

Hansa Wadkar's *Sangtye Aika*: An Autobiography?

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Abstract

Hansa Wadkar's (1923-1971) autobiography is aptly titled '*Sangtye Aika*' (1970), which loosely translates to "listen to what is being said". This paper reads autobiography as a genre that inherently possesses a performative dimension wherein the author performs their autobiographical 'self.' In exploring what it meant for a South Asian woman performer in the 20th century to write about herself, the paper argues that texts like Wadkar's are more than autobiographical works of literature and that there is a strong performative dimension to the act of talking about/representing oneself, particularly in writings by South Asian women performers.

Keywords: Autobiography; Indian Cinema; Marathi Cinema; Performance Text.

Introduction

The autobiography is a genre that scholars since the 18th century* have consistently struggled to define owing to its porous boundaries, which allow the inclusion of different styles and genres of works related to an expression of the self. French essayist Philippe Lejeune (b. 1938), in "The Autobiographical Pact" (1982), defines the genre of autobiography as:

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. (p.4)

For any writing to be considered as an autobiography, according to Lejeune, it should be a prose narrative narrated retrospectively, telling the

* In *Autobiography* (2001), Linda Anderson mentions that autobiography has been recognized as a literary genre since the 18th century and that "it was an important testing ground for critical controversies about a range of ideas including authorship, selfhood, representation and division between fact and fiction. (pp. 1-2)

story of a personality or the individual life wherein the author and the narrator are identical, i.e., the author identifies with the principal character**. However, he admits to the limitation of this definition to post-1770 European literature. He says,

...this does not mean that the existence of personal literature before 1770 or outside Europe must be denied, but simply that our way of thinking about autobiography today becomes anachronistic or not very pertinent outside this area. (p.4)

However, studies post-1980s have made the boundaries of autobiography broader and more permeable. Laura Marcus, in *Autobiography: A Very Short Introduction* (2018), advocates for the inclusion of self-portraiture, photography, and performance as sub-genres within autobiography, and Linda Anderson talks about the writings on critical theory and literary criticism comprising autobiographical elements in her book, *Autobiography* (2001). Therefore, autobiography is now broadly understood as an intermedial genre, and there are multiple possibilities for what can be considered an autobiographical expression.

When we approach the autobiographical works of South Asian women in the performing arts, we encounter more diversity of expression. This is because the intricacies of tradition, culture, language, and experiences influence such works. Autobiographies, in such cases, may not strictly be literature that is written down, as traditions of orality and performance inherent to different cultures may also influence how such narratives are produced. There might even be differences in how these narratives are rendered by people of different genders. Therefore, the ways of compiling and creating such works should also be approached through different methodologies. Thus, considering autobiographies as literary texts alone limits our understanding of them. Personal stories written by female performers such as Hansa Wadkar, whose life experiences originate from within a regional cultural space, such as the film industries of Maharashtra, are informed and influenced by their contexts. Understandably, there are significant divergences from the western academic perceptions of how autobiographies and personal narratives (such as memoirs, journals, diary entries, and testimonies) work. How do we, then, begin to understand such texts? Do the conventional definitions of autobiography apply to them? Can there be multiple ways of reading/understanding them? This paper addresses these questions through a study of *Sangtye Aika**** (1970)

** Lejeune, Philippe et al. "On Autobiography". *Theory and History of Literature*, vol. 52. University of Minnesota Press, 1989, p.4.

*** In this paper, *Sangtye Aika* refers to the book published in 1970 unless stated otherwise.

and its English translation *You Ask, I Tell: An Autobiography* (2013).

Sangtye Aika, which was also the title of one of Wadkar's most popular filmspost-independence (1959, Dir: Anant Mane), was first published in a serialized format across four instalments starting with the Diwali issue (November 1966) of the Marathi weekly, *Manoos*. In 1970, these articles were compiled and revised after a second round of interviews and eventually published as a book by Rajhans Prakashan, a Pune-based publication house led by G. Majgaonkar. A team consisting of award-winning journalists and editors like Arun Sadhu and Sadhakar Anwalikar interviewed Wadkar for the article series, which was later developed into a book.

It was groundbreaking work, perhaps even the first of its kind, as is claimed in Majgaonkar's editor's note in *Manoos'* 1966 Diwali issue. He laments that Marathi readers were satiating their curiosity by reading the translated autobiographies of Marilyn Monroe or Brigitte Bardot because the local film artists of their time were not coming forward to talk about their lives. This was also what motivated *Manoos* to approach Wadkar. Majgaonkar says:

If their [film artists from Maharashtra] (truthful) biographies got published, then the literature will be enriched and it will restrict the unnecessary and shallow praise for American actors/actresses. If the original comes out, then the imitation is automatically killed.**** (p.41)

Manoos was a magazine with a wide readership and it published articles on topics ranging from "politics to arts, music and cinema" (Jain xxxvi). Post its publication as a book, *Sangtye Aika* won the Maharashtra State Award for Best Autobiography in 1971. In English, it was edited, translated, and published by Jasbir Jain and Shobha Shinde**** in 2013 as *You Ask, I Tell: An Autobiography*.

Sangtye Aika carried the label of an autobiography from the beginning. 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

erwise.

**** The authors acknowledge the inputs provided by Dnyanesh Mirikar in translating this excerpt

***** Jasbir Jain is the Director of the Institute for Research in Interdisciplinary Studies (IRIS), Jaipur, and Shobha Shinde was the Director of the School of Language Studies and Research Centre at the North Maharashtra University

edition, the subtitle was reinstated, and it was called *You Ask, I Tell: An Autobiography*. Jain comments on the ill-fitted position of the text within the genre of autobiography by remarking that Wadkar's autobiography "eludes easy classification" (p.xii), owing to its many features and the methodology followed in creating it. Let us examine this ambivalence of labels associated with this text.

The ambivalence of labels

In its book form, *Sangtye Aika* included additional material gathered from a second round of interviews to fill the gaps that remained in the narrative. But it did not change the text's characteristic fragmentariness and tendencies to swing back and forth in time, owing to its origins as an oral narrative^{*****}. The disruptiveness of the narrative may only be apparent to the reader, as for Wadkar, it may have been a coherent, fluid narrative that flowed as she recollected and shared her life stories and experiences. Hence, Wadkar's short autobiography stands apart from similar works by her peers, such as Durga Khote (*I Durga Khote, 2006*) and Zohra Segal (*Close-Up, 2010*). It is also worth noting that she came from a family of hereditary practitioners of music and dance from Sawantwadi^{*****} and was unable to complete her schooling owing to financial constraints. Her ability to articulate her story orally was largely a result of her experience in the film industry, which M.L. Kulkarni alludes to in his introduction to *Sangtye Aika*:

Something which even the great writers have not been able to attain has been easily achieved by this woman who never went to school or college but was instead educated in the university of life. (p.xlii)

Regarding readability, *Sangtye Aika* is not narrated in a refined literary-language, nor does it feature a colloquial Marathi. Rather, it features magazine-friendly language, indicating a significant contribution of the editors. This problematizes the position of Wadkar as the author as it is likely to have been a collaborative project. As primarily an oral narrative, it had to involve a degree of collaboration for it to become a literary text. Orality in

^{*****} According to the Living Handbook of Narratology, "'Oral narrative' is a term that covers a number of different types of storytelling: spontaneous conversational narrative ('natural narrative'); institutionalized oral narrative in an oral culture context; oral bardic poetry; simulations of orality in written texts by means of narrative strategies such as pseudo-orality or *skaz*.

^{*****} According to the official website of Sindhudurg district, Sawantwadi is a municipality in South-West Maharashtra. It is part of the Sindhudurg district in Maharashtra's Konkan region.

storytelling was at the heart of Wadkar's profession. She, along with many other performers in theatre and films were practitioners of what Kathryn Hansen calls "vernacular, largely oral, systems of communication and knowledge" (p. 256).

This validates Jain's argument regarding the difficulty of labelling it to a certain extent: the production process of the text places it in a "mid-way status between a written narrative and a collaborative one" (Jain xii). However, neither in *Manoos* nor in the Marathi or English versions of the texts do we feel the presence of an interviewer. We get to know of the involvement of a team of editors only through Majgaonkar's editor's note, the introduction, and the prologue of the book's Marathi and English editions. The collaborative origins of this text make it go against the grain of the characteristics associated with autobiographies.

However, Jain adds, the onus of giving shape and form to *Sangtye Aika* was with Wadkar, and Sadhu was "not allowed to punctuate the narration" (Jainxiii). This indicates that Wadkar had a fair amount of editorial control over the narrative. The articles published in *Manoos* were designed like a recurring feature column written using a first-person mode of narration by Wadkar. But a peculiarity of the text is that "[t]he initiative at no point lay with Hansa Wadkar," (Jain xii). This is interesting because, autobiography is largely understood as a conscious endeavour of the author, rendered with a distinct purpose or motive. If it was not originally a conscious endeavour on Wadkar's part, what kind of an authorial voice does she embody? Whom does she represent?

Narrator and/or performer?

Despite the unique features, the overall structural framework of both the versions of *Sangtye Aika* and *You Ask, I Tell* follow the conventions associated with autobiographies. The readers of all three versions of the text get a few pictorial glimpses into Wadkar's life. Compared to the other versions, *You Ask, I Tell* has more photographs, which Jain and Shinde sourced from The National Film Archives in Pune. These include stills taken from Wadkar's films, a photograph of Minerva Movietone Studios (1936-the 1950s), 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* respectively.

The book *Sangtye Aika* does not contain images barring one on the front cover and two on the back. For the articles, *Manoos* published two recurring photographs of Wadkar, one taken in profile and another one captured as a long shot, possibly at the time of the interview. These portraits are fascinating as the long-shot photo shows her in a reclining posture with two artificially added studio lights focused on her, perhaps alluding to her constant presence in the limelight. On the other hand, the close-up photograph shows her as a Marathi woman in her mid-forties, sans any make-up, thoughtfully gazing ahead. This image also represents the limit to which Wadkar allows the reader's gaze. In *You Ask, I Tell*, the readers are only given glimpses of her professional life. There are no images from her personal life. This seems to have been an editorial intervention intended to complement the autobiographical self-created and performed by Wadkar in the book.

Overall, the narrative aptly puts together a dramatic story of a self-made actor who built a name for herself in the Marathi and Hindi film industries despite her humble beginnings and significant personal struggles. The featuring of photographs along with the articles also allowed the author and publishers to tap into the former's recall value by drawing from her old works, which would have become part of the collective cultural memory^{*****} of the cine-going public in Maharashtra. As a strategy, it brings out the performative^{*****} aspects of the autobiographical work. However, it is unlikely that Wadkar would have selected the images included in *You Ask, I Tell* as it was published years after her demise. The appreciation received by Wadkar's story corroborated *Manoos'* estimate of the latent potential of celebrity autobiographical narratives in India at the time.

Both *Sangtye Aika* and *You Ask, I Tell* progress in disconnected fragments. The movement of the narrative in both texts resembles that of a film as it moves through successive frames or acts. Wadkar's story is highly visual in the way things are described, and any section from any chapter can be taken and performed as an act written for a play or film. For instance,

***** Collective cultural memory is a memory of an event, incident, or person that a group would remember. In this context, when we consider cinema as a part of a culture whose memories are shared by the group of people who belong to or subscribe to that culture, then the components of the cinema including the roles, actors, storylines, etc., become part of the cultural memory of that group of people as well.

***** According to Malhotra and Lambert-Hurley, autobiography as a mode of storytelling is "...performative, requiring a performer and an audience, every fresh rendition of a tale, whether "on stage or page" ..." (p. 14)

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. (p.21)

The text is constructed with a cinematic vision; in individual fragments of continuous narratives of any episode, such as the one mentioned above, there is a beginning, middle and end. Wadkar's narration incorporates elements of theatricality and melodrama, which moves the reader as they would when watching a film. The text constantly converses with the reader like a performance does with its audience. Wadkar herself alludes to this method of visualizing towards the very end of her book, by saying that the past "moves like a panorama in front of my eyes, like a movie of my life." (p.100)

Her long career in films started when she was just ten years old. Thus, the ability to think cinematically came naturally to her. Wadkar's narrative, as a result, indicates her visual thought process and trenchant observation, especially in the study of characters. Given below is an instance where she describes the director Himanshu Rai (1892-1940):

But Bombay Talkies had one person, Himanshu Rai, who was very close to me. He was the founder of Bombay Talkies. He treated everybody with affection and regarded me as his own daughter...Everybody in the studio adored Himanshu Rai. Even the pet birds and animals. He would sound the horn on reaching the gate. All the peacocks and birds in the studio recognized the sound and would start shrieking. Horses would start neighing, almost as if to announce his arrival. As soon as he reached the studio, the first thing he would do is go to the birds and animals, feed them and then turn to his work. (p.26)

Her keen eye for detail indicates that she may also have studied the characters she essayed on screen with a similar depth. This can be observed also in the way that she talks of her experience playing Sakhu in *Sant Sakhu*, a happily married woman, who was subjected to emotional and physical torment by her in-laws. Wadkar's detailed descriptions of her experiences resemble a filmic vision, thus making the readers wonder whether narrative coherence and linguistic dexterity are necessary at all for autobiogra-

phies. *Sangtye Aika* was intentionally designed to be projected differently, as Wadkar was a masterful storyteller who excelled in the cinematic method of storytelling.

However, this does not mean that Wadkar may not have engaged in any form of self-reflection or premeditation as Jain and Majgaonkar argue. They say that it may not have been possible for Wadkar to reflect upon her past as much owing to her illhealth towards the end of her life and believe Wadkar's autobiography is a playful and brave expression of candour. But they fail to consider that the act of recollection and retelling involves meticulous selection and editing also. Wadkar was performing a stylized version of herself that she wanted the reader to recognize and acknowledge. In *Sangtye Aika*, she portrays herself as an individual capable of introspection who constantly reflects on her past. She admits to her rebellious responses to situations that endangered her freedom and dignity as a woman. Furthermore, she offers just the right amount of detail for the reader to see this. A powerful instance would be the one where her husband, Bandarkar, expresses his suspicion of her chastity through violence. She says,

Bandarkar removed the leather belt of a hold-all and began giving me hard lashes on my back. (p.23)

She talks about this and other painful experiences by using pauses and silences, elaborating only selectively, ready to move to the next memory in an instant. This may read like an abruption in the narrative flow, but we must note that it serves a narrative purpose for Wadkar. It shifts the focus away from her state as a victim and allows her to assert her dignity and resilience. Following is another example from the book where Bandarkar asks her to prove her innocence by taking an oath not to "do anything like this again." (Wadkar 23)

I have not done anything wrong, why should I take an oath? Again, he hit me hard. I was on fire. My Husband doubts me, fine. God's picture was before me. I stood before it. I ground my teeth in anger and silently took an oath - I have not committed any sin so far in my life - but I take an oath in Duttaji's name, from now on I will not care about anybody. (p.23)

Wadkar carefully presents only those incidents that portray her voice and agency. In doing so, she engages in what Hansen calls a "doubled performativity" wherein "the actor's self is twice-created, both as a stage performer and a social being" (p.256), a feature typical to theatrical memoirs.

Therefore, *Sangtye Aika* presents a form of self-fashioning, a performance of a persona constructed through careful curation of information related to the public and private aspects of Wadkar's life. By making the details of her private life public, she reassures readers of her desires – to be a housewife and mother and clarifies that her circumstances – the financial situation of her family and their dependence on her – prevented her from achieving them. Here are two instances in the book that illustrate this:

My daughter was born. I came home. I was happy now I would not have to work in films. I was very fond of domestic life and children. I was tired of the film line and its life full of hustle and bustle. I had decided not to work after the birth of my daughter but this did not happen. My family had already signed the contract for *Kadambari*. (p.40)

After my illness, I had no desire to work. I had no strength for that. But the people at home cared only for the money, not for my health. They immediately signed a contract for a movie with Prabhat. (p.42)

The only time when she does manage to secure a domestic life for herself was when she goes to live with Joshi^{*****}, but she feels stifled by the restrictions on her movement and agency and realizes the limitations of the trope of the Indian woman that she wanted so badly to identify with. Wadkar vicariously lived as a woman fitting within this trope through her on-screen characters. A good example is Sakhu from *Sant Sakhu*. Sakhu was a householder with an abundance of inner spirituality^{*****} and a system of values which positioned her as a chaste, family-oriented woman – a woman that Wadkar aspired to be.

Sakhu's role has left lasting memories in my mind. Even if I try to forget, it is impossible to forget the shooting of *Sant Sakhu*. I merged in that role so completely that I forgot my own existence. I lost my own identity. I began to think I was Sakhu. (p.35)

***** Joshi was a man Wadkar met at a hotel in Kolhapur during the shooting of *Sonyachi Lanka* (1950). Between 1951-1954 she left home and went to live with Joshi in Marathawada, a region in Maharashtra. These three years marked her absence from films and theatre as well.

***** The trope of an ideal Indian woman during the nationalist period was tailored according to the upper and middle-class women of "good birth" who were "culturally superior to the westernized woman" (Chatterji 128). She was educated, but not a professional, she was supposed to be a worthy companion to the Indian man. Partha Chatterji argues that the new woman was the "reverse of the 'common woman who was coarse, vulgar, loud, quarrelsome, devoid of superior moral sense, sexually promiscuous, subjected to brutal physical oppression by males.'" (pp. 127-8)

This also caused her to be typecast briefly^{*****}. Both *Sant Sakhu* and her later film *Sant Janabai* (1949) in which she played the eponymous character, drew inspiration from mythology and integrated it into the system of values that went into the creation of the trope of the new Indian woman. According to Ashish Rajadhyaksha, her performance in *Sant Sakhu* also gave her an image of the “demure ingénue look that graced nearly every social Marathi cinema ever since” (p.239).

Interestingly, her career post-independence saw a stream of Tamasha-style films^{*****}, in which she played roles that were completely in contrast with the demure characters she played earlier. These roles brought her immense popularity, and her name became synonymous with *Lavani*^{*****} dances as well. Meera Kosambi mentions in *Gender, Culture, and Performance: Marathi Theatre and Cinema before Independence* (2015), that Wadkar’s “popularity depended on her acting in tamasha-based Marathi films after Independence” (p.362). In these films, Wadkar portrayed bolder characters. Her first Tamasha film was *Lokshahir Ram Joshi* (‘People’s poet Ram Joshi’ 1947), and she later acted in other widely popular films of the genre like *Pudhcha Paool* (‘The Next Step’ 1950) and *Mi TulasTujhyaAngani* (‘I am a Tulsi Plant in your Courtyard’ 1955). In the book, she counts *Pudhcha Paool*, *Ram Joshi* and *Mi TulasTujhyaAngani* among her best works, in addition to *Sant Sakhu*. She admits that these roles were more challenging for her as an actor as they required her to dance. She says,

I was mentally unprepared to work in a movie based on *tamasha*... The main role of Bayabai in *Ram Joshi* was assigned to me. I had no practice of the *tamasha* dance form nor any experience. (pp.48-9)

The trope of the dancer in the Tamasha films embodies a very local, sexualized, rooted femininity that Wadkar, though initially sceptical, was ultimately successful in embodying. Also, the burden of being able to dance in Tamasha films signifies a kind of feminine image that the film industry was trying to create, especially of women from communities of hereditary

^{*****} After the success of *Sant Sakhu*, she was not considered suitable for other, ordinary types of characters such as collegiate girl in *Daha Vasta* (1942).

^{*****} Marathi cinema, writes Shobha Shinde, “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.” (p.108)

^{*****} Kosambi writes, “short and compact songs that dealt imaginatively with emotions – mainly romantic or erotic love – with great sophistication. The *lavanis* often commented on contemporary events, and some were set to classical raga tunes and made into a form of concert music. (p.9)

practitioners of performing arts. By talking about her experience and the relative ease with which she performed demure characters, Wadkar continuously edited her public image.

Wadkar's autobiographical self is, thus, a performative self^{*****} – a character created to represent her desires and exemplify the pitfalls of stardom. The text speaks of the cinema industry as a place where she achieved professional excellence at the cost of misfortunes in her personal life. She re-constructs the arc of a self-made actor, who went from being a young and naïve girl of ten to a highly successful heroine in the 1930s-1950s to a mainstay in Tamasha films. In the book, by placing her successful film career at a parallel with her problematic personal life, she dutifully takes up the role of a mentor-former actress to warn young girls about the perils of working in cinema. It becomes quite clear in the way she ends her narrative with a lament on the decline of the Marathi film industry. Meera Kosambi sees this aspect of the book as portraying the “worst stereotype of a film actress' life” and says,

She [Wadkar] sketches a tattered life, underlined with exploitation, physical and emotional abuse, and aggravated by self-destructive obstinacy. (p. 362)

Kosambi's critique notwithstanding, Wadkar's narration of her experiences as a professional actor working in the Marathi and Hindi film industries in the 1930s-50s grounds the text firmly in its socio-cultural matrix, making it a relevant piece of writing. Like director Shyam Benegal (b. 1934) says in a Masterclass with the British Film Institute^{*****}, Wadkar's autobiography contains within it the history of the film industry and an insider's perspective on how films were made in that period in India.

Throughout her career, Wadkar performed different roles written by others. However, through her autobiography, she assumes the role of a writer-director-narrator. She takes ownership of her story, critically evaluates her readers, and then prompts them to see things from her perspective. She guides her readers to recognize her as someone who to some extent resembles the characters she essayed on celluloid. The autobiographical text, resultantly, becomes a site of performance where she portrays herself as a person who firmly believes in the values of the Indian middle-class house-

^{*****} According to Kathryn Hansen, “[i]n the performative paradigm, identities are not understood as fixed or essentialized attributes. Central to this axiom is that the autobiographical subject is produced in performance.” (p. 260)

^{*****} “Bhumika: Masterclass with Shyam Benegal.” *YouTube*, uploaded by BFI Events, 18 June 2012, www.youtube.com/watch?v=UeMpq7AVcVE

wife of her time, despite her inability to remain one due to her unfortunate circumstances. As a public figure, she embraces the idea of self-possession^{*****} by telling her story herself thereby denying authenticity to the other versions of it. Wadkar's autobiographical self was created to remind her readers and her audience of the image she once had in their eyes, in addition to a few corrections on how they should think of her.

The narrative as a product of its context

When it comes to South Asian women performers' representation of their selves, their context has a significant influence on their techniques of self-fashioning. According to Malhotra and Lambert-Hurley,

... 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. (p.2)

Wadkar's life and, consequently her idea of 'self' was very much imbricated within the cultural milieu of cinema, which makes the choice of the format she used to narrate her story resemble the narrative framework of a film. *Sangtye Aika*, then, has a natural counterpart in Shyam Benegal's adaptation, *Bhumika: The Role* (1977). *Bhumika* is also a testament to Wadkar's reassessment and dismantling of the genre of autobiography. By adapting the story into a film, Benegal, Satyadev Dubey, and Girish Karnad^{*****}, validated Wadkar's vision and perception of her life as a film. Benegal refers to the cinematic quality of *Sangtye Aika* in an interview and adds that the text brings to life exciting age in the Indian film industry^{*****}.

Much like the text, the film oscillates between the past and the present without an ostensible pattern. It resembles the way in which a person retrospectively reflects on their life, with one memory leading to another, much like Wadkar's book. The film re-creates the disruptiveness of the text through distinct frames and scenes, which work together to eventually give a complete picture of the life of Usha (inspired by Wadkar).

^{*****} The English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704), in the fifth chapter (on Property) of his *Second Treatise* talks about the idea of self-possession. He said, "...every man has a Property in his own Person. This no Body has any Right to but himself."

^{*****} 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.

^{*****} "Bhumika: Masterclass with Shyam Benegal." *YouTube*, uploaded by BFI Events, 18 June 2012, www.youtube.com/watch?v=UeMpq7AVcVE

Interestingly, Benegal had to use different types of film stock within the same film owing to a shortage in their availability. He used these different film stocks to show different phases in the life of the protagonist Usha/Urvashi and to represent several time periods and corresponding technical innovations in filmmaking. In the end, *Bhumika* captured the book's essence, particularly its narrative flow, making Benegal's film a helpful companion to Wadkar's book.

However, it is also important to note that while Benegal honoured some characteristic features of Wadkar's story, he also changed many key aspects of it. For example, Usha's father is shown as a Brahmin, whereas in the book Wadkar clearly mentions that he hails from the Kalavantin community; the suicide pact between Usha and Sunil is different from Wadkar's version, in the book, they do not try to overdose on sleeping pills; Wadkar mentions being raped by a magistrate while returning from Marathawada. It was changed in the film where it is shown to have happened during an abortion procedure. In the book, both are distinct situations. Thus, as an award-winning work by a much-respected director, the film is likely to misadvise the modern-day audience's perception of Wadkar and her story. Particularly the differences in the identity and lineage of the character inspired by Wadkar are severe and in doing so, Benegal may have taken the story away from Wadkar. Such drastic creative liberties lead one to think whether, in telling the story differently, Benegal has endangered Wadkar's agency. After all, Wadkar's agency in telling the story her way is what had made *Sangtye Aika* unique.

Conclusion

The autobiographical writings of South Asian women performers such as Hansa Wadkar stylistically weave their contexts and experiences into their narratives. Reading *Sangtye Aika*, we can note that Wadkar was not a litterateur; she was a successful artist who had a long career in films and theatre. She was well-versed in the contours of these fields, and it had a distinct impact on the way she processed information and narrated them. In the book, she reflects upon her life with a cinematic vision, which makes it move in disconnected and fragmentary visual units like frames in films or acts in plays. But this is also a feature that lends it a critical performative dimension.

Wadkar's affiliation with the world of cinema dictated her approach to storytelling, which also holds true for many other works by South Asian Women who represent themselves creatively. For Wadkar, the text be-

comes a site of performance, in addition to film and theatre. However, the autobiography was also her final stage of performance, and she used it to reflect upon the other stages and other performances that preceded it. The arc of a Marathi actress' successful career and tragic life reached its conclusion on the page through Wadkar's narrative.

Wadkar and/or the editors called it an 'innovative' autobiography. This implies that the contours of autobiography are dynamic, particularly for the works produced by South Asian women in performing arts, as Malhotra and Lambert-Hurley also argue in their book. The method with which the 'self' is represented in such works adds to it a dimension of performativity and self-fashioning. It is also to be understood that owing to the differences in the levels of literacy among women from South Asia, the diversity in modes of self-representation becomes necessary for them to talk about themselves. 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. Therefore, Wadkar's autobiography must be visualized like a film or a performance where she plays the role of Hansa Wadkar, her "autobiographical self".

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