This seems to be getting more and more morbid, which is not what I want to say” (8). This emphasis on “saying” indicates the presence of a listener to whom she is speaking. The self-conscious reorientation of the narrative’s mood also reveals her awareness of her persona, i.e., a celebrity known for her non-serious and jovial nature. Thus, the reorientation is geared to meet the readers’ expectations. Hereafter, she continues the monologue by sharing the relatively happier parts of her life, including her education, achievements, her career on stage and screen, her family, and the overall positive aspects of her life, creating a silhouette of Zohra Segal for the designated audience (reader). This aspect also fulfils the “revelation of character” aspect of a monologue, as highlighted by Sessions.

The occasion is another component of the dramatic monologue that is quite clear in Segal’s foreword. The opening lines of “The Third Bell” serve as a metaphor that marks the occasion. Segal writes, “Sitting on my balcony in the afternoon, watching the setting sun...” indicating the occasion, i.e., when she sits down to write. The setting sun can be taken as an allusion to her advanced age. She expands on this occasion in the first chapter, “Childhood and Lahore,” where she also adds that she decided to write her memoir “to create an absorbing task” for herself and to “put down all that happened” (25) before her memory fades. “The Third Bell” also contains components of dramatic action, which comes through the overview of a very eventful life unravelling in the reader’s mind as if watching a montage with the narrative support lent by a

narrator, i.e., Zohra Segal. Lastly, it is also a narrative rooted in the present; in this case, the timeframe is the author's present defined by the moment she writes her memoir. These aspects of Segal's writing bring the chapter closer to a dramatic monologue in terms of its content, form, and structure.

In addition to these characteristic features of the memoir that reveal Segal's experience in theatre, three more books have been published on her life. These books, with their descriptive titles, also emphasise her professional expertise. The first book is a collaborative autobiography co-authored with Joan E. Erdman and aptly titled *Stages: The Art and Adventures of Zohra Segal* (1997). This book arranges Segal's narrative across ten chapters, some of which directly allude to Segal's long career as a performer. For instance, the first chapter is titled "From Veils to Curtains". It discusses her departure from a very sheltered upbringing in a conservative, aristocratic Muslim household to Mary Wigman Tanz Schule in Dresden to train as a dancer, after which she had a successful career as one of the lead dancers in Uday Shankar's ballet troupe. This trajectory is, quite literally, marked by a transition from the veil to the curtains, as the chapter's title reveals. More titles like "Dancing with Uday and the Shankar Company," "Recreating Indian Dance at Almora," "On Tour with the Prithvi Theatres," and "On and Off Stage in London" all reveal the nuances of a long career in the performing arts, from dance to theatre. These titles are also valuable for guiding newer or unfamiliar readers toward the key milestones that marked Segal's life.

The second book, a biography of Segal by Ritu Menon (2021), is also appropriately titled *Zohra: A Biography in Four Acts*. The chapters are arranged like the script of a play, in Acts and Scenes, and also include two intermissions and one curtain call, where the biographer has presented a thorough overview of Segal's life, with a character sketch drawn through conversations and inputs with many people such as Madhav Sharma (Dramatist), Renu Setna, Pavan Segal (son), Shreela Ghosh (friend and actor) and Gurinder Chaddha (Film

Director), who had the opportunity to know Segal at close quarters professionally and personally. Each of these texts has contributed towards building an interconnected network of texts that provide the framework for interpreting Segal's persona as a performer, ultimately assisting her with impression management as a public figure.

### 3.3.2 Melodrama

In addition to theatricality and spectacle, Segal's memoir also has a distinct melodramatic character. Needless to say, Prithvi Theatres was a fundamental factor that contributed to her expertise in the melodramatic mode of expression. About Prithvi Theatres' plays, Segal notes,

They can truthfully be said to be his [Prithviraj Kapoor's] creations, being a product of his imagination, expressing his lament against the injustice and ills of his motherland and indicating ways of rising above it all...The themes were uncomplicated and the language predominantly Hindustani, which is a simplified combination of Hindi and Urdu and is understood all over India. The style of the plays was naturalistic, with melodrama overtaking the climaxes. (Segal 120)

As Segal mentions here, barring *Shakuntala*, each of the popular plays of Prithvi Theatres was mostly based on the ideas of Prithviraj Kapoor and was worked out into scripts through collaboration with writers. Furthermore, the plays were "written or added to, in the form of extempore dialogue" (120) by Kapoor. The objective of the productions of Prithvi Theatre, like the Partition Quartet, was to draw attention towards the message of communal harmony and to advise the citizens of India against the partition. Therefore, it was imperative that the plays have a mass appeal and be accessible to the audience, regardless of education and social status. To facilitate this, melodrama functioned as a critical narrative vehicle. As Peter Brooks argues, melodrama,

...has the flexibility, the multifariousness, to dramatize and to explicate life in imaginative forms that transgress the traditional generic constraints, and the traditional demarcations of high culture from popular entertainment. (Brooks xxii)

Thus, melodrama was significant and indispensable as a narrative and performative mode to Prithvi Theatres. Their productions sought to draw a mass appeal towards the issues highlighted in them, and this could only be done by breaking free from the constraints of high versus low culture. Segal's long professional association with the company had a significant impact on the way she rendered a character in front of an audience. Her grounding in the melodramatic mode of theatre was intact even when she rendered roles in cinema or television productions. Her popularity and positive reception in such roles suggest that she could meet the audience's expectations. Roshan Seth says that Segal's "early exposure to the Prithviraj mode of acting...was responsible for many of her over-the-top performances" (Menon 233). Indeed, if we refer to some of her cinematic performances, such as the role of Mrs. Gupta in R. Balki's *Cheeni Kum*, her background in theatre is evident from her articulation and expressions. For instance, in the scene where she meets Nina<sup>5</sup> for the first time, her gestures indicate a pleasant surprise, astonishment, and then awe as she moves her hand to her face, and the latter sits down next to her on the sofa. These swift and visibly exaggerated expressions are quite theatrical and succeed in visually conveying the situation and the mood of the character. Then, when she tells Nina of Buddhadev's<sup>6</sup> past relationship (56:06–57:10), the articulation and enunciation of the dialogues are again theatrical and excessive in how they punctuate each detail as it is shared. In comparison, when we observe Buddhadev or Nina's reactions to Mrs. Gupta's dialogues in this scene, the distinction between the style of articulation in theatre and cinema becomes apparent. The affinity of Segal's dialogue delivery in terms of its enunciation, pace, and style tells of her professional background in theatre.

A similar manner of autobiographical narration guided by melodramatic excess also permeates the narrative style of her memoir. For instance, when she joined the British Drama League for the ten-week course on acting, she felt the joy of becoming a student again. She says,

After all these years of lecturing and teaching, it was exhilarating to be ‘taught’ for a change. I completely forgot my graying hair and behaved as irresponsibly as if I was ten years old, and got just as much fun out of it. I don’t think I have enjoyed anything quite as much as this course, from the point of view of shedding the arthritic core inside which encases one’s being as the years go by. (Segal 182)

We can note how emphatic words like ‘exhilarating’ and phrases like “shedding the arthritic core” convey heightened feelings of joy and the desire to break free and find oneself anew. As Peter Brooks contends, “the dramaturgy of excess and overstatement corresponds to and evokes confrontations and choices that are of heightened importance” (Brooks ix). For Segal, this overstatement also expresses her joy in doing something important to her, for she always maintained that acting was what she enjoyed the most. Therefore, learning about it and honing her skills through the course were welcome prospects for her.

A similar blend of overstatements and exaggerations is also present in the anecdotes where she expresses her disappointment. In the chapter “1976–1996: The Last Decades”, she mentions her initial joy and later difficulty in coming to terms with her appearance and performance as Lady Lili Chatterjee in *Jewel in the Crown* (1984).

I would look at my reflection as I passed through the corridors and feel quite thrilled at what I saw. I was made up as a wealthy matron, grey hair parted on the side, lipstick, rings on my fingers, snow white sari, living in a large bungalow...After all, I said to myself, I *am* aristocratic and I know several princesses and nawabs...But when I saw the televised premiere on January 9, 1984, I was horrified. I hated myself as Lady Lili Chatterjee. My dialogue was artificial and brittle and my appearance, far from being aristocratic, made me look like a tarted-up ayah. (Segal 238).

In the initial part of this fragment, Segal expresses a sense of heightened confidence arising from her belief that her aristocratic background will facilitate a good performance. However, that belief is thoroughly challenged when she sees herself on screen. She uses an exaggerated

expression comparing her appearance to a “tarted-up ayah” to show readers the intensity of her dislike towards her on-screen appearance as Lili Chatterjee. To return to Brooks’ ideas on the usage of excess and overstatements, Segal uses such a narrative style here to comment on her work as an actor, which she feels is of utmost importance to her. She conveys her disenchantment upon seeing her performance through a heightened dramatic expression to inform the reader of the extent of her expectations of herself, her genuine commitment to her profession, and her calibre as an actress.

### 3.3.3. Theatricality and Spectacle

As Segal’s initial foundations in acting were laid in theatre, she profoundly understood how plays could represent contemporary socio-political issues on stage. During the time she served as the Vice President and active member of IPTA, their productions were designed to mobilise the audience towards prevailing socio-political issues. As an association of artists, IPTA’s productions represented its members’ voices and opinions. On the functioning of IPTA, Zohra Segal writes,

...Sometimes, if we were lucky, we performed in a regular theatre but most of the time the performances took place in halls, since they were cheaper to hire. A great number of shows were held anywhere in the street or neighbourhood where an audience could be assembled. The novel idea of a theatre of this kind soon mushroomed in all the main towns of India . . . Just as IPTA in Bombay had used the folklore of Marathi theatre, taking tamasha and pawada as forms of expression, so the Bengali artists employed jatra, their provincial folk theatre, as their medium. (Segal and Erdman 123)

As Segal mentions, the avenues of performances were diverse and catered to an equally diverse audience. Therefore, the productions would be focused on drawing the audience in and retaining their attention. The assimilation of provincial performing art forms into the plays was another strategic measure to ensure engagement and wider reach. Prithvi Theatres also had similar approaches to their functioning and performed in similarly diverse venues ranging from big cities to small towns. Their



productions, too, used spectacle as a narrative tool to design their plots since the plays had to depict the horrors of partition and the social, political, and moral problems affecting the public because of it.

As a rhetorical device of significance to theatrical productions of this kind, spectacle essentially is a re-creation of the “spectacle of social life”. Referring to the role of the spectacle in tragic plays, Tom Heeney remarks that it helps dramatise the play’s contradictions and tensions, ultimately helping the audience “visualise what they must face as citizens and persons” (Heeney 15). Some key examples of spectacle in Prithvi Theatres’ “Partition Quartet” (1946–1949) plays include the construction and the breaking of the wall between the house of the two brothers in *Deewar*, Sher Khan’s (Prithviraj Kapoor) handing over of his son to the enemies as a gesture of sacrifice in *Pathaan* (1947), the depiction of the partition riots in *Gaddar* (1948) and the suicide of the protagonist as a measure to save her fiancé’s name in *Ahooti* (1949).

Except for *Pathaan*, Segal did not essay lead roles but helmed the dance direction and essayed relatively minor character roles such as the British woman (*Deewar*), Bari Bi (*Gaddar*), and Gajmukhi Bua (*Ahooti*). These character roles had distinct visual components to them, such as appearance, body language, and movement, which made them exaggerated and theatrical. Among these roles, Segal earned significant praise for her portrayal of Bari Bi. She says,

Although a minor role, it was beautifully written...The one difficult element was trying to feel old from within. The play takes place over a span of thirty years, and from being a middle-aged woman, I had to become a very, very old one . . . Make-up was a great help of course, but the movements and gestures of old age seem false unless the heart has “died” as well. I had to keep repeating “Kill it! Kill it!” to myself in the wings, meaning I suppose, to quell the great surge of energy and well-being I have always been blessed with. Only then was I able to bring any sincerity to my gait and the look in the eye. (Segal 129)

Relying on her trusted technique of intuitive acting, Segal managed to draw the essence of Bari Bi from within her, giving her considerable

success. The impact of this kind of training, i.e., instinctive interpretation and assimilation into a character, allowed her to render dramatic roles well in such plays.

The influence of her professional expertise also reflects through her memoir, where it is possible to trace anecdotes that are narrated with a theatrical and spectacular aspect to them. A suitable example to demonstrate the rhetorical presence of spectacle in her memoir is as follows:

Once, while we were having our lunch, a long black cobra wriggled through the window bars at the far end. Instantly, I jumped on my chair raising protective arms towards Kiran who was seated opposite in her baby-chair. “Don’t move!” shouted Kameshwar, and I stood rivetted to the spot in that pose, scared to death. The snake wove its way down the wall and on to the floor and came creeping towards the table . . . Then lifting its head and upper part of its body, it slithered away through the bars into the wilderness. (Segal 105)

The narrative composition of this anecdote reflects theatricality, and its structure has a clear beginning, middle, and end. It enables the reader to visualise the incident as if it were happening on a stage in front of them. For comparison, a similarly theatrical fragment from Binodini Dasi’s *My Life as an Actress* (1998) describing an unexpected violent encounter with a man is presented below:

When I had said these words, his anger knew no bounds and he drew out the sword that hung by his side. “Is that so! Do you think I’m going to let you off so easily? I’ll cut you to pieces. The twenty thousand I had wanted to give you, I shall spend elsewhere. I don’t care what happens!” Even as he said those words he unsheathed his sword and in a second had struck, aiming at my forehead. I had kept my eyes on his sword. Just as he had raised it to strike me I sat down by the side of a table harmonium. The sword struck the cover of the harmonium and went several inches into it. In a moment he had prised it out and had struck again . . . I got up immediately and caught hold of his upraised hand. (Bhattacharya 87)

If enacted, Segal's and Binodini Dasi's anecdotes would be spectacular, and the viewer would be emotionally captivated by the intensity of the rising action in these scenes. This indicates a predisposition of thespians to remember and narrate their anecdotes in an engaging manner, similar to the dramatic storytelling of plays. In Segal's memoir, the theatrical and spectacular are central rhetorical currents influencing the description of many incidents, regardless of how ordinary they might be. For instance, she recollects the arrival of the Uday Shankar dance troupe in the US by saying, "AMERICA!! More bustle, more excitement, more speed, the public going mad at the end of each show. Flowers, receptions and interviews!" (Segal 73). This example shows that the emphatic, theatrical, and spectacular are central aspects of *Close-Up*'s rhetorical approach.

Another suitable example of Segal's predisposition to theatrical storytelling can be found in the way she informs her readers about Prithviraj Kapoor's early life and his path to a profession in theatre.

The seed of his career was sown in a little village estate called Lyallpur district of the Punjab, where your Prithvi Nath, grandson of the Hindu Pathan zamindar, enacted anecdotes from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* inside the buffalo shed...The grand old Divan Saheb was a strict disciplinarian, instilling democratic values in his kith and kin as well as in his large retinue. Each evening, little Prithvi was made to polish and light the innumerable kerosene lamps in the entire estate, and he would rub shoulders with the sweeper's son while playing kabaddi in the fields. This was the foundation of a love of the outdoors and of sports, and inculcated the maxim in him that all men are equal in the sight of God. (Segal 116)

As the readers read through this kind of description, a montage of scenes depicting a young Prithviraj Kapoor enacting episodes from *Ramayana* or *Mahabharata* in a buffalo shed comes alive in their minds. Such an evocative introduction can easily be translated into a scene or a tableau on the stage or in a film, where the script introduces the story's protagonist. This indicates that Segal's understanding and articulation

of events and incidents were deeply coloured by her professional experiences within which she formed her subjecthood.

### **3.4 Rehearsing and Perfecting the Performance of Zohra Segal**

The existence of multiple narratives on Segal's life is both fascinating and significant to understanding her strategies of self-fashioning as a celebrity. As a well-known actress, her life had a strong public aspect to it, meaning that the recognition and fame resulting from her career ensured sustained interest in her life among those who followed her work. Such experiences also lead to efforts from celebrities to ensure coherence and continuity in the performance of their selves across different mediums. Autobiographical texts, too, as Katja Lee (2022) mentions, are significant sites of persona performance as they are drafted to be read or consumed by designated readers.

Segal's first autobiography, written in collaboration with Joan L. Erdman, was published in 1997 when the former was 85. Interestingly, after 13 years, Segal was prompted to rework and re-publish her autobiographical narrative through the memoir *Close-Up* when she was approximately 98. *Close-Up* is not just a re-telling but an act of re-reading and re-interpreting the earlier account of her persona. Little over a decade apart in their publishing dates, both texts fundamentally contain a similar core narrative, with many pages containing the exact text in terms of sentences and sequence of information.

The revisions are evident in *Close-Up* in the form of certain omissions and additions. In the prologue, "The Third Bell," Segal mentions that she was suffering from the physical limitations of old age while drafting the narrative; she says, "[a] body deteriorating from day to day...the teeth departing one by one, vision diminishing to the extent that sometimes, while writing, I cannot see the lines or the letters" (Segal 7). In addition to the physical changes, there is also an impact on memory, which directly impacts the process of recollection for texts of an autobiographical nature, which may have contributed to the omissions in this case.

On the other hand, Segal also seems to acknowledge the narration of her life a second time in *Close-Up*, when she justifies the endeavour by stating:

My main reason for writing this book is to create an absorbing task for myself, as well as to put down all that happened in my life before I forget it entirely. A lot of it seems to have taken place very, very long ago, as if in another life, and yet parts of it are as vivid as yesterday.  
(25)

The fragility of memory and the attempt to retain coherence of one's identity through the autobiographical narrative by painstakingly recalling and writing is, perhaps, a standard process for autobiographers and memoirists. In Segal's case, she is rewriting her autobiographical account more than a decade after its first publication. Thus, there is also an associated act of re-reading her own memories, leading to distancing the new text from the earlier one. This distance between the *Stages* and *Close-Up* can be gauged through the difference in the gaps and the lapses in the narrative, which could either be a function of Segal's memory or a deliberate choice. Regardless, the narrative template, which retains the characteristic features of Segal's persona as she desired to be seen, remains.

This consistency is also brought out through the employment of a combination of the professional, personal, and intimate registers of performance. In other words, the celebrity persona of Zohra Segal that the readers and audience encounter is made up of a combination of these three registers, according to which details are curated and revealed. As an autobiographical text, Segal's memoir connects anecdotes from her professional life with those from her personal (off-screen/stage) life. A carefully curated set of details informs the readers of Segal's relationships with different people from different contexts, including her professional circle, acquaintances, and family members.

As the book's subtitle suggests, *Close-Up* is a memoir of Segal's life on the stage and screen. Thus, at the very onset, the text establishes

the centrality of the professional register of persona performance by stating that the memoir chiefly contains anecdotes from her life on stage and screen. Needless to say, the anecdotes from her personal and intimate aspects of life do weave in and out of the sections devoted to discussions on her career. But the focus of the memoir, as a whole, remains clearly on her persona as a professional woman. An excerpt from chapter seven detailing the events around the birth of her son serves as a suitable example to demonstrate this:

Kameshwar was overjoyed at the news, the birth of a son being of even greater importance in a Hindu household...By July, I was back to work in Bombay, having to take the baby on tour with me, where he became the darling of the whole troupe...As he grew up, he joined in all the crowd scenes of the Theatre's plays, and got his first chance in a speaking role during the Simla tour of '58, at the age of five, for which he earned Rs. 50. (Segal 135–136)

As the subtitle of Segal's book suggests, this excerpt demonstrates how her anecdotes from her personal life were intertwined and connected to her career. In every chapter, the reader follows Segal's persona as it moves from the professional to the personal register and back through her recollections. Occasionally, Segal takes the intimate register too, especially in Chapter eight where she refers to the period following her husband, Kameshwar Segal's suicide:

I think I passed through a period of near-madness immediately after this. I found myself laughing and crying in turn, examining my actions and being surprised at them...Sometimes the pain and shock proved too much for me physically, and I experienced convulsions wracking my entire body...Understandably, I had been on leave all these days. Now I decided to make an effort to pull myself together and when the next tour was announced, I opted to go along. I set myself the challenge of being able to enact a tragic scene like the one at the end of *Pathan*. "If I can face tragedy on stage, it will mean I am coming back to normalcy. It will encourage me to keep my head above water and avoid my sinking into insanity". (Segal 146–147)

This excerpt shows a movement between the intimate, personal, and professional registers and demonstrates how Segal's profession was an anchor that held her together even in adversities. While she reveals her private moments of agony in these pages, she also informs her reader of her dedication to her profession, which she hoped would help her return to normalcy. Thus, even when the chapters detail intimate aspects of Segal's life, the narrative returns to the professional aspects shortly.

As demonstrated by the excerpt, the memoir consists of Segal curating the registers to perform her persona as per the context. If we look at the book's contents page, starting with the arrangement of chapters, most chapter titles focus on anecdotes and recollections from her professional life. A few chapters, especially the initial couple of chapters, are focused on her personal life and family history, and her persona performance takes the personal register. Such chapters are devoted to revealing her relationship with members of her family and anecdotes from the times she spent with them.

The intimate register of performance, where Segal reveals her innermost fears and desires, is relatively rare in the book, as a greater emphasis on this may render her persona obscure and challenging for the reader to understand. That being said, a promise of the intimate register of persona performance is also attractive to potential readers as they would interact with the text expecting controversial or unpleasant details. Being a celebrity, certain aspects of Segal's life were always accessible to the public. Giving more weightage to the intimate register of performance would mean the curation of Segal's persona using details entirely unknown to the reader or audience. This may affect the coherence and continuity of Segal's persona, which defeats the purpose of the memoir.

Comparing *Stages* with *Close-Up*, it is clear that Segal's objective was to produce a sharper, more focused narrative that informs the reader of her persona, getting rid of some additional details. As compared to *Stages*, *Close-Up* contains many visible revisions and

omissions. For example, in *Stages*, the chapters devoted to recounting her time with Uday Shankar's ballet troupe contain many finer details on the discipline imposed by Shankar on the conduct of performers on stage (76), the nuances of applying make-up correctly (77) and detailed physical descriptions of Shankar, Simike (his French dancer-partner), Kameshwar Segal and Uzra Butt (Zohra's sister). These details are absent from *Close-Up*, which makes it a more refined and focused text on the aspects of her narrative Segal wants the readers to know.

In Segal's extensive career in performing arts, the significance of routine rehearsals and reiterations for fine-tuning performances were paramount, and her biographers have noted her commitment to daily rehearsals. Kiran Segal notes that,

Her entire day is worked out to the minutest detail. Up at 7:30 am, three or four glasses of water to be drunk, followed by breakfast at 8 or 8:30 am, comprising just one mug of hot coffee and nothing else. Then she will go back to her room to literally scan the daily newspaper, have a bath, do some paperwork and then get down to her daily routine of exercises, which she does for nearly an hour-and-a-half. Exercising is the most important part of her routine. If, for some reason, she misses exercising in the morning, she makes it a point to find time later during the day. (Kiran Segal 133)

This excerpt shows her commitment to preserving and fine-tuning her art through rehearsals and routine exercises. Her adherence to a repetitive and detailed routine also highlights the importance of her profession in her daily life. Her routine contained physical exercises and a schedule of practice and refinement of her skills as an actor. Erdman notes,

A significant indication of Zohra's commitment to her art is the full hour she dedicates each morning to exercises, vocal and physical...I could hear, through the closed door of the dayroom, her disciplined renewal of her craft's basics. Not unlike the extensive throat cleansing, scratching and exercising of the famed late Dagar Brothers...Zohra's *sadhana*<sup>7</sup> signals her responsibility to her craft as well as her art, and



serves as an index of their intimate reciprocity in an artist's life. (Segal and Erdman xiii)

Erdman's description of Segal's *riyaaz* or *sadhana* shows the latter's fastidious commitment to rehearsing through repetition. As this was a central part of her day and her life, its influence can also be traced to her life writing through *Close-Up*. This is because the memoir is a stage for Segal to perform her celebrity persona for her readers.

Furthermore, *Close-Up* was a revised iteration of her life. Segal revised her first autobiographical text, *Stages* at least seven times (240) before she moved to India. The multiple revisions and the publication of the revised text as a memoir can be compared to the process of rehearsals a performer undertakes to hone their performance. With each revision, she rehearsed and refined her persona performance.

...to hit the right mark once, they have been practised a hundred times...the actor has listened over and over again to his own voice. He [the actor] has rehearsed to himself every note of his passion. He has learnt before a mirror every particle of his despair. (Diderot 19)

As Denis Diderot (1965) mentions in this excerpt, rehearsing is integral for seasoned performers. As an experienced performer, rehearsing was vital to Segal's routine. Each of the revisions done to her autobiographical narrative can be viewed as a process of rehearsal and refinement. By doing so, Segal was trying to develop what Jonas Tinius (2023) calls "future capacities of being"<sup>8</sup>. In other words, she adapts her persona to her contemporary context through refinement by reiteration or rehearsal. This ensures that her celebrity persona remains consistent and continues to be interpreted according to her preferences, even in the future.

Segal speaks self-consciously and at length in both her autobiographical text about her approach to acting by mentioning the influence of her training in the methods of Mary Wigman, which was largely an intuitive method focused on finding an inner flow and inherent rhythm (Segal 45–46). Years later, Segal's approach to acting

too was based on intuitively responding to the situation or dialogue as the plot or the script demanded. She mentions the same about her preparation for the role of Bari Bi, where she was required to “feel old from within” (Segal 129) and tailored her approach accordingly. Transcribing the same approach to her persona performance, Segal does impression management through the revisions and reiterations of her autobiographical account, each time adapting her persona to suit the context.

This idea of self that interacts with people and circumstances is not a novel concept, especially for celebrities like Segal. Erving Goffman considers this a strategic move geared towards impression management that is common to all persons, celebrities, or otherwise. He states, “...when an individual appears in front of others, there will be some reason for him to mobilize his activity so that it gives the others the impression which is in his interests to convey” (Goffman 4). Marshall et al. elaborate Goffman’s notion of the ‘frontstage’ and ‘backstage’ selves of every individual to discuss how the persona is a manifestation of the “constant reassembly of one’s self” (*Persona Studies* 31) when an individual interacts with others in a social situation. This is quite significant for actors like Segal as the impression she creates influences the roles she would receive.

The maintenance of a celebrity’s public image depends on strategically reassembling a version of their selves to create specific impressions when required. This further means that with specific circumstances, the permutations and combinations of characteristics would vary, leading to a different impression each time. Menon says that Segal “...activated her personal and professional relationships deploying that famous charm of hers, differently with different people, but always with a warmth and genuineness that was immediately reciprocated” (Menon 229). Thus, Segal ensured that she managed her impression according to the occasion and the people, especially when she was interacting with them outside of the home. This ensured that she would continue to be recognised as Zohra Segal, the actress who

portrays a certain type of roles. The memoir is also a performance of this nature wherein the readership is constituted by a mixed set of people with larger numbers of people located outside her personal and intimate circles. Thus, Segal's perception as a "larger than life" figure with a "dazzling persona" (Menon ix), known for the many mischievous, irreverent, and comical roles of grandmothers and mothers in cinema, informs her narrative strategies in her memoir.

However, in her private spaces, i.e., the backstage sphere of her life, the idea of her as a person was entirely different. Menon mentions, Segal considered herself to be an ill-tempered person. Kiran Segal affirms this by remembering how her mother was the 'Hitler' of the household during her childhood, referring to her insistence on orderliness, punctuality, and doing things in certain set ways. Kiran Segal recalls her mother's "eagle eyes" as a child and went to Prithvi Theatres with her mother when the latter was rehearsing. She mentions that she would be made to sit and watch the rehearsals or listen to the readings as they happened, and if at all she tried to move about or sit near the canteen, she would be instantly summoned back to the rehearsal space. While Kiran Segal devotes a chapter to discussing her mother's disciplinarian side, especially in a professional setting, in the biography,

Pavan Segal mentions a quieter self of Segal that he believes she had within her. He says, "Inside . . . I think she was a quiet person...In her psyche there was...not darkness, but there was a silence" (Menon 235) referring to the private emotions of his mother, which were never revealed to the public. Menon also recalls an "uncharacteristic public admission of her feelings" during an interview when Segal briefly alluded to her private moments of emotional turmoil following her husband's demise. Menon's emphasis on the uncharacteristic nature of this admission of Segal's indicates how Segal was aware of the kind of impression she wanted to maintain, and being a seasoned performer, she was able to execute her performance of Zohra Segal with perfection.

Since the memoir is a text that allows the readers to link Segal's backstage self with her frontstage self as a celebrity, it chronicles certain moments of personal agony and joy that Segal wanted to reveal. This suggests that autobiographical writing is always a conscious endeavour where, particularly if the authors are celebrities, there is a conscious narrative construction and presentation of the private self for public consumption through a carefully curated persona performing itself through a suitable combination of registers of persona performance. This helps the author present their most coherent and consistent selves to their readers while retaining their agency through impression management.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter analyses Zohra Segal's autobiographical strategies in crafting and performing her celebrity persona through a close reading of Zohra Segal's memoir, *Close-Up*. The chapter begins the analysis by first examining what constitutes Segal's persona. This section re-traces the moulding of Segal as the 'grand old lady of Bollywood' by looking at the kind of roles essayed by her on cinema and television programmes and comparing the findings with the extratextual information such as biographical information and commentary on her work. Further, the section discusses her past training in theatre through her association with Prithvi Theatres and IPTA. This analysis helps understand the fundamentally performative and theatrical character of Zohra Segal from discussions and writings available in the public domain.

The second section looks into her memoir more closely, examining the autobiographical and narrative strategies that reflect Segal's deep connection with her formative training as a theatre actor. This section also contains one of the central arguments of this chapter pertaining to the influence of her profession in the crafting and performance of Segal's persona. While Segal's beginnings as a professional performer were made through her training in Eurythmics and Pedagogy at the Mary Wigman Tanz Schule in Dresden, Germany, and subsequently as a core member of Uday Shankar's Indian Ballet troupe and also through Segal's association with his institute in Almora,

she always wanted to be an actor, designating the profession the status of her ‘first love.’ It was through her collaboration with IPTA and through her association with Prithvi Theatre that she charted her path into acting in a professional capacity. At the time, the objectives of both IPTA and Prithvi Theatres were political, and both organisations were concerned with the crafting of works that voiced their concerns against pressing issues, such as the British rule and the Partition of India, respectively. As organisations whose works had well-defined objectives, it was pertinent for their work to utilise modes of expression such as melodrama, theatricality, and spectacle.

This section argues that her participation and performance in the plays by these organisations influenced her understanding of not only acting but also storytelling methods. These influences are visible in the narrative of her memoir, *Close-Up*. Primarily, the findings of the analysis indicate that Segal’s memoir uses the narrative technique of monologue, and presents the articulation of her memories through anecdotes narrated in a melodramatic, theatrical, and spectacular way. The first section of the memoir, titled “The Third Bell,” contains the characteristic features of the Dramatic Monologue. The chapter uses the parameters outlined by the literary critic Ina Beth Sessions in her seminal work on the Dramatic Monologue published in 1947 to elaborate how “The Third Bell” meets nearly all the parameters that define a Dramatic Monologue, including the illustration of the character of the speaker, audience, occasion, the revelation of character, the interplay between the speaker and the audience, and the dramatic action that takes place in the present. The presence of a dramatic monologue in the memoir is perhaps the most telling aspect of the author’s profession as a theatre actor.

The next subsection addresses the melodramatic components of Segal’s narrative, focusing on the usage of excess as a narrative tool to convey the depths and intensity of her experiences. To establish the arguments for the usage of the melodramatic mode of expression, the chapter brings into discussion Peter Brooks’ *The Melodramatic*

*Imagination*. This section also draws upon her affiliation with Prithvi Theatres and IPTA and their largely melodramatic modes of storytelling. Furthermore, it also contains a few examples to illustrate how melodramatic acting and articulation styles remained significant components of her acting techniques even after she ventured into cinema and television during her last few decades of life. Then, the chapter moves into a discussion on the presence of the elements of theatricality and spectacle in her chapter. Segal's narrative features a fascinating narrative approach that presents visually evocative renderings of her experiences, allowing her reader to get a glimpse of her lived experiences while also getting a sense of her expertise in the theatrical mode of expression. Through selected examples from Segal's text, such as the anecdote of a snake entering her family's dining area and her introduction to Prithviraj Kapoor as a thespian, the chapter analyses the influence of theatre on Segal's narrative strategies.

The fourth and final section of the chapter devotes itself to assessing Segal's performance of her identity as Zohra Segal, the actress. The analysis presented here takes two approaches, first, a comparative analysis of the two autobiographical texts on Segal's life, i.e., *Stages* and *Close-Up*. Through a comparison of both texts, the chapter highlights the influence of memory and her act of re-reading and re-telling, which introduces a distance between the two texts. The analysis highlights the function of repetition in the shaping and polishing of Segal's autobiographical narrative by viewing it as an act of rehearsal. The chapter establishes how her commitment to rehearsing and refining her persona performance indicates Segal's foundations in dance and theatre performance traditions and indicates the strong presence of the professional register of persona performance.

In conclusion, this chapter identifies the key elements of Zohra Segal's memoir, *Close-Up* and her narrative approach in formulating the text to support the argument of the influence of a performer's professional affiliation in their autobiographical techniques. The insights presented in the chapter support the findings presented in the

thesis, which is focused on the performance of the professional persona and its significance in the autobiographical writings of female Indian performers from the 20th century.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Sections from this chapter have been included in the paper “Life as Theatre: A Critical Appraisal of Zohra Segal's *Close-Up* (2010)”, currently under review with the IUP Journal of English Studies.

<sup>2</sup> She choreographed for and performed in several Hindi films as a dancer as she notes in *Close-Up* (107)

<sup>3</sup> After her ten-week course, Segal realised that it was difficult to get roles in the industry. Ritu Menon notes that Segal decided to take up whatever came her way to continue working as an actor while earning a living. One of the jobs she had was as a dresser at the Old Vic, which allowed her to be in proximity to the theatre scene in London (Menon 227).

<sup>4</sup> Smith and Watson refer to the malleability of the memoir as a genre of autobiographical narration in *Reading Autobiography Now* (2024) by tracing the various definitions of the term over the years (7).

<sup>5</sup> Actress Tabu essays the character of Nina.

<sup>6</sup> Amitabh Bachchan performs the role of Buddhadev.

<sup>7</sup> *Sadhana*: The word *sadhana* refers to practice or reiteration, especially in performing arts like dance, music or theatre.

<sup>8</sup> See Tinius (2023) for his discussion on rehearsing.

## CHAPTER 4: Madhur Jaffrey's *Climbing the Mango Trees* (2006)<sup>1</sup>

### 4.1 Introduction

The wave of South Asian immigration to the US and the UK in the post-1960s led to a significant increase in the popularity of Indian cuisine in these regions. This phenomenon was fuelled partly by the nostalgic desires of the immigrant population for their gastronomic cultures and partly by the curious palates of the people of other ethnicities living in the US and the UK. Elizabeth Buettner (2008) mentions that South Asian cuisine was considered a “Jewel in the British Crown” and that “India was firmly ensconced in Britain’s cultural consciousness” (867). The increasing interest in immigrant culture and food became more evident during the 1980s in the UK, leading to a report by the Commission on Racial Equality on “Ethnic Minority Broadcasting”. It recommended that the broadcasting channels cater to the diverse British population<sup>2</sup>, which led to greater representation by South Asians, especially on television programmes. Such events led to the production and broadcast of many successful television programmes, including cookery shows. At this juncture, the contributions of Indian immigrants such as Madhur Jaffrey (1933–) in introducing culinary enthusiasts in the UK (and the US) to “authentic” Indian cuisine through television programmes gained prominence.

Born and raised in Delhi, Jaffrey migrated to London in the 1950s to study acting at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts. During this phase of her life, she taught herself to cook out of necessity. Shortly after graduating, she moved to the US, where she acquired greater renown for her culinary prowess and deep knowledge of Indian gastronomic culture. Learning to cook eventually became a turning point for her, leading to professional opportunities and a solid career. However, her journey was not without its hiccups. In her interviews and cookbooks, Jaffrey often shares her initial struggles while learning to



cook as a student in London. As an established professional, sharing such anecdotes allowed her to connect with many South Asian students and professionals living abroad, all looking to make inroads to mastering their culinary traditions. The sharing of her struggles and learnings from her experiences in the kitchen gave her audience a sense of confidence in her abilities to guide them to their desired expertise, which further cemented her position as the go-to expert abroad, specifically on Indian cuisine.

During her early days in New York in the 1950s, Jaffrey often guided Indian immigrants and their descendants on making Indian food at home by sharing recipes tailored for their American kitchens. Her recipes gained popularity among the diaspora and were often circulated during events<sup>3</sup>, drawing attention from people from other ethnicities keen to explore Indian cuisine. Gradually, as she became an author and cookery show host, with 30-plus cookbooks and eight cookery shows, her public persona was consolidated around her professional expertise. Within this context of her profession in food, this chapter critically appraises Madhur Jaffrey's celebrity persona. Looking at Jaffrey as primarily a television personality, the chapter reads her memoir, *Climbing the Mango Trees* (2006), by contextualising it among her acclaimed cookbooks like *An Invitation to Indian Cooking* (1973), *Madhur Jaffrey's Indian Cookery* ([1982] 2023) and *A Taste of India* (1985) to derive a sense of her narrative techniques and the influence of her professional expertise in determining those techniques. Through understanding her autobiographical narrative strategies, the chapter further uncovers her autobiographical strategies of self-fashioning with which she renders her persona performance.

In the context of the present work, the chapter establishes that while interacting with Jaffrey's works, be it the cookbooks, cookery shows, or the memoir, the audience is interacting with Madhur Jaffrey as an identity being performed. The "identity"s is a projection of Jaffrey containing the characteristics that define her as a person. These characteristics are updated continuously and enacted to communicate

and maintain interpersonal relationships (Marshall 25). Additionally, this chapter discusses how *Climbing the Mango Trees* (2006) presents the most comprehensive rendition of Jaffrey's persona through the memoir. In its narrative approach, structure, and organisation, the memoir extends from Jaffrey's cookbooks and facilitates continuity and consistency for her persona projected through her cookbooks and television shows. In doing so, it reveals Jaffrey's response to her public perception delivered through the memoir. The contextualisation of *Climbing the Mango Trees* with her previously published cookbooks and television shows additionally helps the narrative by forming a matrix of interconnected texts within the boundaries of which Jaffrey's persona is articulated and performed.

To supplement the analysis of Jaffrey's persona, this chapter also evaluates her performance as the host of *Madhur Jaffrey's Indian Cookery* (1982) to better understand the physical and visual attributes of this performance, including her attire, narrative approach, and the role of these variables in crafting the persona of Madhur Jaffrey. Comparing the insights from the show to the information provided in the memoir helps the chapter's analysis of the nuances of Jaffrey's persona performance. Furthermore, the chapter also employs Kim Barbour's (2015) theory of the registers of persona performance to understand the specific combination of the registers in the memoir. This again helps the chapter highlight the influence of Jaffrey's profession in her scripting of herself.

Jaffrey's memoir facilitates the fusing of her identity with her profession, making her a household name who can be trusted to guide those getting acquainted with Indian food abroad. For instance, in *Madhur Jaffrey's Indian Cookery* ([1982] 2023), she talks about making garam masala at home by using a coffee grinder (21). She is addressing a readership that is settled in the UK in the 1980s through this particular book, some of whom may not have Indian cooking equipment within easy access. By suggesting alternatives, she makes the recipes and dishes accessible to immigrant and non-immigrant audiences alike. Her

adaptive approach bridges the cultural divide between the readership of different ethnicities, allowing interested readers to take the initiative to attempt certain dishes. This helps her remain relevant to the audience she is addressing, as their kitchens may be very different from traditional Indian kitchens. Furthermore, through a clearly defined set of steps, she assures her readers of achieving culinary authenticity well, even through kitchen spaces and equipment that are far from the setup found in traditional Indian kitchens at that time. This, in turn, illustrates how the diasporic kitchen, as a liminal space, shapes the cooking practices through availability, context, and daily lived realities of the immigrants.

Thus, her works contribute to the body of works created by Indian immigrants who sought to familiarise the American and British populations with the so-called exotic and unfamiliar terrain of Indian cuisine that was thus far reductively understood as a confluence of curries. As her expertise in Indian cuisine started drawing recognition from the American public through her dinner parties and recipes in circulation, the eminent food critic from the New York Times, Craig Claiborne (1920–2000), profiled her. The article described her as “An Indian Actress who is a Star in the Kitchen too” (1966), which resulted in significant publicity for her skills. Claiborne’s article paved the way for her subsequent foray into a career in food, with her first cookbook and cookery show following the article within a few years. As Marshall et al. argue, certain “thresholds are achieved in order for an individual to appropriate a profession as part of their public identity and status” (181). For Jaffrey, the article, her cookbook, and cookery shows were key thresholds that established her status as a culinary professional.

#### **4.2 Nourishing an Evolving Tradition: Contextualising Jaffrey’s Work**

While Jaffrey was an influential and authoritative figure on South Asian food in the diaspora, she was by no means the first to produce cookbooks or television shows catered to the cuisine. One of the earliest cookbooks published in the UK by an Indian immigrant was *Indian Cooking* by Savitri Chowdhary (1909–1996), published in 1954.

Similarly, in the US, the list of the earliest cookbooks by Indian immigrants includes Dharam Jit Singh's *Classic Cooking from India* (1956), *Indian Cookery* (1970), and Santha Rama Rau's (1923–2009) *The Cooking of India* (1975). While Dharam Jit Singh's cookbook and Shanta Rama Rau's cookbook memoir also have elements of autobiography that bind the narrative, their recipes are mainly instructional. For instance, Singh's *Classic Cooking from India* captures the American housewife's interest in adapting Indian dishes into her kitchen. Therefore, the author indulges in the eulogising of Indian cookery by saying:

In India even the poorest cook, with his alchemy of spices and respect for quality, can coax the most Cinderella of vegetables to appear on the table with elegance. The humble lentil is transformed into a savory delight for the most sophisticated taste. With meat, fish and fowl, the modest home in India can present a dish succulent enough to make the gourmet crow with delight or blow a flourish on silver trumpets as the French do to celebrate good food. (*Classic Cooking from India* 2)

Throughout the book, Singh equates Indian cuisine with French cuisine to emphasise how the cooking method, flavours and aromas are highly intricate. The narrative also features an autobiographical approach in the initial chapters in which he presents a highly idealised narrative of his early acquaintances with food.

Shivering with excitement and private bliss, I would creep into the kitchen to eat. Most of us in the house did not eat in the dining room. My aunts and uncles sat, at least during those days, in the kitchen, an immense room with smoky beams and mellowed ceiling. At one end was the hearth, presided over by the cook whom we called Big Brother Dilla... The kitchen was a place of warmth and happy extroverted fun. We could enter it from eleven to two in the afternoons and Big Brother Dilla, comforting, solid, burly, with his generous hand and overflowing ladle of wonderful things, was the king of the festive hubbub. (*Classic Cooking from India* 6–7)

However, Singh's recipes are instructional and direct, similar to Savitri Chowdhary's *Indian Cookery*, and they aim to simplify the process of making Indian food at home. Albeit compared to Chowdhary, Singh's descriptions of Indian food appear far too mystical and grandiose. On the other hand, Chowdhary's cookbook has little to no autobiographical focus. But the recipes contain advice based on experience, which, like Jaffrey's, reflects her initial trials and tribulations as an immigrant cooking Indian food abroad. Her recipe for *dahi* or curd is a suitable example in this context:

In very cold weather, the milk for making *dahi* should be warmer (not really hot), and the quantity of the curd which you are mixing in should be slightly increased and at the temperature of blood-heat. Some people wrap a piece of blanket round the pot or the jug to give extra warmth. After the *dahi* is set, it should always be kept in a cool place. In India we make *dahi* in earthenware pots, but I have found that it retains its flavour fairly well even in china jugs. When using *dahi*, care should be taken to save a little for making the next lot. (Chowdhary 18)

In this excerpt, her suggestion to substitute earthen pots with China jugs is drawn from experience and understanding that most of her readers, who are based in the UK, may not have utensils available in a conventional Indian kitchen. Therefore, her suggestions help readers arrive at the desired outcome and get the dishes right. Unlike Chowdhary, Shanta Rama Rau's memoir lends equal importance to autobiographical anecdotes and recipes; however, the recipes are instructional and curated thematically. However, despite being curated in this manner, they don't have a direct connection with the anecdotes that are narrated, so the author's personal connection with the recipes or dishes is unclear. In this case, Jaffrey's cookbooks place her at the centre. Her books are not just instructive; many of the recipes contained in them are directly connected to her experiences that are brought out through narrative descriptions:

A simple dish, enjoyed equally by peasants and jetsetters in Uttar Pradesh, this may be served with almost all Indian meals. It has a slightly bitter taste that I happen to adore. I love it best with a sauced meat or chicken dish, some plain yoghurt, an Indian bread and some nice, hot pickle. Oh yes, some relish with onions to give the meal a little crunch! Normally, long white radishes (mooli) are used in India. They are not always easy to find in the West. When I do find them, I find them minus their precious green leaves. In desperation, I decided one day to substitute radishes. They did, naturally, lose their colour during the cooking, but they were delicious. (*A Taste of India* 64)

Furthermore, in the narrative approach of her cookbooks, the readers are addressed directly as if in a direct conversation with her. Her memoir also follows the same concept. For example:

When cooking for the children, I leave out all the chillies, whether the powdered red kind or the fresh green variety. My parents did the same for us when we were growing up. I use low-fat yoghurt, but you may use any that you prefer. (*Climbing the Mango Trees* 226)

This is largely absent in the cookbooks mentioned earlier, as they were not written to be personalised conversational texts. Her memoir, too, draws its narrative structure and flow from the cookbooks and contains recipes toward the end. Thus, Jaffrey's cookbooks and memoirs strive to do more than simply give the readers recipes to follow — she converses with them through the texts. Through her works, the readers learn to cook while also getting to know her and her experiences with the recipes. She also makes herself a relatable figure by sharing her experiences as a fellow immigrant, which gives the readers the assurance that they are being guided by an individual who has lived through similar experiences and learnt to work in a kitchen space resembling their own. Such factors play a pivotal role in building the readers' trust towards Jaffrey.

For immigrants particularly, Jaffrey's works speak to their sense of nostalgia. She addresses these feelings of nostalgia by drawing out the gastronomic memories from the readers' minds through evocative

descriptions of food, encouraging them to recreate those memories, for which she provides instructions. For instance, in *Climbing the Mango Trees*, she describes fenugreek leaves, their appearance, and flavour as follows: “Fenugreek greens, with their small oval leaves and their very earthy aroma, appear in Delhi only in the winter months, so it is then that they are eaten, either mixed in with carrots or with potatoes.” (264)

Jaffrey’s description of fenugreek leaves is evocative, especially her description of the shape and size of the leaves and the aroma they contain. She also mentions that this dish is a winter speciality in homes in and around Delhi. Thus, for readers familiar with the dish “Carrots with Fenugreek Greens” or its alternative, potatoes with fenugreek greens, this description would serve as a reminder of the dish, its flavours, and their memories of consuming it. On the other hand, readers unfamiliar with the foods of this region, or this dish in particular, would also have clarity on what to expect when preparing such dishes based on her description. With this inclusive approach, her emphasis throughout her cookbooks and memoir is to help her readers create/re-create the flavours from the dishes as they are made in Indian homes.

#### **4.3. Madhur Jaffrey: The Woman Who Taught the West How to Cook Indian Food<sup>4</sup>**

To be known as an expert in any domain is associated with achieving a certain degree of public acknowledgement of one’s skills and building a reputation. As Marshall et al. (2020) elaborate, “[p]ersonas are both the cause and effect of reputation and can be created with a sense that the desired reputation already exists prior to its actual development” (77). In this sense, Jaffrey’s persona is both the cause and effect of the reputation of an individual possessing knowledge of Indian cuisine. It is the cause because it led to the opportunities for her to publish a wide range of cookbooks and host a series of successful cookery shows, cementing her public image as a television personality. The cookery shows allowed her to display her command over cookery publicly and established her as an expert known for introducing people in the US and the UK to cooking Indian food.

Jaffrey's profession as a television personality helped her leverage the values of "familiarity and mass acceptability", the attributes of personalities created by television (Marshall, *Celebrity and Power* 119). Marshall refers to the ability of television as a medium to breed familiarity through its regular scheduling, advertising function, and set format for non-fictional programmes, like cookery shows. The advertising function of television shows mainly relates to the association of commodities as brand names with certain programmes, such as *The Colgate Comedy Hour* (1950–1955) or *Texaco Star Theater* (1948–1956), and Indian television shows like *The Cadbury Bournvita Quiz Contest* (1972–) and *Star Singer* (2006–). Similarly, the association of the hosts' names with the programme suggests a manner of commodification similar to that of the film star. Richard Dyer comments on the influence of stars in the economics of production, stating that a section of scholars believe that stars "manipulate" the market and also the audience and facilitate the generation of revenue. Dyer discusses this in the context of films helmed by Hollywood production houses (*Stars* 10), but the same is applicable in the case of television programmes too. Media houses apply the same strategy of utilising the market value of the television personality's public image by using their names in the titles. For instance, Madhur Jaffrey's name was associated with her television programmes such as *Madhur Jaffrey's Indian Cookery* (1982) and *Madhur Jaffrey's Far Eastern Cookery* (1989), suggesting that her name, as a brand, represented expertise and adaptability in the context of Indian cuisine explored abroad, which drew audience towards their programmes.

For Jaffrey, television cookery shows were one of the early sites of performance. But Jaffrey is a trained actress who continues to insist on seeing herself as an actress instead of a cook. "I always say, 'I'm an actress who cooks.' I see myself as an actress" (Kayal 2015). Some observations made by Craig Claiborne (1920–2000) in his 1966 article on her suggest Jaffrey's inherent awareness towards the performative aspect of cookery,



When Ms. Jaffrey speaks, her hands and fingers are in frequent motion to give an aerial image of the things that she describes. There are arcs and circles, ovals, squares and rectangles that seem to outline for her listener the shape of a lentil patty, a cucumber, perhaps, or a pod of okra. She has a most engaging enthusiasm when she speaks of the food of her homeland. (Claiborne 1966)

Although Claiborne's article preceded Jaffrey's television career, it shows Jaffrey's awareness towards the performative nature of the act of cooking, particularly when recipes and techniques are being explained to an audience. It suggests that as early as 1966, when the article was published, Jaffrey was equipped as a performer for her professional transition into a cook on television.

Her show *Madhur Jaffrey's Indian Cookery* (1982) was intended for an ethnically diverse audience in the UK and received much critical acclaim. Panikos Panayi (2008) mentions that as a result of her successful cookbooks and cookery shows, Jaffrey was "seen as something of an Elizabeth David" (204), implying that Jaffrey was among the first who, through collaboration with the BBC, became a television chef specialising in Indian cuisine. Consequently, Jaffrey's cookery show turned the kitchen into a site of cultural performance. She was able to facilitate the recreation of the tastes and flavours of authentic Indian dishes through a host of recipes explored in a kitchen located outside India, similar to those of her viewers who watched the programme. Jaffrey shared or passed down recipes, tastes, and knowledge through her show and kitchen, which comprise a part of Indian gastronomic culture. Furthermore, in adapting the techniques of cooking Indian food to the British or American kitchens of her shows, she was also educating her audience to retain and sustain Indian gastronomic culture through adaptation and improvisation.

Despite Jaffrey's claim that her first cookery show, *Madhur Jaffrey's Indian Cookery* (1982), was an unexpected "immediate hit" (Haider 2022), the programme was the result of a strategic approach to cater to a "nation where the consumption of 'foreign foods' had grown

exponentially since the 1950s” (Buettner 867). The show title carried her name and was broadcast with a fixed schedule, airing every Monday evening after 6:30 pm, with the family audience constituting its designated viewership. The BBC Programme Index introduces the first episode as follows:

Actress and international cookery expert Madhur Jaffrey introduces the first of eight programmes which will show lovers of Indian food how to achieve those subtle and exotic flavours in their own kitchens. Her step-by-step guide reveals some of the real secrets of this exciting cuisine. 1: Tandoori Chicken...In this first programme she shows how to cook the very popular tandoori chicken, using an ordinary domestic oven; how it can be transformed into chicken makkahani or chicken [i]n delicately spiced buttery sauce, and a quick and easy side dish, spicy cucumber wedges.

Thus, Jaffrey was seen as an “international cookery expert” whose show was specifically catered towards those who enjoyed Indian cuisine and wanted to recreate it in their kitchens. Since this and the consecutive shows emphasised the idea of creating “authentic” Indian food, Jaffrey’s name as the host also came to reflect the same. Crossland-Marr and Krause state that “[a]uthenticity is also the work of representation — of geography, cultures, and agricultural ways — that is economically and socially valuable” (9). Jaffrey staked her claim to this tag of authenticity by representing her culture on television through her appearance, performance, and food. As the host, she performed the role of the expert on the television screen every week through her appearance, attire, body language, and food. Consequently, the programme facilitated the structuring of her persona, and through it, her routine appearance on television helped train the viewers to expect and anticipate an interaction with her at the weekly designated time. This familiarity, in turn, allowed her to continually interact with the audience as a familiar expert in authentic Indian food.

To appear authentic to her viewers, she drew from her own context and lived experiences as an immigrant. She shared ways to adapt

and improvise with Indian food in the diasporic kitchen, like substituting the grinding stone with a coffee grinder or, as stated in the programme excerpt (above), using the oven instead of a tandoor to make tandoori chicken and yet arrive at the “authentic” flavour for any given dish. By the time her programme aired, she had lived briefly in the UK and had been in the USA since the 1950s. Therefore, these substitutions and workarounds came from her own experiences of improvising and adapting to what is available in her kitchen in these countries. Through such techniques, she was practicing knowledge sharing that is central to Indian cookery. In other words, her cookbooks, memoirs, and television shows demonstrate the importance of received advice, which may be informal or knowledge that is passed down through generations. In this manner, she was performing her persona as the professional expert capable of guiding people in recreating the food from her home.

As a television personality, her appearance is yet another key component of her persona. On her cookery shows, Jaffrey appears in a fusion of Western and Indian aesthetics, i.e., in clothing ranging from salwar-kameez to sarees paired with stylish short-cropped or bob hairstyles, perhaps as an allusion to her identity as an Indian settled in America, originally hailing from a household that followed mixed cultural practices. She creates her own aesthetic, which firmly establishes the idea of Madhur Jaffrey in the minds of the audience, which they also connect to what she represents through her programme as well. In other words, she configured her style to reflect her identity, cultural background and flexible approach to cooking. For the members of her audience and readership who shared similar cultural roots, this was a way of integrating familiar cultural aspects of cookery with those that are followed and/or available in their current setting.

Cookery shows are cultural-educational programmes<sup>5</sup>, and as a host, Jaffrey’s presence was expected to facilitate the consumption of culture and the products created through such performances, i.e., food and associated equipment. Therefore, Madhur Jaffrey’s identity as a television personality was curated to achieve this from the onset. Due to

this reason, despite working as an actor, her public image continued to be strongly associated with food. Michelle Kayal (2015) in her interview with Madhur Jaffrey affirms this, “Madhur Jaffrey is known to Americans — when she is known at all — as an author of Indian cookbooks. And with good reason: she has written more than two dozen of them.” In the introduction to this interview, Kayal also states that Jaffrey is “often called ‘The Julia Child of Indian Cookery’” (2015). This correlation with Julia Child (1912–2004), a global icon in the world of cookery, television personality, and an author of cookbooks, further indicates how Jaffrey’s identity corresponds to her profession.

It’s important to note that, like Child, Jaffrey is known as herself and not as any other character. In other words, her identity as an expert is connected to her real name, unlike the correlation that exists between actors and their various on-screen roles. Thus, on television, she performs as Madhur Jaffrey, an identity put to play (Lee 4) that retains strong ties to her backstage self (Marshall et al., *Persona Studies* 33) or her identity as an individual outside her profession. She is cognizant of what Madhur Jaffrey means or represents as a celebrity. Therefore, throughout all her works and public appearances, be it the cookbooks or television shows, she ensures that she represents those very ideas and presents those very narratives through a consistent performance of her persona so as to retain familiarity with her audience. This familiarity, a characteristic of television personalities, builds trust between the host and their audience.

By the time her memoir was published, Jaffrey had already had been a professional cookery show host for over two decades. She had also been consistently publishing cookbooks for over three decades. Therefore, the template for her persona performance was well-defined for her to continue it the memoir also. Her cookbooks also contain significant autobiographical focus through which Jaffrey keeps herself and her experiences at the centre of the narrative. The memoir, as expected, has a greater autobiographical focus but continues the narrative approach of the cookbooks and the television shows through

its direct address to the readership/audience. In the memoir, her identity as the television personality Madhur Jaffrey is also her autobiographical self. Consequently, the memoir stitches together several publicly known anecdotes from Jaffrey's childhood, which are revealed in her interviews, articles, cookbooks, and television shows, as well as many unknown and more personal moments from her childhood.

This strategy of autobiographical narration is deliberate because, as a celebrity, she is already aware of her audience. Catering to this designated audience, she curates her memoir using moments and anecdotes that best reflect her journey of acquiring her refined palate and archive of taste memories, which, today, are synonymous with her expertise in Indian food. In doing so, she is using her agency as a celebrity to ensure that legacy carries on with this very interpretation of her as a professional and expert.

#### **4.4. Scripting the expert: Jaffrey's autobiographical narrative strategies**

Jaffrey is often called "the doyen of Indian cookery" (Panayi 204). She draws legitimacy to her status as an established professional from her experience growing up in Delhi in an affluent home with diverse cultural practices owing to the professions of various generations of family members in the governments of the rulers who governed Delhi across time. In her memoir and cookbooks, she speaks at length about the influence of such a diverse history on various cultural characteristics of her family such as thought process, education, fashion, and, most importantly, food.

The men in my family, right down to my father's time, learnt Persian, the Moghul court language, and knew how to appreciate the finer nuances of Persian poetry, delicate kababs and fine wine (with the takeover of the British, the wine changed to whisky). The women, on the other hand, were kept at home where they spoke and read Hindi well enough to master many Hindu religious texts...These women cooked quail and venison quite lovingly for their husbands but some, like my grandmother, remained vegetarian. (*A Taste of India* 25)

She indicates how her ancestors' lifestyles and practices trickled down to their subsequent generations, including hers, leading to the nuanced cultural practices in her home, which featured a mix of British, Mughal, and Hindu sensibilities. Jaffrey considers these the foundation of her culinary interests. However, it was typical for similar traces of Indo-Persian culture to exist within the households of wealthy Hindu families in North India when Jaffrey was growing up.

In addition to familial cultural practices, Jaffrey also cites her school lunch hours as sources of her exposure to the culinary diversity of India. As stated in her memoir, she shared meals with classmates from diverse backgrounds during these lunch hours:

Abida and Zahida could be relied upon to bring meats — and what meats they were! Goat cooked with spinach, browned onions and cardamom or goat with potatoes, cinnamon and cloves...Abida and Zahida's food was inner-city, Delhi and Muslim... Sudha's food was as Jain as Abida's and Zahida's was Muslim. Completely vegetarian, it was devoid of onion and garlic as those bulbs were thought to arouse base passions; it contained no tomatoes or beets as their colour was reminiscent of blood...Promela's family were relaxed Delhi Punjabis...She brought parathas (griddle breads) stuffed with cauliflower, and mango pickle to eat with it. (*Climbing the Mango Trees* 160 – 161)

She indicates in this excerpt how these lunches taught her about the regional and cultural variations in the usage of various ingredients and the ways to combine them to produce, at times, familiar and similar dishes. As components of her memoir's narrative strategy, such anecdotes are included as pieces of evidence to support her professional knowledge of various dishes and culinary practices followed among different communities in India. These anecdotes provide the readers with critical background knowledge of her insights, which in turn helps them view her as an expert.

Jaffrey refers to her lived experience of growing up in Delhi between 1933 and 1955, a transient time marked by historical events,

including various episodes from the Indian freedom struggle, including Gandhi's non-cooperation movement, his assassination, and India's attainment of independence followed by its partition (1947). This was the time when Delhi's food culture was also undergoing rapid transformations, which Jaffrey includes in her memoir by drawing a narrative parallel to her journey of acquiring her taste memories. Through its narrative, the memoir informs the readers how Delhi was coming into its own as a gastronomic hub, i.e., a point of confluence of Mughal, Punjabi, North Indian, South Indian, British, and Afghan-Punjabi cuisines. Connecting this contextual historical knowledge of Delhi with accounts of her years growing up within it, Jaffrey legitimises her status as a professional with genuine, lived experiences which enriched her archive of taste memories. In doing so, she uses the narrative parallel to geographically anchor her source of authentic knowledge on Indian food as an expert.

Location is a significant factor in determining the authenticity of food. The official markers of authenticity recognised worldwide include the Geographical Index (GI) marker, which certifies the authentic standard of foods and other commodities by associating them with their geographical point of origin. Similarly, the authenticity of Jaffrey's knowledge is tied to the location of her home through the memoir. This connection of authenticity with home follows from her belief that kitchens in Indian homes are the truly authentic points from which Indian cuisine originates. To put it simply, for Jaffrey, dishes created in the kitchens of Indian homes constitute "authentic" Indian cuisine. The following anecdote from *Climbing the Mango Trees*, based on her conversations with the chefs from Bukhara and Dumpukht restaurants of the Maurya Sheraton Hotel in Delhi, illustrates her understanding of "authentic". Jaffrey was researching the recipe for "Lamb with Spinach (*saag gosht*)" and recalls how the chefs responded to her queries by demonstrating the preparation of "elegant, and highly elaborate meat dishes, all worthy of emperors" (Jaffrey 244). She writes,

But, I asked one of the chefs, Nisar Waris, “how would you cook a simple saag gosht in your own home? I am looking for an everyday recipe”. To me, it is these home dishes that, rather like Italian food at its best, form the heart of our great cuisine. (*Climbing the Mango Trees* 244)

Her emphasis on home as the site of authentic Indian food also serves to reassure her readers about the dishes they create at home using her recipes. This is also an important function of cookbooks/cookery shows because, for immigrants, food is an indispensable part of the cultural experience that they seek to recreate while navigating their lives in a foreign country.

This very understanding of authenticity as a value sourced from “home” guides the narrative of her memoir. In *Climbing the Mango Trees*, the narrative is structured to convey her journey of acquiring her famous archive of taste memories, which is a key characteristic feature of her as a professional. As per the memoir, she acquired her rich repository of taste memories from home, and the same archive came to her aid when she could not handle the locally available food in London during her time as a student. Like the authenticity of food cooked in the Indian kitchen, Jaffrey’s memoir also serves to emphasise her authenticity as an expert based on her lived experiences growing up in Delhi. In other words, as an immigrant expert on Indian food, her authenticity is also rooted in her home, where she built her archive of taste memory, leading to a highly successful career in her later years.

Jaffrey mentions in the introduction to *An Invitation to Indian Cooking* (2011) that during her early years of living in New York, she would redirect all those who sought restaurant recommendations for authentic Indian food to her home.

My answer is always an apologetic, “I am afraid there is no place in New York or anywhere in America where top-quality Indian food can be found — except, of course, in private Indian homes” . . . Naturally, it is difficult to recommend such a restaurant. The only alternative is



to invite the people in question home for dinner. (*An Invitation to Indian Cookery* 9–10)

This highlights the importance that Jaffrey gave to the food that is prepared at home. In doing so, she locates authenticity within the kitchen spaces geographically confined within Indian homes. However, by accepting the possibility of creating authenticity in kitchens that are outside India, she shows openness to adapting to new kitchen technology and equipment. For example, in *An Invitation to Indian Cooking*, she remarks —

...my book can introduce you to the smells and tastes which I grew up with as a child in Delhi and which I have struggled over the years to re-create in my American kitchen. These dishes, some traditional and some adapted to the produce in American supermarkets, you can now cook in your own homes instead of having to rely on second-rate eating places or the mercy of Indian acquaintances. (26)

Among the binary entities of the home and the restaurant, she emphasises the authenticity of cuisine emerging from the home. She accepts and encourages the possibility of recreating authenticity through adaptation in home kitchens, even if they are located abroad. Thus, what Jaffrey represents is the connection of authentic cuisine with the home, be it through her professional appearances on television in the intimate settings of the home or as the author of cookbooks that may be read within homes or kitchens.

Anita Mannur (2010) observes, “Food becomes both intellectual and emotional anchor” for the “immigrant subject” (27). Here, Mannur highlights the ability of food to induce nostalgia and engender feelings of familiarity and comfort among expatriates. Jaffrey’s work enables such a readership to engage with this nostalgia and recreate the gastronomic components of Indian culture in a geographically distant location. In addition to her guidance on cookery techniques and food practices, her work also offers insights into serving specific pairings of dishes for social gatherings. Her recipe for “Cocktail Koftas” (*Indian Cookery* 62), a modification of the more traditional kofta, is a suitable

example to illustrate this objective of her cookbooks. This recipe is her reimagining of koftas as a snack to be served with drinks or dinner. Thus, her work goes beyond enabling a re-creation of dishes and helps diaspora and non-diaspora members to collectively engage with Indian culture through food. Such recipes and discussions allow her readers to modify and adapt traditional Indian dishes according to their context in the US or UK.

Recipes like “Cocktail Koftas” are also insightful examples to understand how Jaffrey gleans from her own accumulated experiences of living abroad. She informs her readers of learning to improvise and adapt the cuisine during her initial years living in the US when she hosted several dinner parties. She says:

The only alternative is to invite the people in question home for dinner. I did this for several years, justifying the expense and the effort by telling myself that someone had to let Americans know what authentic Indian food was like and that I couldn’t heartlessly ignore their curiosity and interest. So I kept feeding people in large numbers until exhaustion finally put an end to what I considered was rather discreet proselytizing. (*An Invitation to Indian Cookery* 10)

She further adds that she kept doling out recipes to people whenever conversations around Indian food cropped up and soon started sharing her recipes by post to those who requested them. This indicates how, as a member of the diaspora, she strategically positioned herself as an approachable and knowledgeable person with sufficient experience in adapting Indian cuisine to her context.

The locations associated with authentic food of Delhi, outside the kitchen at home, that feature among Jaffrey’s notable exceptions include Moti Mahal (1920–) and kebabs from the kebab makers near Jama Masjid in Delhi. In *Climbing the Mango Trees*, Jaffrey lists these establishments as the only permitted locations outside the home from where food could be ordered (172). However, according to her memoir, Moti Mahal, at that time, was known for its village-style cooking, as it

was an establishment set up by people who had migrated to Delhi from Punjab in the wake of the partition of India. Jaffrey notes,

This was Punjabi food from what had once been India's northwest frontier, near its border with Afghanistan. When India was partitioned, fleeing Hindu refugees from the newly formed West Pakistan gathered their valuables and ran in an easterly direction. They carried their tandoors with them so they could cook along the way. One such family that fled all the way to Delhi decided to open Moti Mahal and offer its plain village cooking to a city of culinary sophisticates. (*Climbing the Mango Trees* 172–173)

Thus, even as an establishment, the menu primarily included the food that the refugees cooked at home in their villages. Therefore, despite being outside food, the recipes came from the kitchens of the owners and their families. A recipe for the “Black Beans Cooked in Punjabi Style (Kali Dal)” (266) from Moti Mahal finds a place in the “Family Recipes” section of her memoir, perhaps because it constitutes a part of her childhood and because it was an establishment central to the gastronomic history of Delhi. The inclusion of this recipe also tells of Jaffrey's autobiographical strategies in juxtaposing her journey of acquiring taste memories with the transformation of Delhi's gastronomic culture through a confluence of different cuisines. This narrative parallel is inserted into the memoir to reflect the diversity of her archive of taste memories through an indirect comparison with the culinary diversity of Delhi.

Additionally, in Jaffrey's cookbooks, the authenticity of taste is also associated with the materiality of food and how it connects with the embodied experiences of people from the Indian subcontinent. Thus, her cookbooks connect authenticity with the thingness of food<sup>6</sup>. To put it simply, for Jaffrey, food is an object that transcends its consumable, material property that provides nutrition. It is an entity that can engender nostalgia and even placate the longings of those desperately seeking to recreate their past experiences of consuming it. Jaffrey assures those who follow her recipes of their ability to realise such desires.

However, this is not a feature unique to Jaffrey's works and can be found in the cookbooks of authors who preceded her, such as Savitri Chowdhary's *Indian Cooking* and Mrs Balbir Singh's *Mrs. Balbir Singh's Indian Cookery* (1967), which Jaffrey herself mentions referring to in her early days of cooking<sup>7</sup>. For instance, Savitri Chowdhary indicates in the very beginning of her book possible alternatives for utensils:

Most cooking utensils in India are made of tin-plated brass, iron or steel. It is, however, quite possible to cook Indian food in heavy enamel or aluminium saucepans. Deep, heavy frying pans may be used for cooking dry vegetables, for frying, and for condensing milk. (Chowdhary 20)

Jaffrey was following the template of cookbooks that were predominantly written for a readership based outside India. Adaptability is a predominant factor found in such cookbooks; in doing so, such authors make their recipes more experiential and relevant. Another example from Jaffrey's book that demonstrates adaptability teaches the readers the fundamental difference between similar meats in India and the US. Jaffrey argues that because of such differences, some technical improvisations are required to create certain Indian dishes in American kitchens. She says,

There is another significant difference in the quality of Indian meat, which influences cooking techniques. In India, meat dropped into fat can be expected to fry, slowly or quickly, as the cook desires. Here in America, if a pound of meat is put into oil to fry, unless one has taken careful preliminary steps, it will start boiling...As I go along I will tell you, in each recipe, which step to follow. What I want you to understand here is why an Indian meat dish cooked in America will never taste quite the same as it does in India. (*An Invitation to Indian Cookery* 78–9)

Such instances inform her readers that the recipes come from her experience traversing the learning curve of cookery, which makes a compelling case for the legitimacy of her expertise. As Marshall (2010)

notes, such a notion of authenticity presented by celebrities is essentially a narrativisation of the private aspects of their lives for public consumption, presenting an accessible but constructed “performance of the actor’s everyday life” (Marshall, “Promotion and Presentation of Everyday Self” 40). In Jaffrey’s case, she curates anecdotes from her memories and experiences to pitch her authenticity as a fellow immigrant who has experienced situations like the readers.

Jaffrey’s crafting of her persona around the idea of familiarity, both in the memoir and the cookbooks, helped foster a direct relationship with her audience. According to Marshall (2014), the proximity of the television screen and the intimate settings within which it is located and watched within a house distinguishes it from the engagement produced in cinema halls. Therefore, television personalities, including hosts of live programmes or news, are closer to the audience and are able to guide them through the programme, especially through the various discontinuities or interruptions brought by commercial breaks or breaking news. Moreover, their mode of address is direct because

...the viewer is spoken to and looked at quite directly...There is no pretence that the audience is not there...in this way, the host serves as the medium through which the audience is involved in the program. The host speaks to the audience, but within the program, he or she represents the audience’s point of view. (Marshall, *Celebrity and Power* 123)

Thus, television personalities imbibe the aspects of the medium in their day-to-day lives during which they perform their highly mediated personas. These personas are mediated because they are consciously put together to be projected through the medium they use to communicate with the audience. These personas are crafted to be familiar, relatable, and stable. Since their interaction with the audience happens within the informal and private setting of the home, their connection with them also reflects the same ethos. A useful example to demonstrate the direct address is their use of personal pronouns “I” and “you” when addressing

the audience. For example, in the episode of *Madhur Jaffrey's Indian Cookery*, where she makes Tandoori Chicken, she says,

You'll need about one lemon in all for the entire two and a half pounds. And once you've done that, you rub this marinade — this is the first marinade for the chicken. You rub it in properly on both sides and then you let the chicken sit for twenty minutes. While it sits for twenty minutes, I shall make the second marinade. For the second marinade, I have here a food processor. You can use a blender; that will work just as well.

Similarly, in the recipe for 'Chicken with potatoes' from the book, *An Invitation to Indian Cooking*, Jaffrey says:

If you wish to double this recipe, double all ingredients except the oil. Instead of 5, use 6 tablespoons of oil. Your cooking time will not change much, except that of course you will have to fry the chicken in two batches. You will also need a bigger pot. (In this recipe I use a skillet.) (*An Invitation to Indian Cookery* 142)

We can note how her form of address in the television show episode and the cookbook are quite similar in their approach. The audience/reader is addressed directly through 'you' and Jaffrey is the 'I' who is addressing them. The reader gets the impression of being under Jaffrey's direct guidance, which assures them that by following her advice properly, they will achieve the desired outcome.

As a trained performer, she can convincingly present and perform the persona of Madhur Jaffrey that her readers are already familiar with to reflect this sense of authenticity. Consequently, the influence of her voice and her work has steadily fostered and inspired an upcoming generation of cookbook authors from the diaspora like Meera Sodha, Priya Krishna, and Tejal Rao. Her influence is visible, for instance, in the case of Sodha, through her autobiographical approach in her 2014 book, *Made in India*, which shares a selection of recipes from her family kitchen. Similarly, Priya Krishna's *Indian-ish* (2019) also begins with an anecdote on her journey into food writing. Like Jaffrey, these authors also place their own experiences at the centre of their

writing and, in doing so, demonstrate their personal connection to food. These texts, like Jaffrey's, are also targeted at a readership located outside India. However, the notion of authenticity, as expressed through Sodha and Krishna's books, is more related to their experiences and connection with food, which is a shift from Jaffrey's approach that seeks to enable her readers to recreate authenticity as she defines it in terms of flavour and taste as created in Indian kitchens.

Jaffrey's legacy notwithstanding, it is difficult not to question the idea of the "authenticity of taste" achieved through improvisation, substitution, or approximation of equipment or ingredients, as it is technically a fabricated quality. The association of the adjective 'authentic' with regional Indian food, particularly, has increased usage over time. Navreet Kaur Rana (2022) points out that "Indian food is...affected by this incessant search for authenticity. As a general rule, a dish which is old or uses regional ingredients is termed 'authentic' without an understanding of its origin, history, or evolution over time" (25). In recent popular writings on food, such as *Masala Lab* (2020), which takes an engineering-oriented approach to studying food and cooking, the concept of authenticity is vehemently rejected. The author, Krish Ashok, remarks, "Only completely fraudulent people swear by authenticity...No two recipes for a dish tend to be the same in India, and if every single one of these claims to be authentic, then authenticity as a concept is meaningless in this context" (Ashok xviii–xxiii). Similarly, Sandip Roy (2024) states, ". . . the quest for authenticity when it comes to food is futile. Each home has its own 'authentic' way of preparing beloved local dishes". This indicates that authenticity is considered a practically determinable value in popular food writing. With increasing access to information on food and the formation of cuisine through influences and migration, a re-evaluation of the concept of 'authenticity' and its association with food is happening through such texts.

However, for Jaffrey, authenticity is not a fixed or concrete idea. Her approach to cookery, as demonstrated through her cookbooks and cookery shows, accommodates situations like the absence of equipment,

suggests workarounds for extremely complex procedures, and spice tolerance levels of her readers. The following excerpt from her book Madhur Jaffrey's *Indian Cookery* demonstrates her promise of not losing out on authenticity even if the dishes are made through adjustments:

Does this mean that Indian food is always spicy? Well, in a sense it does. It always uses spices, sometimes just one spice to cook a potato dish and sometimes up to fifteen spices to make an elaborate meat dish. But it is not always hot. The 'heat' in Indian food comes from hot chillies . . . Those of you who do not like hot food should just leave out all the chillies — red, green, or cayenne — in my recipes. Your food will still be authentically Indian, superb in flavour and not at all hot. (*Indian Cookery* 13)

Here, Jaffrey offers the promise of authenticity, even if the dishes are improvised or tailored to suit her readers' palates. This shows that authenticity is not a static feature associated with a cuisine for Jaffrey. It is more about the overall flavour that is generated rather than the method or equipment that is used. However, an evident limitation of the promise of "authenticity" is that it is difficult to determine whether the recipe's outcome would taste exactly like Jaffrey's. However, this does not seem to have deterred Jaffrey's followers from using her recipes or looking up to her expertise. It shows how concretely she has used her persona to maintain her reputation as a professional.

As a result, even readers with cultural or familial ties to India rely on her recipes and connect them with their own contexts. For example, her recipes might help her readers/audience recreate or relive certain memories associated with specific dishes. Jaffrey shares about her school days when she learned about different kinds of cuisines that exist all over India, and by sharing the recipes for some of those dishes, she recreates those moments and those tastes for herself. Similarly, the reader may also choose a particular recipe out of nostalgia induced by memories of having tasted it in a particular context. Authenticity, therefore, is associated even with the food's ability to recreate such



moments as far as Jaffrey's works are concerned. Thus, it is not a rigid or measurable value in the sense that it is being used in her works, but it carries deeper cultural and mnemonic aspects.

#### **4.5. Embodying the 20<sup>th</sup>-century Immigrant Woman: Navigating Authentic Cuisine in a Liminal Kitchen**

A vital aspect of Jaffrey's persona performance is that through her work, she reveals what it means to be a female professional in food, especially as an immigrant. As a well-known expert on Indian cuisine abroad, it was pertinent for her to trace and establish her expertise through taste memories firmly through her memoir. Across all her work, through each component of her persona performance, she demonstrates the characteristics of female professionals from the 20th century. This can be witnessed in how she carves her persona from anecdotal references from her childhood growing up in a joint family.

When I left India to study in England, I could not cook at all but my palette had already recorded millions of flavours. From cumin to ginger, they were all in my head, waiting to be called to service...I could even 'hear' the honey on my tongue. (*Climbing the Mango Trees* xiv)

Her exposure to food during day-to-day events and special occasions left strong imprints on her mind, forming her archive of taste memories that stayed with her throughout. Therefore, as she mentions, she could "summon" the requisite flavours and tastes when required, later in life, which aided her while learning to cook.

In her cookbooks and interviews, Jaffrey recollects several struggles associated with food as a young immigrant student in London. She recalls requesting recipes from her mother, which were sent through airmail but were very brief. She says,

[s]he'd send back three-line recipes: take this, take that, put it together, stir it around and when it's done you take it off the fire... But, this is something that I began to realize actually many, many decades later, that I must've had a food memory, a taste must've stayed in my head.<sup>8</sup>

She further adds that with a bit of perseverance, she could recreate the flavour and taste she sought, using the ingredients and equipment available at her disposal. This is to encourage the readers that they can also learn from Jaffrey's experience and produce "authentic" Indian flavours, even if they do not have access to all of the traditional Indian cooking equipment and ingredients. For instance, she suggests using an electric coffee grinder as a substitute for the Indian grinding stone for coarse grinding spices, demonstrating that even with improvisation, it is possible to recreate the desired flavours and dishes. Such suggestions are part of her efforts to demystify Indian food and debunk the presumptions that, as a cuisine, it is extremely technical and rooted in traditional ways of cooking. By offering alternatives and substitutes for conventional preparation techniques, she makes her cookbooks practical and suited to her readers' everyday needs.

The kitchen is a significant site of cultural performance, as it is often a curated space that contains instruments and ingredients that intimately connect with one's culture and lived past. It is a site of memory with material components that allow the curator's past and present to fuse, creating a space that reflects both aspects of their lived and inherited cultural realities. Yasmin Alibhai-Brown attests to this in her acclaimed memoir *The Settler's Cookbook* (2012). She writes,

In my sunny, high-tech kitchen, one small cupboard keeps cooking paraphernalia I brought over from Kampala in 1972, the year we Asians were cast out of Uganda by the sadistic black nationalist Idi Amin . . . Why I transported old pots and pans to England I cannot explain. I try but am unable to throw them away . . . There is a wooden contraption for grating hairy, brown-shelled coconuts . . . Then there is a Formica chapatti patlo, a round board with small legs, previously made of grainy wood to roll out various Indian breads . . . A brass device came too . . . Made by M. S. Chava, whose name is burned into the brass, it was used to make savoury Indian snacks. (11–13)

One can see how, in Alibhai-Brown's 'sunny, high-tech' kitchen, there are instruments reminiscent of her childhood home in Uganda, where

she grew up in a family of Indian immigrants. Brown's London kitchen contains equipment that refers to the "multiple migrations" (Ojwang 64) the family had to undertake. These components sit alongside the modern and non-Indian cooking instruments found in a typical kitchen in England, making it a liminal site with a confluence of the past and the present.

Alibhai-Brown's description reflects the lived experiences of most Indian immigrants, as they carry instruments like pressure cookers, *idli* makers, *kadhais* (woks), and cutlery, and ingredients such as teas and spices and place them alongside cooking equipment and ingredients from their new location. Thus, the immigrant kitchen becomes a liminal space in terms of its composition and function because it combines the qualities of the curator's home and present location. However, it is also worth noting that while such a space lacks certain facilities of the ethnic kitchen or the kitchens of India with all their constituents, it makes up for many other aspects through more advanced equipment. Regardless, the curators must inevitably tweak their recipes in such kitchens as they recreate the tastes and flavours from their native cuisines.

Thus, the insights in the cookbooks and the memoir that are drawn from her lived experiences as an immigrant in London and New York are designed to present her expertise and trustworthiness. She demonstrates that she is a person who is exactly familiar with her reader's needs as they try to navigate the limitations of trying to cook Indian food while living abroad. In *An Invitation to Indian Cooking*, Jaffrey shares that she learned to cook through the recipes given on "flimsy air letters" (11) mailed to her by her mother, which is perhaps an experience that students who move abroad might be able to relate to. She describes her approach to cooking Indian dishes in her kitchen in London and New York as "unorthodox" as it required her to circumvent certain limitations and improvise. She continues,

I began adapting her recipes to what was available in England and, later, when I moved to America, to the ingredients and appliances that I found here. Over the years I discovered that the electric blender could

do much of what the Indian grinding stone did, and much faster; that instead of roasting eggplant in hot ashes as my mother recommended, I could do it directly over a gas burner; that American meats just couldn't be fried the Indian way because they contained too much water . . . Slowly, I began changing the recipes to suit the conditions. I managed to arrive at the genuine taste of traditional dishes, but often had to take quite a circuitous and unorthodox route to get there. (11–12)

This captures her innovativeness and adaptability, particularly during her student days. Besides, for Jaffrey, liminality began right from her childhood in a home where cultures intermingled. Closer to her generation, there was a mixed cultural influence on what was essentially an affluent North Indian home, which was reflected in things like breakfast menus and clothing items. Her upbringing, coupled with her interest in Indian food, which led her to research various dishes and cuisines from different parts of India, allowed her to converse with the diverse Indian diaspora in a relatable manner. This was also because her work and lived experiences allowed her to offer insights on improvising and achieving the desired flavour and taste in various dishes from across India. This, in turn, allowed her to be a facilitator in the Indian diaspora's desires to practice their cuisines and associated cultural practices, such as festivals and events, in a manner approximately like how they used to back home.

Her anecdotes add to the liminal dimension of her kitchen in New York as a space that retains its connection with India while being geographically disconnected or distant. Jopi Nyman (2009) links 'the representations of the culinary' in autobiographical works produced "within the context of intercultural exchange and increasing global mobility" with "the ongoing construction of hybridised identity and the desire to negotiate identity in new transnational spaces" (Nyman 282). Here, Nyman's definition of the representation of the culinary, particularly in the context of Madhur Jaffrey's works, can apply to her entire body of work, including her cookbooks, television shows, and

memoir. Therefore, as texts with considerable autobiographical content, the theme of food in her works does not merely cater to the production and reproduction of nostalgia. Still, it features a negotiation of the identity of an immigrant individual, which is also something this text offers to facilitate for its readers — their ability to negotiate their identity as an Indian immigrant in a foreign country. Nyman sees culinary autobiographies, particularly memoirs, as a

...part of identity construction' which is 'linked to both private and public settings, to ideas of home and childhood, and also to the ways in which they affect the formation of the subject — and even more so that of a subject crossing from one culture to other, occasionally forced to dwell between the two worlds. (284)

Nyman highlights the importance of such texts in highlighting the identity formation of the author, especially in this transnational context. Furthermore, such texts also provide a way to reflect the author's desire to separate from the dominant cultural, or in this case, culinary codes, while ensuring not to alienate oneself. Nyman sees this role of the "tropes of taste and food" as playing "a double role, stitching the group together but separating it from the dominant" (283). It means that while the efforts of cooks like Jaffrey are to retain the individuality of Indian cuisine, she makes extra efforts to ensure that she provides enough support to bridge the cultural divide and enable her readers from different ethnic backgrounds to access and consume Indian food through her work. She does this by carefully highlighting Indian flavours and foods, titillating her readers into feeling intrigued by the tastes she so artfully describes. A suitable instance is her memory of consuming the *dahi baras* (lentil patties in yoghurt) prepared by the *Khomchawallah*<sup>9</sup> as a child:

A wooden spoon would disappear into the depths of a brown sauce, as thick as melted chocolate. It would emerge only to drop a dark, satiny swirl over our *dahi baras*. As we ate them, the *dahi baras* would melt in our mouths with the minimum of resistance, the hot spices would bring tears to our eyes, the yoghurt would cool us down, and the

tamarind would perk up our taste buds as nothing else could. This, to us, was heaven. (*Climbing the Mango Trees* 75–76)

This anecdote is also featured in her cookbook *A Taste of India* (10), where it is used to illustrate the kind of flavours central to Indian foods. It is part of her narrative strategy to inspire the readers, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, to overcome their initial apprehensions and explore Indian food.

Historically, the kitchen in India has been a site for conversations, arguments, collaborations, and teaching-learning. In some instances, it is also a site of origin of a plethora of tastes, a site of discovery through which, in Jaffrey's case, her archive of taste memories took form, subsequently helping in crafting her celebrity persona. The kitchen space and homestead for Jaffrey in Delhi were occupied by a large family and have had a certain mythical quality. This is to say that, as a child who never went to the kitchen except to taste certain foods when asked to do so (PBS interview), the kitchen was always a distant, unknown part of the house out of the reach of children. For instance, in a recollection of typical autumn afternoons at Number 7, her grandfather's house, she remarks in her memoir how the afternoon snacks constituting pine nuts, and some aerated drinks were "...not always enough, so a servant would be dispatched to the distant kitchen for plates of *pakorīs*, vegetable fritters made by dipping vegetables or slices of them in a spicy chickpea flour batter and deep-frying them" (86). The kitchen, in affluent houses like Jaffrey's, was also a space that was demarcated for those who frequented it for work, i.e., the servants and the women who "went back to the kitchen" (16) to cook vegetarian meals for themselves after serving meat-based dishes to the men of the family.

In another instance from the same text, she describes the kitchen as a place to which "orders went out" (20) as the children (including her) were still hungry after their morning snack of *Daulat ki Chaat* (Snack of Wealth). As these are childhood memories, she builds the narrative from a child's perspective, describing how the kitchen was a distant

place in the house from where the various dishes that appeared on their table originated. This indicates her awareness of the status of the kitchen in traditional Indian households as a typically secluded space that is not immediately accessible to outsiders, visitors, children, and, at times, men. The kitchen used to be built in the interior of houses, making it a site of private conversations and experiences. However, this is no longer true for the Indian diaspora or those living in metropolitan cities in India, as apartment-type dwellings now usually feature the open kitchen model, where the kitchen is built as an extension of the living area. Therefore, being a television personality whose work is aimed at encouraging and enabling her audience to step into the kitchen and cook, the primary concern of Madhur Jaffrey is to do away with the arbitrary distance between the kitchen and the rest of the household and bring it into the centre of the household, making it a site where one of the crucial components of one's culture is explored.

One more significant aspect of the Indian kitchen addressed in Jaffrey's work is its ability to expand out of the house's interiors and become a site of collaboration, often in times of meal preparation, in which other family members also get involved. In her memoir, she alludes to the expansibility of the kitchen through recollections of family picnics and the experience of watching the churning of butter, which would take place "just outside the pantry on the bricked, covered pathway leading to the kitchen" (37). Even through her cookery shows, like *Madhur Jaffrey's Indian Cookery*, she helped reinvent the kitchens of the diaspora by re-introducing her audience to the expansibility of the kitchen.

Jaffrey's show, which aired on Mondays and Fridays in the late afternoon or early evening slots on BBC Two, was categorised under educational programs. Thus, its scheduling allowed it to cater to a broader audience, including children and adults who were interested or could make time to learn more about Indian cuisine. As learning about cuisine was facilitated through the television program, the kitchen expanded into the living room. It helped her works revive the expansible

nature of the Indian kitchen. The Indian kitchen, as we saw through the example given by Jaffrey, flows outwards and becomes a space of collaboration that can involve the entire family in the cooking process. Consequently, the kitchen no longer remains a secluded, mysterious place, away from visitors and children's sight.

Furthermore, the characteristics of the immigrant's kitchen space are intended to extend beyond Jaffrey's kitchen to those of her readers who enthusiastically attempt her recipes. For instance, if one follows the recipe for "Roz ki Gobhi or "Everyday Cauliflower"" (260) from her memoir, her expertise conveyed through her persona is designed to assure that if they follow her instructions, there is a possibility that it would taste like hers despite the differences and minor tweaks that may inevitably occur. This is communicated through her direct address, her medium pace of instruction, words of advice, and suggestions for substitutions or possible workarounds in case of any foreseen difficulties on the part of the reader/audience. For instance, in her memoir, in the recipe titled "Maya's Meat and Potatoes", she says:

You could try making this with goat, which is now widely available in ethnic markets. If you can't get it, you can always fall back on either boneless lamb or a combination of some lamb pieces with bone and others without. (234)

As mentioned previously, the ability to retain authenticity despite substitution is an assurance that Jaffrey provides throughout her entire body of work. This is her way of reaching out to the audience with an encouraging assurance that there are possible alternatives, even if they cannot arrange everything traditionally required to make an Indian dish. Compared to her, the works of her predecessors, in this regard, were relatively more instructive and presented with the assumption that the reader of the recipes would have things in place beforehand. For instance, while Dharam Jit Singh in *Indian Cookery* (1970) comments on possible alternatives for cooking fat that may be more accessible to the readers, his instructive approach insists on certain "rules" (19), following which alone the reader may possibly achieve the desired



outcome. Similarly, Savitri Chowdhary also provides alternatives and recommends some workarounds but maintains her instructive approach with a clearly defined list of what other steps or ingredients can be used as substitutes if the reader does not have what is required. This differs from Jaffrey's more reassuring approach of suggesting alternatives, which do not come across as words of instruction but as words of advice designed to be more reassuring towards the reader.

#### **4.6. Conclusion**

The discussions presented above demonstrated the contributions of Indian immigrants such as Madhur Jaffrey in facilitating culinary enthusiasts of Indian and other ethnicities to familiarise themselves with and create 'authentic' Indian cuisine. By arguing for the interpretation of Madhur Jaffrey as a television personality, it traced the crafting of her persona as that of an expert of Indian cuisine through a contextualised reading of her memoir, *Climbing the Mango Trees* (2006) with a selection of her well-received cookbooks like *An Invitation to Indian Cooking* (1973), *Madhur Jaffrey's Indian Cookery* ([1982] 2023) and *A Taste of India* (1985).

The chapter contended that Jaffrey's persona is most comprehensive in *Climbing the Mango Trees* (2006), mainly because of its autobiographical nature and because it follows her cookbooks in its thematic and narrative template. The memoir emphasises her archive of taste memories, which paved the pathway for her career as an expert and professional cookery show host later in life. The sections above also discuss how Jaffrey brings nostalgic food memories from the depths of the readers' minds by using vivid food descriptions in her cookbooks and recipes. She strategically infuses her lived experiences, claiming authenticity of voice and taste in the cuisine she is guiding the audience to recreate. She lends a deliberate, autobiographical touch to her writings to assure the reader of her experience and knowledge as an expert and professional who is also an immigrant like them.

Jaffrey's career on television was among the early sites of performance for her persona. Her programmes helped turn the kitchen into a site of cultural performance. The format of the shows, their regular schedule, and the fact that they carried her name facilitated the structuring of Jaffrey's personality and ensured recognition. This led to familiarising the viewers with the cuisine at designated times each week. As an immigrant host representing her culture on television, she consolidated her status as an expert through her persona. The television programme format led to a direct relationship with her audience, an approach she maintained through her cookbooks and memoir. Her consistent identity on television and in cookbooks allowed her to gain trust and a reputation as a celebrity.

The chapter also discussed how Jaffrey mobilises her lived experiences of growing up in a culturally mixed home and her experience living abroad as a student and a professional in her cookbooks and memoir. This autobiographical approach connects with the past and present experiences of most Indian immigrants as they settle in and organise their kitchen spaces. Additionally, the article discussed how Jaffrey used her persona to help the immigrants and non-Indian readers navigate their kitchens' liminal space. Drawing insights from the writings by immigrants like Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, this chapter referred to the practice of the immigrants to carry instruments like pressure cookers, *idli* makers, *kadhais* (woks), and cutlery, and ingredients such as teas, spices, eventually placing them alongside cooking equipment and ingredients from their new location. Such an arrangement of the kitchen speaks of its liminal nature because it combines the qualities of the curator's home and present location. In teaching her readers to navigate this liminal space, Jaffrey ultimately cements her status as a trustworthy expert on Indian cuisine.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Parts of this chapter have been included in the paper “The Memoir and the Mediated Self: The Crafting and Performance of Madhur Jaffrey's Persona in *Climbing the Mango Trees* (2006)”, accepted for publication in a forthcoming issue of the journal *Celebrity Studies*.

<sup>2</sup> See the article “Multiculturalism Policies in Contemporary Democracies” published by Queen's University.

<sup>3</sup> In, *An Invitation to Indian Cooking* (2011), Madhur Jaffrey says, “I began writing down the recipes of my most popular dishes and made several copies of them. Whenever someone started a conversation about Indian food, I just handed out a recipe. It worked so well that once when we attended a party, we found that every single dish had been made from my recipes” (10)

<sup>4</sup> A 2022 BBC Article on Madhur Jaffrey addresses her as “The Woman Who Taught The West How to Cook Indian Food”. This chapter uses it as a subheading for the section that details Jaffrey's identity as an expert on Indian food.

<sup>5</sup> Jaffrey refers to her television show, *Madhur Jaffrey's Indian Cookery* as an educational programme on her BBC Interview from 2022.

<sup>6</sup> See *Thing Theory* (2001) by Bill Brown.

<sup>7</sup> Personal correspondence with Madhur Jaffrey

<sup>8</sup> Jaffrey, Madhur. Interview by Judith Weinraub. Greenwich Village, New York, 2 Dec. 2010.

<sup>9</sup> *Khomchawala* is a hawker who sells street foods in Delhi.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This thesis examines the life narratives of three distinguished women performers from 20th-century India, Hansa Wadkar, Zohra Segal, and Madhur Jaffrey, to demonstrate how their professional expertise impacts their autobiographical strategies of self-fashioning, which subsequently affects the crafting and performance of their celebrity persona. Through the analysis and findings presented herein, the thesis indicates the inadequacy of autobiography studies alone in providing critical insights into celebrity life narratives, such as autobiographies and memoirs by celebrities. This work aligns with the arguments of Katja Lee (2022) and argues that, particularly for autobiographical texts authored by celebrities, a research framework guided by Persona Studies theories is required. Consequently, the thesis develops a theoretical framework, drawing important definitions from various theorists to create a robust foundation for the theoretical framework, which is later applied to the primary texts.

The chapters of the thesis focus on the autobiographies/memoirs produced by actresses Hansa Wadkar, Zohra Segal, and Madhur Jaffrey, respectively. These autobiographical writings were chosen as case studies as they capture the essence of their authors' being professionals engaged in the performing arts in the 20th century. Their subjectivities, formed within this context, are articulated through their autobiographical accounts. By applying the theoretical framework to the primary texts, this thesis establishes that the 20th-century Indian actresses' autobiographies are the sites for the crafting and performing their professional personas, and as readers, we engage with them as professionals. To prove this hypothesis, the thesis examines how Wadkar, Segal, and Jaffrey utilise their professional skills derived from their experience working in cinema, theatre, and television to determine their autobiographical narrative strategies. In other words, the thesis traces a pattern among the autobiographical writings by Indian actresses to understand how their expertise in performing arts affects their

strategies of autobiographical self-fashioning, establishing such texts as sites for the crafting and performance of their personas. Furthermore, the findings from the case studies of Wadkar, Segal, and Jaffrey suggest that crafting and performance of their persona may not result in a consistent and coherent understanding of their celebrity personas. Rather, it would depend on the intent of the author as they foreground their agency to author these texts and craft and perform their celebrity personas. They may use the autobiographical text as a tool to conform to or contradict the existing interpretation of their celebrity selves by curating a celebrity persona according to their requirement.

### **5.1 Summary of chapter-wise findings**

The introduction to the thesis contextualises celebrity autobiographical writings and situates the three primary texts within the tradition of autobiographical writing by Indian actresses. Locating the primary texts within this context, this chapter delves into existing scholarly and literary works published on them to highlight the key research gaps and to delineate the primary research objectives of the thesis. To address the research objectives formulated as questions, the chapter outlines a research methodology based on textual analysis through a theoretical framework guided by Persona Studies wherein the key terms are defined through the works of a selection of scholars, including Guy Debord, Richard Dyer, P. David Marshall, Kim Barbour, and Neepa Majumdar.

The **first chapter**, titled “Towards a Persona Studies-based Reading of Celebrity Autobiographical Writings”, develops the proposed theoretical framework for analysing the primary texts. It begins with an analogy based on Richard Dyer’s analysis of Eve Arnold’s photograph of Joan Crawford to highlight the plural and dynamic nature of celebrity identities and the significance of the author’s intent in shaping them. Thereafter, drawing on Walter Benjamin’s key arguments from “A Short History of Photography”, the chapter further develops the thesis’ arguments on the importance of intent by connecting it with what Benjamin defines as staging in the composition of photographs.

Connecting these ideas to concepts of self-fashioning in autobiographical narratives and the influence of professional expertise on the same, the chapter moves into defining some key concepts central to the theoretical framework before defining it.

In this chapter, certain fundamental concepts, including celebrities as forms of spectacle (Guy Debord 2005), the definition and function of stars (*Stars* 1998) and (*Heavenly Bodies* 2004), impression management (Goffman 1956), persona (*Persona Studies* 2020), and registers of persona performance are discussed as part of the formation of the theoretical framework. These definitions and theorisations function as the foundation for the study of the primary texts. Through the subsequent sections, the chapter discusses the application of the framework to autobiographical writings of 20th-century Indian actresses before highlighting the key limitations and concluding the chapter by reiterating the main arguments.

The **second chapter** studies Hansa Wadkar's translated autobiography *You Ask, I Tell* (2013). It analyses Wadkar's interpretation of the meaning of the female celebrity/film star through her initial reluctance to talk about her experiences, her tone of narration, and her insistence on wanting to be seen as a woman deeply rooted in familial and cultural values. As one of the earliest examples of autobiographies of women actors, this text provides significant details on the professional demands of being an actor. This chapter emphasises the need to view Wadkar's autobiography as a text through which she crafts and performs her celebrity persona through a specific combination of the three registers of persona performance, viz. the Professional, Personal, and the Intimate, to facilitate the "public construction of the private" (*Persona Studies* 33). Further, the chapter establishes that in the autobiography, Wadkar is essentially enacting or performing as Hansa Wadkar, a professional, and does not necessarily provide a confessional account of her struggles as a woman who worked as an actor.

The later sections of the chapter discuss that autobiographies like Hansa Wadkar's are highly contextual and need to be read as such. As these are not standard literary autobiographies, which are expected to be relatively more articulate, coherent, and unified, it would be difficult to achieve a thorough understanding of this text solely with the help of the existing theoretical frameworks of autobiography studies. Through its detailed study on *You Ask, I Tell*, the chapter highlights that Wadkar's background in cinema, a widely popular mode of storytelling, led to the formation of her subjectivity and influenced her narrative strategy. Her long and successful career allowed her to be well-acquainted with the narrative format of cinema, giving her a unique cinematic vision to carry her autobiographical narrative. This influence of the medium is visible in her autobiography. The fact that she was trained in cinematic storytelling makes the autobiographical narrative disconnected and fragmentary, due to which it moves like a film.

The findings from the study indicate that the text is a site of performance for Wadkar's autobiographical self, which can be taken as a character in her story who represents her across the stages of her life. As the autobiographer, Wadkar distances herself, critically examines and evaluates her actions, and presents these observations through the narrative, helping her target audience trace her growth as an actor and individual. As a site of performance, the autobiography presents the arc of a Marathi actress' successful career and tragic life. It contains elements of theatricality and melodrama, which were also crucial to the narrative progression of cinematic storylines during Wadkar's time as a professional. The chapter assessed the text as per Freytag's classification of the components of a dramatic text and found that it was possible to club chapters and categorise them under different components indicated under this classification. This section of the chapter concludes that the performative quality of the text arises from its suitability for being converted into a monologue or dialogue and performed.

The last section of this chapter discusses the adaptation of Wadkar's autobiography by Shyam Benegal through his film *Bhumika*:

*The Role*. The chapter argues that Benegal's adaptation, which he calls an inspired work, presents significant rewritings and departures from Wadkar's version of herself and the events. Benegal's film focuses more on the different kinds of roles that the protagonist plays, both in cinema and in life, in her search for a meaningful life of her choice. Hansa Wadkar in this film is re-presented through Usha, the feminist protagonist relevant to Benegal's context of late 1970s India. The chapter highlights the rescripted scenarios from the text and argues that what Benegal does is essentially a reinterpretation of Wadkar through Usha, who, in pursuing her individuality, understands the fruitlessness of her dependence on men. He chose the award-winning actor Smita Patil, who was already well-known for portraying strong feminist characters, to portray Hansa Wadkar through Usha. By breaking down the various instances of narrative departures from Wadkar's autobiography, it concludes that such severe departures lead to the potential of *Bhumika* to misadvise the modern viewers about Hansa Wadkar, as it is often the first point of contact with Wadkar's story in contemporary times.

The **third chapter** consists of a critical analysis of Zohra Segal's memoir, *Close-Up*. The chapter commences the analysis by considering what constitutes Segal's persona by re-tracing the moulding of Segal as the 'grand old lady of Bollywood' through her roles in cinema and television programmes. Then, the findings are compared with the available biographical information and commentaries on her work to get a sense of her existing public persona. Further, by delving into her past training in theatre through her association with Prithvi Theatres and IPTA, the chapter sketches out the fundamentally performative and theatrical character of Zohra Segal.

Reading her memoir more closely, the chapter examines the key autobiographical narrative strategies that reflected Segal's deep connection with her training as a theatre actor. This section constitutes the central arguments of the chapter about the influence of her profession in the crafting and performance of Segal's persona. While Segal's



beginnings as a professional performer were made through her training at the Mary Wigman Tanz Schule in Dresden, Germany, and as a core member of Uday Shankar's troupe and also through Segal's association with his institute in Almora, she always wanted to be an actor, designating the profession the status of her 'first love.' She charted her path into acting professionally through her collaboration with IPTA and association with Prithvi Theatres. As organisations whose works had well-defined objectives, it was pertinent for their work to utilise modes of expression such as melodrama, spectacle, music, and theatricality.

The chapter highlights that Segal's participation and performance in the plays by these organisations influenced her understanding of acting and storytelling methods. It traces the influences of the dramatic techniques practised in these organisations on Segal's memoir, establishing how Segal's memoir uses the narrative technique of monologue and articulates her memories through anecdotes narrated in a melodramatic, theatrical, and spectacular fashion. Elaborating the influence of theatrical practice on her approach to storytelling a bit further, the chapter also examines the book's prologue, "The Third Bell" for characteristics of the dramatic monologue. Using the parameters outlined by the literary critic Ina Beth Sessions in her critically acclaimed work on the "Dramatic Monologue" in 1947, the chapter contends that "The Third Bell" meets most of the parameters that define a Dramatic Monologue, including the illustration of the character of the speaker, audience, occasion, the revelation of character, the interplay between the speaker and the audience, and the dramatic action that takes place in the present. Since it does not meet all the criteria, it is a partial monologue. The presence of a dramatic monologue in the memoir is perhaps the most telling aspect of the author's profession as a theatre actor.

The chapter also traces the melodramatic components of Segal's narrative, focusing on her usage of excess as a narrative tool to convey the depths and intensity of her experiences. To put Segal's usage of narrative excess into perspective, the chapter integrates the discussion

on the usage and relevance of excess in theatrical works as presented in Peter Brooks' *The Melodramatic Imagination*. This section once again refers to Segal's affiliation with Prithvi Theatres and IPTA and their largely melodramatic modes of narrative expression. Furthermore, it provides examples to illustrate how melodramatic acting and articulation styles were retained in her acting techniques even after she ventured into cinema and television during her last few decades of life. Moving on to an analysis of the elements of theatricality and spectacle in Segal's narrative, the chapter highlights the visually evocative renderings of her lived experiences, which enables her reader to get a glimpse of her lived experiences while also getting a sense of her expertise in the theatrical mode of expression. Through selected examples from Segal's text, such as the anecdote of a snake entering her family's dining area and her introduction to Prithviraj Kapoor as a thespian, the chapter presented a comprehensive analysis of the influence of theatre on Segal's narrative strategies. The chapter also discusses the specific combination of registers of persona performance that Segal's narrative employs to demonstrate her professional expertise. In doing so, Segal performs impression management to ensure continuous and coherent interpretations of her celebrity persona.

The final section of the chapter focused on Segal's performance of her identity as Zohra Segal, the actress. The analysis was based on two approaches. The first was a comparative analysis of Segal's two autobiographical texts, *Stages* and *Close-Up*. This comparative analysis considers the act of autobiographical narration as a performance and then highlights the function of repetition in the shaping and polishing of Segal's autobiographical narrative. This section contends that the prevalence of multiple autobiographical narratives and biographical texts point towards Segal's strong foundations in dance and theatre performance traditions, where repetition and reiteration are key elements to achieving perfection. Thus, reflecting on Segal's choice to re-publish her autobiographical narrative 13 years after the publication of *Stages*, the chapter concludes that Segal was perfecting the

performance of her identity as the performer, Zohra Segal, by making necessary refinements.

The **fourth chapter** delves into Madhur Jaffrey's *Climbing the Mango Trees* (2006), a memoir deeply rooted in taste memories. This chapter studies Jaffrey as a television personality and highlights the affinity of its narrative approach to the conventions of television shows. It highlights critical components of Jaffrey's narrative, such as its direct address and desire to create familiarity and claim authenticity to Jaffrey's identity as a cook through the narrative thread guided by taste memories. The sections of the chapter point to the deliberate arrangement of the narrative through food memories to project Jaffrey's expertise in Indian cuisine and subsequently validate her celebrity persona. In more concrete terms, this chapter argues that her narrative approach results in her interpretation as a person whose subjecthood was shaped by food and the experiences of consuming food — which is an expected narrative arc for an individual noted for her expertise in Indian cuisine.

Connecting to the central argument of the thesis and as part of addressing one of its key research questions, this analysis assesses Jaffrey's autobiographical persona to arrive at the understanding of how women in performing arts leverage their professional experiences in strategising their autobiographical narratives. The chapter also demonstrates how, as an Indian immigrant herself, she joins other individuals who preceded her and followed her in facilitating culinary enthusiasts, regardless of their cultural roots, to familiarise themselves with and create 'authentic' Indian cuisine. Furthermore, the chapter interprets Madhur Jaffrey as a television personality by tracing the crafting of her persona as that of an expert of Indian cuisine through a contextualised reading of her memoir, *Climbing the Mango Trees* (2006), with a selection of her well-received cookbooks like *An Invitation to Indian Cooking* (1973), *Madhur Jaffrey's Indian Cookery* ([1982] 2023) and *A Taste of India* (1985). This is done to show how the memoir sustains the narrative of Jaffrey's persona following the style

of narration familiar to television personalities. Furthermore, the chapter mentions Jaffrey's strategies towards impression management through a specific combination of the registers of persona performance, again, focused on her professional expertise.

The chapter also remarks that Jaffrey's persona is most comprehensive in *Climbing the Mango Trees* because of its autobiographical nature and consistency with her cookbooks' thematic and narrative template. The memoir emphasises her archive of taste memories, which paved the pathway for her career as an expert and professional cookery show host later in life. The various sections in this chapter also trace how Jaffrey brings out nostalgic food memories from the depths of the readers' minds through vivid food descriptions in her cookbooks and recipes. In doing so maintains the deliberate, autobiographical approach typical to all her food-related writings to assure the reader of her experience and knowledge as an expert and professional who is also an immigrant like them.

The chapter also views television as one of the early sites of performance for her persona. It argues that the format of the shows, their regular schedule, and the fact that they carried her name facilitated the structuring of Jaffrey's personality and ensured recognition. The shows helped the viewers familiarise themselves with her and with the cuisine she represented through the broadcast schedule at designated times each week. The television programme format led to a direct relationship with her audience, an approach she maintained through her cookbooks and memoir. Lastly, the chapter also discusses how Jaffrey mobilises her lived experiences of growing up in a culturally mixed home and her experience living abroad as a student and a professional in her cookbooks and memoir. This autobiographical approach connects with the past and present experiences of most Indian immigrants as they settle in and organise their kitchen spaces. Jaffrey uses her persona to help the immigrants and non-Indian readers navigate their kitchens' liminal space. Drawing insights from the writings by immigrants like Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, this chapter refers to the practice of the immigrants to

carry instruments like pressure cookers, *idli* makers, *kadhais* (woks), and cutlery, and ingredients such as teas, spices, eventually placing them alongside cooking equipment and ingredients from their new location. The chapter highlights how such an arrangement of the kitchen indicates a liminal nature because it combines the qualities of the curator's home and present location. The chapter concludes that by teaching her readers to navigate this liminal space, Jaffrey ultimately represents the 20th-century immigrant woman while also cementing her status as a trustworthy expert on Indian cuisine.

## 5.2. Addressing Research Questions

Through the three distinct case studies presented in the chapters, the thesis addresses the primary research questions. To reiterate, the thesis set out to examine a) As artists working across different media formats, how does their professional status impact their strategies of self-fashioning in the 20th century? b) How do Wadkar, Segal, and Jaffrey redefine and reshape our perception of female professionals within the artistic fields? c) What are the fundamental mechanics of autobiographical self-fashioning, i.e., what strategies and techniques are employed in crafting the celebrity persona through Wadkar, Segal, and Jaffrey's texts? d) To what extent do their personas in these texts align with or contradict their established public images as celebrities, and what does this reveal about the broader genre of celebrity autobiographical writings by female professionals?

To address the first research question, the critical analysis of the texts and the paratextual material, including biographical texts, films, and interviews, revealed that Hansa Wadkar's identity was re-cast in the mould of the *Tamasha* artist, which was informed by her extensive work in *Tamasha* films during the later part of her career. This categorising of her also impacted her celebrity persona, and she was seen as a decadent star and victim of the dubious and aggressive ways of the film industry. Zohra Segal's persona was also interpreted through her performances in film and television programmes. She notes in her memoir that she achieved fame quite late in life and that most of her

roles were that of maternal or grandmotherly figures. Her identity, thus, was increasingly interpreted in this light. This impression led to a different public perception of her, in contrast to her past career as a dance director, theatre actor, and professional dancer. Madhur Jaffrey is known as a celebrity cook and expert in Indian cuisine. She achieved widespread recognition for her knowledge and skills in Indian cookery through her many cookbooks and cookery shows. Her persona was also at variance with her education and training — she had trained to become an actress but ventured into a career in food, which informed the way her identity continues to be interpreted even today.

Wadkar, Segal, and Jaffrey's autobiographical writings were taken as representative case studies because these texts also inform the readers what it meant to be a female professional in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Wadkar chose to become an actress out of financial necessity, and was not what she wanted to do in life. Segal and Jaffrey, on the other hand, chose to become actors due to their passion. All three of them belong to different socio-cultural backgrounds, with mutually distinct career paths: Wadkar worked mainly in cinema and theatre, Segal worked in dance, theatre, television, and cinema, whereas Jaffrey worked in cinema and television. In addition to these achievements, their works depict them as family-centric individuals. Wadkar does not portray herself as a career-focused person but as someone who likes the fact that she succeeded but would not consider herself ambitious. Her autobiography is devoted to addressing her anxiety about being seen as a typical star and victim by emphasising how she has changed in life. On the contrary, Segal presents herself as an extremely driven and passionate actress, willing to take on any and every acting work. Her autobiography also contains an impression of her as a person rooted in her family with close ties to her relatives. Madhur Jaffrey's subjectivity was created around home-cooked food and therefore, despite being an ambitious professional later in life, her memoir tells the readers of simpler days. She wanted to be an actor after completing her degree and found a spot at the prestigious Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts.

However, her memoir as well as the section at the back containing recipes, demonstrate her rootedness in family. Thus, all three of them, as can be seen in their respective memoirs, jostled with the anxiety of being family-centric while fulfilling their professional desires, a condition found in the autobiographical accounts of 20th-century Indian women.

As highlighted by these chapters, Wadkar, Segal and Jaffrey's celebrity personas were interpreted in these specific ways because of their professional affiliations. Whether they agreed or disagreed with their public perception, their professional expertise influenced their self-fashioning techniques, and the crafting and performance of their personas were quite evident in their autobiographical texts. In Hansa Wadkar's case, as Chapter Two elaborates, it is apparent in the fragmentariness and non-linear narrative flow of her autobiography. The chapter also highlights Wadkar's preference for viewing her past through a mental panorama. Her early acquaintance with cinema trained her in this kind of narrative technique, and by the time she was working on her autobiography, she had already spent four decades in the profession. Thus, her professional expertise guides the narrative technique of her autobiography.

Similarly, Zohra Segal, who was proficient in various performing arts, each of which relies on different kinds of media, echoes her diverse professional expertise through her memoir's multifaceted narrative approach. The narrative of her memoir progresses through anecdotes, letters, diary entries and photographs along with the conventional chapters. However, compared to Hansa Wadkar's autobiography, Segal's memoir shares more significant similarities with narrative formats and techniques practised in theatre, owing to her extensive expertise in the domain. Segal's memoir is also fragmentary in its progression, a feature that highlights her expertise gained through professional experience in cinema and theatre. Chapter 3 traces the narrative elements typical to plays in Segal's memoir, indicating the

significant influence of her professional experience in crafting and performing her persona through her memoir.

In Madhur Jaffrey's case, a narrative thread moulded on taste memories is a significant indicator of her professional identity as a cook and her professional expertise as an author of cookbooks and cookery show host. Both these aspects of her career require proficiency in narration, which she also demonstrates through her memoir. Chapter 4 examines her narrative strategy and concludes that she has modelled her narrative approach based on her experience as a television personality. She mobilises the values of familiarity, acceptability, and accessibility as she crafts and performs her persona. In this manner, they use the narrative techniques they learnt and developed proficiency in through their profession to fashion themselves in their autobiographical narratives. To reiterate, Wadkar uses cinematic narration to tell her story. In contrast, Segal adopts a multifaceted approach but relies more on the narrative devices integral to theatre. Jaffrey models her narrative on the strategies of self-fashioning demonstrated by television personalities.

Each chapter begins with an overview of the existing public perception of each of these celebrities before proceeding to analyse their narrative strategies and outcomes regarding the persona work done by these autobiographical texts. This approach addressed the fourth research question, which examines whether these actresses complied with or rejected their existing image as they crafted and performed their personas in these autobiographical texts. The findings of the study indicate that Hansa Wadkar categorically rejected her existing public perception and crafted her celebrity persona to guide her readers towards her "real" self, which is essentially her own interpretation of her self. Segal and Jaffrey, in comparison, accept their existing identities as celebrities and actresses and opt to retain them by bringing out certain characteristics associated with their personas indirectly through the narratives. For example, Segal maintains her persona as the witty, grandmotherly figure through a narrative interspersed with humour and



philosophical reflections. Similarly, Jaffrey structures her memoir on the theme of food and intersperses almost all discussions and anecdotes of her childhood with the memories of consuming different foods.

The work presented through this thesis hopes to offer an important intervention in studying celebrity life narratives through its insistence on including their professional status and expertise in analysing such works. Furthermore, this work also proposes that autobiographical texts, regardless of whether they are autobiographies or memoirs, are consciously curated narratives designed to reflect the authors' expertise in certain professions. As the identities of celebrities are often fused with their professions, the autobiographical texts do not intend to disengage with their professional lives and solely focus on their personal lives. This work highlights that while such promises are often made by autobiographical texts, disengaging from the professional lives of celebrities creates a problem of identifying with their readership. In other words, since their identities are assimilated into their professional statuses, their autobiographical texts cannot move away from this aspect of their lives. Their works are written to be read and written for a designated audience or readership. If the narrative does not address the author's professional expertise, there is a risk of estrangement of the audience or readership from the celebrity's identity. Therefore, professional expertise strongly influences the narrative strategies in the autobiographical writings by celebrities, through which they script their personas for public consumption.

## APPENDIX – A

### Interview with Ms. Kiran Segal

#### (Online Interview Transcript)

**Meghna Gangadharan:** Zohra Ji<sup>1</sup> published *Stages*, her well-received autobiography co-authored with Joan L. Elderman in 1998. So, why did she feel the need to re-publish her life's story through *Close-Up* in 2010?

**Kiran Segal:** As she felt so. As I said earlier, she felt that it was a bit too long and that it could be edited and made better reading-wise. That was the reason.

**MG:** When I read your book, *Fatty!*, and Zohra Ji's *Stages* and *Close Up*, it seemed that there were two sides to her. One was how we all knew her from her films as this very funny, amicable person, and then there seemed to be this very serious side to her. Did she prefer to be seen in a certain way through her memoir while working on it? Did she have in mind a particular impression of her that she wanted to create as a celebrity/public figure?

**KS:** No, she has just simply written down her life. I don't know what idea she had. Because obviously, I was not in her head or her brain when she was thinking and writing on this. Considering what you asked about, was she a very different person otherwise? On the screen, of course, you're doing a character. You're doing a role that is given to you, and as an actor, you have to get into that role. Whatever it may be, it may be to your liking. It may not be to your liking, but your duty as an actor is to go totally into that character, so it is wrong to say that, you know, was she like that also in real life. In real life, she was just as normal as you and me, very jovial, full of fun. At times, very strict very disciplined. And that was it. One thing she enjoyed in real life was always being the centre of attention. She always wanted to be constantly given attention all the time, even if we went anywhere. Because I remember an incident when both of us went to a party, and that was a time when she just

returned from England back here. That was in the late 80s. And, of course, nobody recognized her over here. She was already known in England because of her television series, which I think was called *Parosi*. She was teaching, you know, English to Indians and Asians. But here, when she came, she was known as Kiran Segal's mother. And deep within, I knew that she didn't like it because she always liked to be, you know, recognized.

So what happened was when we were at this party, I met some of my old friends and some people whom I like being with. When we came back, I said to her, I said, "*Kitna maza aaya!* [It was such fun!] It was so nice. *Itne saare log the jaan pehechaan ke!* [There were so many familiar people]" and the answer I got was, "*Kya maza aaya? Mera toh kisi ne notice hi nahi liya!* [Who had fun? Nobody even noticed me!]" You see, she was very childish that way. So I didn't know whether to laugh or scold her or what. She, she was like that. I mean, very kiddish in certain respects, you know? But that was her! I think we're all like that a little bit, *ek jo personality mein bhi alag alag traits hote hain, kabhi kuch, kabhi kuch* [Like our personalities have various traits and at times we behave like this or that]. If anyone would say anything to her, she would take it, you know, with a pinch of salt. She herself considered life as one big joke, which all, you know, my daughter and all, we all agree. Life is one big joke, you know; we have all our theories, and you know, *yeh hoga, woh hoga, aur agle janam mein, aur pichhle janam mein?* [this will happen, that will happen, in the next life and past life] You know, how we Indians are. When we talk about anything we say, *acha, is Janam mein nahi toh agle Janam mein, main yeh kar dunga, woh kar dunga*, [okay, if not in this life, I will do this and that in the next life] nonsense! But, *kal kisne dekha hai?* [Who has seen the future?] And it is a joke. In the end, you're just dust. Nothing.

**MG:** Did she have in mind a specific way in which she wanted to be remembered, which might have guided how she wanted to structure her memoir. If you are aware of that?

**KS:** Like that, that I don't know, because she didn't sit down and discuss the memoir with me. She just did it when she felt that she should. Other than this, I wouldn't know what she was thinking when she was writing it. But a thought does come in that yes, she would have liked to be remembered, and also that she had a very interesting life. Very interesting. She was very rebellious by nature, not just her, even her other sister was. I think it kind of runs in the family, you know, very rebellious by nature. Always, always doing what she wanted to do and what she thought was best. In fact, when she passed away, I was at the hospital with her. Immediately, you know, you get such a shock, that my mother is not there. But then, you tell yourself that she's lived 102 years. As per her decision on life and her way of life, and that, I think, is great. Yeah.

**MG:** What did she think about Zora Segal, the actor, if she ever shared her thoughts about herself as a public figure with you? What was her perception of Zora Segal — the actor, as people knew her professionally? How did she think of herself in that kind of role or persona?

**KS:** I wouldn't know what she thought. It's just that when I liked her in a particular role, I would always tell her that, you know, this was really, really nice. If something was not up to the mark, I would tell her straightaway, and she would agree with me sometimes. If you remember, she did a film which was called *Chalo Ishq Ladayein*, with Govinda. I think I read about it. Oh, yes, and I saw it and I was livid! I was so angry with her. I said, "Don't you dare ever take up a third-rate film like this again!" But she said, "*Haan*, I know, *itni bakwaas thi* [Yes, I know it was bad]" I said, "It was bad, but you, as an actor, you know, it brings you down. She said, "*Nahi, mujhe kya pata tha ye aisi hogi, waisi hogi!* [No, how would I know that it would turn out to be like this or that?]" But the funny thing is that so many people remember her, for that role in that film. That is, that's the odd thing, you know. So, I suppose an actor just takes on whatever comes, whether they like it or

not. Some [actors] are choosy. She wasn't very, you know, choosy in that way.

**MG:** My question was regarding her public appearances. For example, I saw many videos of her reading poetry and how she would be so articulate and read it out so beautifully. Then, when she presented herself on a public forum as Zohra Segal, the actor, I often wondered what her approach would have been to presenting herself.

**KS:** How would I know? Her approach would be to do her best and to get as much praise as possible. Like any artist. Any artist who presents themselves on stage or in front of the public wants to give their best. Therefore getting also a lot of praise and attention, and *Waah! Waah!*<sup>2</sup> and that sort of thing. But she always wanted to give her best, even she insisted on asking for the scripts whenever she was approached for film roles. *Ki mujhe pehle se script padhni hai, padhni hai. Aajkal toh aise nahi hota na.* [She would say, "I want to read the script in advance". These days, it doesn't happen that way.] You just go, and they give you your line, and you say it, apparently. And that's it. But with her, it was like, as many people say, it was the old-fashioned way of the theatre. Because she was never a film person. She was a theatre person. Film offers came later after she moved here, by which she got, you know, more popular. But her poetry reading, etc., was well-rehearsed and well-worked out. She would recite her poetries every day, every evening, as an exercise.

**MG:** Would you agree that, as a performer, rehearsing or practising was a very, very integral part of her day-to-day life?

**KS:** Yes, yes, very much so. *Unka purana system tha ki* [Hers was an old system/method], to get into the character, *mujhe jaan na hai yeh kya hai* [She would say, "I want to know what this is about"]. I have to know, I have to imagine, *yeh sab aage peeche, uska soch ke* ["I have to think around the role"]. And then she would approach her work accordingly.

**MG:** I read that when you accompanied her for a film, I think it was *Dil Se!* where you must have accompanied her during the shoot . . .

**KS:** No, no, no. Not at all. Because I was also never free, perpetually on my tours and performing, etc., etc, so it was very difficult. The only film I accompanied her [for] was *Cheeni Kum*, which we did with Tabu and Amitabh Bachchan. At that time, it was difficult for her to stand without some support. If you see the film she's always holding on onto a table or a sofa or something like that, and that was when I accompanied her, yes.

**MG:** So, when you accompanied her, how did you find her approach to acting, preparation, or rehearsing? What would be your perception of her process or preparation, if you could recall?

**KS:** It's the same always, you know? Memorising her lines, thinking about them, and maybe reciting them to herself. It was the same. There's nothing. We have been seeing this from our childhood. We never paid any attention to it. We thought, yeah, that's alright! Everybody lives like this.

**MG:** Why I ask is because when I see the movie now, I can see the marked difference in how Zohra *ji* speaks her lines in a manner that is very, very precise, very clear. The articulation is so beautiful and so well-defined. In comparison, if you see Amitabh Bachchan or Tabu speaking their lines, it is very different. I believe that her experience as a thespian comes across when you see or when you hear her, at least, speaking her lines. So that's why my question was about her process of preparation.

**KS:** Oh, well. For us, it's nothing great. Nothing different. It's just the same old thing. Memorise, recite, again, and again, think about it... And I suppose this would be for, as I've said earlier, for any artist. *Unka bhi wahi hai* [It was like that for her too] you know, even when you're doing a dance, or you're doing a piece of *abhinaya*<sup>3</sup>, when you're expressing a poem or something. You're thinking about it, you're thinking about the character, you're thinking about the environments that must have been, *toh yeh toh sab ka hi hota hai* [it is like that for everybody]. *Ab in logon ka kya hota hai, kaise hota hai* [How it is for these people

(actors/theatre professionals)], I don't know, you know, what the present system is like. Because she did one film opposite, and I forget who the male actor was. There was this film, it was called *Saaya*. You would have to check. Maybe it was John Abraham, I'm not sure. Maybe. Once she came back from the shoot and, I asked her, I said, "*Achcha, kaisa tha?* [How was it?]" She said, "*Kya kaisa tha! Yeh ladka toh kuch bolta hi nahi hai!* [What do you mean, how was it? This boy doesn't even speak!]" *Maine kaha, "Kaun ladka?"* [I asked, "Which boy?"] so she took that boy's name. And I said, "*achcha?* [Is that so?]" So she said, "*Main jo bhi kehti hoon, wo phus-phus, phus-phus karta hai* [“Whatever I say (lines), he just whispers back”]. So I told him, I told him, why don't you speak up? I'm not getting a feedback. Now, this is the old traditional system, you know, where the actors give impetus to the other one also. The characters keep playing, but then I explained; I said, "*Aaj kal toh, Ammi, dubbing ka system hai* [These days, *Ammi*, there is a system of dubbing]. They dub afterwards." She said, "*Iska kya fayda! Woh saare expressions wagahra...* [“What is the use of that? What about all those expressions?”]" So she used to feel very, you know, sort of empty that way.

**MG:** In terms of her experience as a theatre artist, would Prithvi Theatres be the strongest influence? Particularly in how they would articulate the stories and present them, would you consider Prithvi Theatres as a greater influence on her as an actor?

**KS:** Well, of course. But before that, she was a dancer with Uday Shankar. And she spent several years, and she learned a lot from him regarding stagecraft, presentation, etc, etc, which was then handed down to me, and I handed it down to my disciples. But then, of course, she was at Prithvi Theatres. Initially, as you know, she joined as a dance director and later went into acting. But yes, acting-wise, that would be the strongest influence in her life. She worked with Prithvi *ji*, I think, for 14–15 years, and then after my father's demise in Bombay, she said that I couldn't carry on living here. There are too many memories, so I have to move away. And then we came to Delhi.

**MG:** When you read the memoir, how did you find her approach to narrating herself in *Close-Up*?

**KS:** I enjoyed it. I enjoyed *Close-Up*. For me, *Stages* with all those letters from her maternal uncle, and all that was slightly, you know, stretched out. I felt so. Although I didn't want to say much to her. But when I read *Close-Up*, I enjoyed it. It was crisp. It was faster moving. And, yes, very enjoyable.

**MG:** I read an interview with Kamalabai Gokhale once. She was the actress in Dadasaheb Phalke's movies, and she was initially a theatre artist, so she didn't think very pleasantly about the transition from theatre to cinema. So, I was wondering whether, as a theatre artist who transitioned into Cinema and television, Zohra Ji perceived that. Did she look at the transition favourably, or was it just work for her?

**KS:** It was just work, because she never discussed it. If she were unhappy, she would have said something. But I have heard this from other theatre people that, you know, because you are in theatre, and because you're facing a live audience, you have to sometimes exaggerate or be loud to get right across to the very last person. Whereas in cinema, the camera picks up every little detail, so you don't have to overdo anything you know. It's just a slight movement or a slight twitch or a slight expression and that is it. And the voice, you have to also, I think, bring down. You don't have to... Theatre people, you know, they speak very loudly. Yeah, you have to when you're on stage. But strangely enough, she never discussed this with me, never, and never complained either.

**MG:** Perhaps she was just passionate about her work, and she didn't mind if it was a different medium, perhaps.

**KS:** Yeah, I suppose she just jelled into whatever situation there was. And she enjoyed it. She enjoyed theatre. She enjoyed TV. She enjoyed a little bit of cinema. Cinemas toh unhone bahut kam kia hain na. Kuch bhi nahi.. woh because of old age. So, that was about it.



**MG:** My last question would be, when she published *Close-Up*, what was the reception like?

**KS:** I don't know. It must have been good because it sold! Well, yeah, and I don't know about the reviews and all.

**MG:** Was there any specific feedback or something that she got to know about how her memoir was received by her readership?

**KS:** No, I don't know. Really, don't know. I just think because it sold, it sold a lot of copies. That was enough for her, I suppose. *Usse zyada toh unhone kabhi discuss kia nahi* [More than that, she never discussed]. Perhaps she wasn't even bothered, you know; done, over and done with!

## **Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> 'Ji' in Hindi signifies respectful address while speaking about seniors or elders.

<sup>2</sup> An interjection used to convey appreciation.

<sup>3</sup> *Abhinaya*, in Indian dance, refers to the aspect of enacting or emoting. It is the technique of using expressions to convey the mood or the meaning of the lyrics.

## APPENDIX - B

### Interview with Ms. Madhur Jaffrey

#### (Questionnaire and Responses)

**Meghna Gangadharan:** How did you come to write your memoir, *Climbing the Mango Trees* (2006)?

**Madhur Jaffrey:** My English publisher had been asking me for quite a while to write a memoir, but I had hesitated. My life is not an open book, and I do not want it to be. I finally agreed to do it, but with the provision that I only go up to the age of around twenty.

**MG:** What made you choose the way the memoir is structured? Did you have a particular format in mind while drafting it?

**MJ:** I did not have a format in mind; in fact I wrote nothing until I was about nine months from the deadline. I was just stewing and thinking but found myself unable to put pen to paper. When I finally sat down to write, it all came in a kind of gush. The format just happened on its own. I did nothing to plan it or form it.

**MG:** If you could go back and think about the moment you decided to write your memoir, were there any existing memoirs of this kind that you liked for their narrative structure, format, and style?

**MJ:** No, not really.

**MG:** What was the process behind writing the memoir? Was it like an oral narrative where you would dictate your story to a person who would write/type it down and get your approval?

**MJ:** Most of my life, I've just been a one-woman-office. I think. I write. I correct. I correct it again. I keep correcting it until it looks clean to me, and then I send it to the editor. I wrote the whole memoir before I sent it to the publisher.

**MG:** What were the challenges in writing the memoir, if any?

**MJ:** The challenges all had to do with memory. I couldn't remember everything completely. I used the aid of photographs and letters. Even more important was that I kept calling my brothers, sisters, and cousins to check on several dates, times, and details. For example, I could not remember the make and color of cars; my sisters, brothers, and cousins all remember them quite differently! I learned for the first time that memories are not exact and vary with the person. People remember what they want to and how they want to.

**MG:** Given that the corpus of your family recipes would be significantly large, what made you choose these specific recipes that were added at the end of the book? How do these particular recipes connect with your story from the memoir, in your opinion?

**MJ:** The recipes are for dishes that we ate frequently in our rather large family. There were also recipes for dishes that I liked. That was enough for me to choose them.

**MG:** When you wrote your first cookbook, were there, in your opinion, any noteworthy cookbooks by authors of Indian origin writing from the USA or the UK whose works you found exciting?

**MJ:** I certainly bought Indian cookbooks. There weren't too many to choose from. I loved Mrs. Balbir Singh's cookbook. The recipes in it, and some of the recipes my mother mailed me from India were at the core of everything I cooked as a young student in London. They brought back memories of the tastes I had grown up with in Delhi.

**MG:** What does 'authenticity' mean to you in terms of food and taste?

**MJ:** Authentic food comes from a real place. It has existed for a while. It brings out powerful but quiet emotions in those who eat it daily. It always tastes like "home" to them.

**MG:** As an expert in the field with decades of experience, has your understanding of ‘authenticity’ of food/cuisine and taste changed over time?

**MJ:** Food is authentic when it is true to a natural source that has had built-in longevity. It changes over time and is easily influenced, but its core seems to stay the same.

**MG:** Besides bringing the recipes to life on BBC’s Indian Cookery, were you also involved in writing the scripts for each episode? Or did you have a team of screenwriters collaborating with you?

**MJ:** I did not write the scripts for any of the episodes. They were written by the Director and the Producer.

**MG:** Who are the cookbook writers and food memoirists from the current times whom you consider your successors?

**MJ:** Meera Sodha in the UK and Tejal Rao in the US.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Primary Sources

Jaffrey, Madhur. *Climbing the Mango Trees: A Memoir of a Childhood in India*. Ebury Press, 2006.

Segal, Zohra. *Close-Up: Memories of a Life on Stage & Screen*. Kali for Women, 2010.

Wadkar, Hansa. *You Ask, I Tell: An Autobiography*. Zubaan Books, 2013.

### Secondary Sources

“Bhumika: Masterclass with Shyam Benegal”. *YouTube*, uploaded by BFI Events, 18 June 2012, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=UeMpq7AVcVE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UeMpq7AVcVE)

“Great Masters Series: Zohra Unmasked” *IGNCA*, 2014, Archive.org, <https://archive.org/details/dli.Zohra.Unmasked>.

“Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (Hart-Celler Act)”. *Immigration History*, <https://immigrationhistory.org/item/hart-celler-act/>. Accessed 30 Nov. 2023.

“Madhur Jaffrey: Interview”. *American Masters*, PBS, n.d., <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/archive/interview/madhur-jaffrey/>. Accessed 19 Oct. 2024.

“Programme Index”. *BBC Genome Project*, Accessed 22 Mar. 2024, <https://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk/search/0/20?q=Madhur+Jaffrey#top>.

“Results by Country: United Kingdom”. *Queen’s University*, n.d., <https://www.queensu.ca/mcp/immigrant-minorities/resultsbycountry-im/united-kingdom-im>. Accessed 19 Oct. 2024.

- “The Woman Who Taught the West to Cook Indian Food”. *BBC World Service*, 7 Nov. 2022, video, 4:20, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=sXm\\_I8EI0-M](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sXm_I8EI0-M).
- Alibhai-Brown, Yasmin. *The Settler’s Cookbook: A Memoir of Love, Migration and Food*. Portobello Books, 2009. eBook, 2012.
- Anderson, Linda. *Autobiography*. Routledge, 2011.
- Arnold, David and Stuart Blackburn. *Telling Lives in India: Biography, Autobiography and Life History*. Permanent Black, 2004.
- Ashok, Krish. *Masala Lab: The Science of Indian Cooking*. Penguin Random House India, 2020.
- Balki, R. *Cheeni Kum*. 2007, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b6Hd6WYPgWU>.
- Barbour, Kim. ‘Registers of Performance: Negotiating the Professional, Personal and Intimate in Online Persona Creation.’ *Media, Margins and Popular Culture*, edited by Einar Thorsen, Heather Savigny, Jenny Alexander and Daniel Jackson, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp. 57–69.
- *Women and Persona Performance*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2023.
- Benjamin, Walter. “A Short History of Photography”. *One-Way Street and Other Writings*, Translated by Edmund Jephcott, Verso, 1979, pp. 199–216.
- Benegal, Shyam, Director. *Bhumika: The Role*. Blaze Film Enterprises Pvt. Ltd., 1977.
- Bigot, Corinne. “Diasporic Culinary Trajectories: Mapping Food Zones and Food Routes in First-Generation South Asian and Caribbean Culinary Memoirs”. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, vol. 55, no. 6, 2019, pp. 795–807. doi:10.1080/17449855.2019.1680154.

- Black, Shameem. "Recipes for Cosmopolitanism: Cooking across Borders in the South Asian Diaspora". *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2010, pp. 1–30. University of Nebraska Press, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5250/fronjwomestud.31.1.1>. Accessed 12 Aug. 2024.
- Brooks, Peter. *The Melodramatic Imagination*. Yale University Press, 1976.
- Brown, Bill. "Thing Theory". *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 28, no. 1, 2001, pp. 1–22.
- Buettner, E. "Going for an Indian: South Asian Restaurants and the Limits of Multiculturalism in Britain". *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 80, no. 4, 2008, pp. 865–901. doi:10.1086/592112.
- Chatterjee, Gayatri. "Durga Khote: The Contour of a Life and Work". *I, Durga Khote: An Autobiography*, translated by Shanta Gokhale, Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Chatterji, L. "Book Reviews: Joan L. Erdman with Zohra Segal, Stages: The Art and Adventures of Zohra Segal". *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1, 1999, pp. 157–159. <https://doi.org/10.1177/097152159900600116>.
- Chowdhary, Savitri. *Indian Cooking*. Andre Deutsch Limited, 1954.
- Claiborne, C. "Indian Actress Is a Star in the Kitchen Too". *The New York Times*, 7 July 1966.
- Crossland-Marr, Lauren, and Elizabeth L. Krause. "Theorizing Authenticity: Introduction to the Special Section". *Gastronomica: The Journal for Food Studies*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2023, pp. 5–12. Accessed 22 Nov. 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1525/gfc.2023.23.1.5>.

- Dasi, Binodini. *My Story and My Life as an Actress*. Edited and translated by Rimli Bhattacharya, Kali for Women, 1998.
- Debord, Guy. *Society of the Spectacle*. Translated by Ken Knabb, Rebel Press, 2005.
- Deller, Ruth A. "Star Image, Celebrity Reality Television and the Fame Cycle". *Celebrity Studies*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2016, pp. 1–17. DOI: 10.1080/19392397.2015.1133313.
- Dey, Debashrita, and Priyanka Tripathi. "Abhi Toh Main Jawan Hoon" (For I Am Forever Young): Reflections on the Agentic Cinematic Presence of Zohra Sehgal in British Indian Films". *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 11 Apr. 2024, pp. 1–17.
- Dyer, Richard. *Stars*. BFI Publishing, 1998.
- *Heavenly Bodies*. Routledge, 2004.
- Ellis, John. *Visible Fictions: Cinema, Television, Video*. Routledge, 1982, 1992.
- Englund, Lena. "Celebrity Myth-Making: From Marilyn M. to Kim K". *Celebrity Studies*, vol. 14, no. 2, 7 Feb. 2023, DOI: 10.1080/19392397.2023.2173016.
- Erdman, Joan L. & Zohra Segal. *Stages: The Art and Adventures of Zohra Segal*. Kali for Women, 1997.
- Gaffney, John, and Diana Holmes, editors. *Stardom in Postwar France*. Berghahn Books, 2007.
- Glatch, Sean. "The 5 Elements of Dramatic Structure: Understanding Freytag's Pyramid". *Writers.com*, 31 May 2024, <https://writers.com/freytags-pyramid>. Accessed 7 Nov. 2024.
- Geetha, K. A. "Entrenched Fissures: Caste and Social Differences among the Devadasis". *Journal of International Women's Studies*, vol. 22, no. 4, 2021, pp. 87–96. Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol22/iss4/7>



- Geraghty, Christine. 'Re-examining Stardom: Questions of Texts, Bodies and Performance.' *Stardom and Celebrity: A Reader*, edited by Sean Redmond and Su Holmes, Sage Publications, 2007, pp. 98–110.
- Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. University of Edinburgh Social Sciences Research Centre, 1956.
- Govt. of Maharashtra. *Sindhudurg*, 2023, [sindhudurg.nic.in/en](http://sindhudurg.nic.in/en). Accessed 31 Mar. 2023.
- Gupta, Neena. *Sach Kahun Toh: An Autobiography*. Penguin Books, 2021. eBook.
- Haider, F. "The Woman Who Taught the West How to Cook Indian Food". *BBC*, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/stories-62730127>. Accessed 19 Oct. 2024.
- Hastie, Amelie. *Cupboards of Curiosity: Women, Recollection and Film History*. Duke University Press, 2007.
- Heeney, Tom. "Theorizing the Spectacle: A Rhetorical Analysis of Tragic Recognition". *Theatre Symposium*, vol. 5, 1997, p. 14.
- Heilbrun, Carolyn G.. *Writing a Woman's Life*. Ballantine Books, 1988.
- Herman, David, Manfred Jahn, and Marie-Laure Ryan, editors. *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*. Routledge, 2005. eBook.
- Horkheimer, Max and Adorno, Theodore. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Continuum, 1996.
- Ingle, Hrishikesh. "Prabhat Studios: Early Marathi Cinema and Respectability". *Economic & Political Weekly*, vol. 52, no. 28, 2017, pp. 43–48.
- *Marathi Cinema, Cultural Space, and Liminality: A History*. Oxford University Press, 2022.

- Jaffrey, Madhur. "Madhur Jaffrey's Indian Cookery". *BBC Good Food*, 16 May 2014, video, 55:74, [www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL7qHxImKz\\_6BqlTXrIm5hPKjIWT6CVsZQ](http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL7qHxImKz_6BqlTXrIm5hPKjIWT6CVsZQ).
- Jaffrey, Madhur. *A Taste of India*. Pavilion Books, 1985.
- Jaffrey, Madhur. *An Invitation to Indian Cooking*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2011. PDF.
- Jaffrey, Madhur. *Madhur Jaffrey's Indian Cookery*. Bloomsbury, 1982, 2023.
- Jain, Jasbir. "Speaking of Self to Others: The Difficult Art of Autobiography". *You Ask, I Tell: An Autobiography*. By Hansa Wadkar, Zubaan, 2013.
- Kayal, M. "Actress, Cookbook Author Lives Madhur Jaffrey". *Associated Press*, 2015, <https://web.archive.org/web/20151117032959/http://bigstory.ap.org/article/21a4586ea766458a9e0f6dcb782e6c6f/actress-cookbook-author-lives-madhur-jaffrey>. Accessed 19 Oct. 2024.
- Kosambi, Meera. *Gender, Culture, and Performance: Marathi Theatre and Cinema before Independence*. Routledge, 2015.
- Lee, K. "Performing Lives, Producing Life: Why Persona Studies and Life Writing Studies Need Each Other". *Persona Studies*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2022, pp. 1–8.
- Lejeune Philippe et al. *On Autobiography*. The University of Minnesota Press, 1989, pp. 3–30.
- Majgaokar, G. "Atmakathechi Katha". *Manoos*, nos. 18–21, Nov. 1966, pp. 40–41.
- Majumdar, Neepa. *Wanted Cultural Ladies Only! Female Stardom and Cinema in India: 1930s–1950s*. University of Illinois Press, 2009.

- Malhotra, Anshu, editor. *Speaking of the Self: Gender, Performance, and Autobiography in South Asia*. Duke University Press, 2015.
- Mandelbaum, David G. “The Study of Life History: Gandhi”. *Current Anthropology*, vol. 14, no. 3, 1 June 1973, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4105081f>.
- Mannur, Anita. *Culinary Fictions: Food in South Asian Diasporic Culture*. Temple University Press, 2010.
- Marcus, Laura. *Autobiography: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Marshall, P. David, Christopher Moore, and Kim Barbour, editors. *Persona Studies*. 2020.
- Marshall, P. David, Christopher Moore, and Kim Barbour. “Persona as Method: Exploring Celebrity and the Public Self through Persona Studies”. *Celebrity Studies*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2015, pp. 288–305. DOI: 10.1080/19392397.2015.1062649.
- Marshall, P. David. *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*. 1997. 2014 edition.
- Mayer, Sandra, and Julia Novak. “Life Writing and Celebrity: Exploring Intersections”. *Life Writing*, vol. 16, no. 2, 2019, pp. 149–155. doi:10.1080/14484528.2019.1539208.
- Menon, Ritu. *Zohra!: A Biography in Four Acts*. Speaking Tiger, 2021.
- Mukherjee, Debashree. “Creating Cinema’s Reading Publics: The Emergence of Film Journalism in Bombay”. *No Limits: Media Studies from India*, edited by Ravi Sundaram, Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 165–198.
- Naidu, Leela, and Jerry Pinto. *Leela: A Patchwork Life*. E-book, Penguin Books, 2017.

- Naval, Deepti. *A Country Called Childhood: A Memoir*. Aleph Book Company, 2022.
- Nayar, Pramod K. *Seeing Stars: Spectacle, Society and Celebrity Culture*. Sage Publications, 2009.
- Niazi, Sarah. “Teen Deviyān: The Prabhat Star Triad and the Discourse of Respectability”. *Sahapedia*, 2016. <https://www.sahapedia.org/teen-deviyan-the-prabhat-star-triad-and-the-discourse-of-%E2%80%98respectability%E2%80%99>
- Nyman, J. “Cultural Contact and the Contemporary Culinary Memoir: Home, Memory and Identity in Madhur Jaffrey and Diana Abu-Jaber”. a/b: *Auto/Biography Studies*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2009, pp. 282–298. doi:10.1080/08989575.2009.10815212.
- Ojwang, Dan. “Gastropolitics and Diasporic Self-Writing”. *Reading Migration and Culture: The World of East African Indian Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Palekar, Amol. *Viewfinder: A Memoir*, Westland Books, 2024.
- Panayi, Panikos. *Spicing Up Britain: The Multicultural History of British Food*. Reaktion Books, 2008.
- Paniker, K. Ayyappa. *Indian Narratology*. New Delhi, Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, 2003.
- Patel, B. “‘Sant Sakhu’ Delights the Devotees: Prabhat Receives One More Saint: Hansa’s Dignified Performance”. *Filmindia*, vol. 7, no. 11, 1941, p. 75.
- Patel, B. “Studio Close-Ups”. *Filmindia*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1939, p. 59.
- Pradhan, Snehaprabha. “Oh! A Mere Actress: A Plea to Cast off Hypocrisy”. *Filmindia*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1941, pp. 39–41.

Priyadarshi. “Chitrapat Pareekshan: Chetana Chitra ‘Sangtye Aika’”. *Manoos*, June 1961, pp. 35–37.

Puchner, Martin. “Textual Cinema and Cinematic Text: The Ekphrasis of Movement in Adam Thorpe and Samuel Beckett”. *EESE* 1/99, GWDG, 1999, <https://webdoc.sub.gwdg.de/edoc/ia/eese/artic99/puchner/499.html>.

Puppe, Heinz W. “Walter Benjamin on Photography”. *Colloquia Germanica*, vol. 12, no. 3, 1979, pp. 273–291.

Purushotham, K., editor. *Ahead of Their Times: Essays on Women Autobiography in India*, Kalpaz Publications, 2020.

Rajadhyaksha, Ashish and Willemen Paul. *Encyclopedia of Indian Cinema*. Routledge, 1999.

Rana, Navreet Kaur. “The Perpetual Quest for ‘Authenticity’ in Indian Cuisine: An Answer through History and Folklore”. *Digest: A Journal of Foodways and Culture*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2022, pp. 25–54.

Rau, Santha Rama. *The Cooking of India*. Time-Life Books, 1975.

Ray, Sandip. “Gobi Manchurian and the Food War”. *The Hindu*, 2024, <https://www.thehindu.com/society/gobi-manchurian-banned-goat-food-authenticity-debate-othering-column-sandip-roy/article67835978.ece>.

Ray, Satyajit. Nayak. *YouTube*, 1966, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4GaPPxfQ5sA>.

Santhosh, Sulfiya. “Mapping the Contours of Femininity in Modern India: A Study of Binodini Dasi’s *My Story and My Life* as an Actress and Durga Khote’s *I, Durga Khote*”. *Samyukta: A Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2012, pp. 1–17. <https://samyuktajournal.in/mapping-the-contours-of-femininity-in-modern-india-a-study-of-binodini-dars-my->

story-and-my-life-as-an-actress-and-durga-khotes-durga-  
khote/

Segal, Kiran. *Zohra Segal 'Fatty'*. Niyogi Books, 2012.

Sessions, Ina Beth. 'The Dramatic Monologue'. *PMLA*, vol. 62, no. 2, 1947, pp. 503–516.

Sharma, Krati. *Indian Women Autobiographies: A Study of Gender Identity*. LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2012.

Shinde, Shobha. "A Note on Marathi Cinema". *You Ask, I Tell: An Autobiography*. By Hansa Wadkar, Zubaan, 2013.

Singh, Balbir. *Mrs. Balbir Singh's Indian Cookery*. The Chaucer Press, 1967.

Singh, D. J. *Classic Cooking from India*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1956.

Singh, D. J. *Indian Cookery*. Penguin Books, 1970.

Smith, Greg. *Erving Goffman*. Routledge, 2006.

Smith, Sidonie, and Julia Watson. *Reading Autobiography Now*. University of Minnesota Press, 2001, 2024.

Smith, Sidonie. "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance". *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, edited by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, University of Wisconsin Press, 1998, pp. 108–114.

Tharu, Susie, and K. Lalita, editors. *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present. Volume I: 600 B.C. to the Early Twentieth Century*. The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 1991.

Tharu, Susie, and K. Lalita, editors. *Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present. Volume II: The Twentieth Century*. The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 1993

- “Jonas Tinius on His Book, State of the Arts”. *CaMP Anthropology*, 9 Nov. 2023, [campanthropology.org/2024/02/05/jonas-tinius-on-his-book-state-of-the-arts/](https://campanthropology.org/2024/02/05/jonas-tinius-on-his-book-state-of-the-arts/).
- Wadkar, Hansa. “Sangtye Aika”. *Manoos*, no. 22, 3 December 1966, pp 26–47.
- Wadkar, Hansa. “Sangtye Aika”. *Manoos*, no. 23, 10 December 1966, pp. 32–44.
- Wadkar, Hansa. “Sangtye Aika”. *Manoos*, no. 24, 17 December 1966, pp. 31–46.
- Wadkar, Hansa. “Sangtye Aika”. *Manoos*, nos. 18–21, November 1966, pp. 32–41.
- Wadkar, Hansa. *Sangtye Aika*. Rajhans Publications, 1970
- Wani, A. “The Tamasha Film: Gender, Performance, and Melodramatic Form”. In *A Companion to Indian Cinema*, edited by N. Majumdar and R. Mazumdar, Wiley Blackwell, 2022, pp. 281–303.