Chapter VI:

Mee-Durga Khote

Autobiography of Durga Khote
Mee-Durga Khote is the autobiography of a highly respected actress of the Hindi / Marathi Cinema. Durga Khote was not the first actress to pen her autobiography but unlike actresses like Hansa Wadkar, Snehaprabha Pradhan, Leela Chitnis etc. who also authored their autobiographies in Marathi, Durga Khote played a multifarious role in public life. She was not just an actress, but also a businesswoman, a cultural ambassador and director and producer of plays and films. In a long and chequered career she earned many National awards and gained a pan-Indian stature that the above-mentioned actresses could never acquire.

For someone who was so obviously extraordinary throughout her life, Mee-Durga Khote reads like an astonishingly ordinary book filled with the mundane and petty concerns of its author. In the Preface to the autobiography Durga Khote admits to having started writing her memoirs as a means of keeping herself occupied. She had no thought of getting it published. She apparently consented to its publication due to the "constant insistence" from "friends" who also happened to be editors of a big Marathi publishing house. According to Margo Culley, for a woman autobiography writer "the real defense against unseemly egotism is the social positioning of the text. Family
members and friends have urged her to write her life-story and she
earnestly hopes it will be of use to others.\textsuperscript{1}

\textbf{Mee-Durga Khote} is thus a problematic text as far as analysis
according to the Feminist Literary Theories is concerned. This is
because, as we shall see, it constantly shifts between confident
assertion and passive humility. Durga Khote was a woman of high
achievement who earned a name for herself in an era when women
celebrities were few and far between. Early in life, she stepped
outside the magic circle and yet far from being ostracised, became
later in life a part of the Establishment, a much-respected member of
the film and cultural fraternity. She was highly successful in her
professional life, yet her personal life was, in her own words, "not
unhappy". And in any case, analysing the autobiography of a
matriarch in a patriarchal society is difficult!

As one looks at the narrative pattern, the structure, the tone
and the language of \textbf{Mee-Durga Khote}, one senses confusion in the
mind of its author as to where to place her sense of Self. Durga Khote
accepts that it was her public persona that gave her the publicity,
fame, money and self-evident right to pen her autobiography ("Had
the financial situation of the Khote family not become shaky then
where would I have been...? My identity would have been confined
to being the daughter-in-law of a rich and powerful family, that's
all!" At the same time, like most women, she locates happiness in personal relationships. Instead of emphasising her achievements, she tends to highlight the hidden costs of her public fame.

The narration of *Mee-Durga Khote* shifts intermittently from confident assertion of achievement to a retreat from it. Even the “I” in the title “I-Durga Khote” speaks of a person with a strong self-image. Several women autobiography writers have talked about the difficulty of saying “I”. Durga Khote has revealed her willingness to speak to the public about herself with the bold use of “I” in the title itself. Yet, somewhere along the way, the autobiography fails to take the reader into confidence and the intimate nature of the “I” mode is sublimated by the selective opening of the bag of memories by Durga Khote.

*Mee-Durga Khote* exploits, in the words of Patricia Meyer Spacks a “rhetoric of uncertainty”. The autobiography states Durga Khote’s publicly acknowledged success, but at the same time mutes it. Jill Conway in a study of the accomplished women of the “progressive era” in the U.S. (women born 1850-65) has remarked upon the narrative flatness with which in their autobiographies they have described their exciting lives. Their letters and diaries are quite different, reflecting ambitions and struggles in the public sphere and strong personal feelings. Whereas in their published autobiographies
they portray themselves as intuitive, nurturing, passive, never managerial, which, to have accomplished what they did, they inevitably had to be.  

According to Philip Dodd: “The claim of achievement, the recognition that accomplishment was neither luck nor the result of the efforts or generosity of others, all continued, well into the Twentieth Century, to be impossible for women to admit in their autobiographical narratives.”

Durga Khote too talks about her entry into films as something that happened purely by chance. As Sidonie Smith says: “The only script for women’s life insisted that work discover and pursue them like the conventional romantic lover.”

Durga Khote was born in a privileged background and married into the wealthy Khote family. Barely two years into her marriage, the Khote family lost all their wealth, including the house they lived in, due to the unwise stock and share investments of Durga Khote’s father-in-law and a simultaneous slump in their family business. Durga Khote was back in her maternal home, struggling to keep the home fires burning. Her luxury-loving husband was unable to shoulder the burden of his young family once the security of wealth was taken away from him. Durga Khote’s rich father gave them a flat to live in, in his sprawling mansion on Charni Road, Bombay. But
Durga Khote was determined not to put any more responsibility of herself or her husband and two children on her father. She could have taken the softer option and gone running to Daddy and lived comfortably off his considerable wealth. But her self-respect and pride would not allow this. She was determined to stand on her own feet. Durgabai gives us her father’s reaction to this streak of independence: ‘Papa said, “I am proud of my girl.”’ A few chapters later she again tells us about what her father had to say about her decision to give one more try to films after a disastrous debut: "Papa swiftly got up from the easy chair and giving me a tight hug said, ‘This is my lion cub. She will not eat grass... Sit down here and tell me everything properly.’" 8

Mr Pandurang Shamrao Laad, Durgabai’s father, was definitely the most important male figure in her early life. She has dedicated her autobiography to his memory. The first half of Meen-Durga Khote is replete with the mention of him. It was a strong father-daughter relationship. It was perhaps made stronger as days passed because of the weak bond between Durgabai and her husband. Vishwanath Khote comes across in the autobiography as a figure unable to find a slot for himself in life, unable to fulfil the role of an able breadwinner after the Khote wealth dissolved. At all the crucial junctures of her life, it was her father who guided her along the path...
to success. He was her major source of inspiration. She has said very clearly in her autobiography that her entry into the tricky world of films would never have been smooth and dignified without the backing of her powerful father. She describes the scene when V. Shantaram came to Laad Mansion to sign her for “Ayodhyecha Raja”. After seeing Durgabai’s first film, “Farebi Jaal”, Mr Laad had come to the conclusion that his daughter had been taken advantage of. So he was extra careful about protecting his daughter and her reputation: “Papa seated Mr. V. Shantaram in the hall and told me to come inside. There he told me in strict tones, ‘You will remain quiet. You will not speak a word. I will speak and I will decide everything.’ Later Papa put before Shantarambapu a list of conditions. Clothes, make-up, story, my standard of living, the behaviour of the rest of the crew towards me- it was a long list.”

One can say that Durga Khote accepted the patriarchal status quo and initially at least, worked under the directions of her father. Like Laxmibai Tilak who attributes her success in the literary world to her husband, Durga Khote attributes her success in the film world to the initiative taken by her father. Thus she functions within the patriarchal framework. It is only later, as we continue reading Mee-Durga Khote, that one notes the growing confidence of Durga Khote as a woman of the world, as a professional and as a de-facto head of
the family. The references to her father lessen and then gradually disappear. We are not even given a description or circumstances of his death. Mention of her husband is always in sarcastic tones which emphasises his failure as a breadwinner and life partner: “I could not understand how and where to restrict the rudderless lifestyle of Mr. Khote... His bad habits and addictions were growing. He would go to office as and when he wished. The company of loafers and hangers-on was increasing. He displayed no concern for the house, the children, and the finances. His was an absolutely irresponsible existence.” The hidden and implied suggestion is that had her husband taken on full responsibility for his family, Durga Khote would have been left free to fulfil her duty towards her children. She refers to the work that brought her name, fame, glory and money as something that she had to perform under compulsion. Her constant lament about not being able to give enough time and attention to her children runs through the entire book. She does not highlight her achievements but rather dilutes them. She seems to accept the boundaries of Public and Private spaces chalked out by patriarchy and in spite of her achievement in the Public sphere, reverts constantly to her Private Self. In this way she continues to sublimate a powerful Self: “From his childhood itself, I could never stay close to Hareen. To date this fact still bothers me.” “I fully appreciated Hareen’s
affectionate nature. But destiny and the events that followed did not allow me to nurture this close bond of love. “Hareen loved me a lot. But I was not fated to do anything for him or to return his love. Circumstances forced me to always stay away from him.”

“Hareen refused outright to go to boarding school. I too was reluctant about pressurising him. Many times I felt like giving up everything and being there always for Hareen. But if I gave up my career, the question was, ‘What next?’”

As luck would have it, “Ayodhyecha Raja” proved to be a runaway success. Durga Khote contrasts the reaction of her father and her husband. “Papa was overwhelmed after seeing ‘Ayodhyecha Raja’. Without fail every evening at 8 o’clock he would see the show...Which scene came when, which dialogue was delivered when, when did my song begin—all this he knew by heart... On the other hand, the reaction of Mr. Khote was completely opposite. After seeing the Hindi version of ‘Ayodhyecha Raja’, he criticised wholeheartedly my Hindi diction. The Marathi version he did not even bother to see.”

It was while she was shooting for “Saungadi” in Pune that Vishwanath Khote died in Bombay of a heart attack. Her colleagues in Pune did not tell her directly about this tragic news but only told her that she would have to go post-haste to Bombay. Her two
companions on that awful Pune-Bombay train journey got her ready to disembark at Byculla: “I asked, ‘why are we getting off here?’

Suddenly I spied Papa and Mummy. Papa came up to the train door and he and Mummy helped me get off. I clung to Papa and asked, ‘Papa, why get off here? Let us go home as soon as possible.’ Papa said, ‘Banu, we will go to the hospital first. Here, hold my hand.’

What a rock of support was Papa! His face had become drawn. But he did not let his grip on my hand loosen one bit.”

Fathers have so clearly represented patriarchy to newly awakened feminists that Sheila Rowbotham felt the need to defend the individuality of fathers: “Because we were not dealing with abstractions of a vaguely defined ‘patriarchy’ but talking about actual men, a complex picture began to emerge of ‘manhood’ and ‘fatherhood’ and our contradictory needs and images of both. Because these were men with whom we were connected passionately and intimately, it was impossible to settle for an oversimplified stereotype in which they could be objectified as the ‘enemy’ or even the ‘other’.”

Because of her husband’s death, the work on “Saungadi”, of which Durga Khote was the heroine, came to a halt. She was in no state to face the camera. But after one month of mourning, it was her father who helped her to get on to her feet and face the camera again.
He helped her in this way to face the world and life again: “The next day Papa took me to Pune. The set was ready in the studio. He reached me to the make-up room and all the while that I was getting ready, he sat waiting outside. Then he handed me over to Mr. Altekar and others and said, ‘Look after her.’ He then patted me lovingly and said, ‘I am always standing by you. Never be afraid.’ Papa returned to Bombay by the afternoon Express.”

Philip Dodd acknowledges the deep influence of fathers in the lives of exceptional women: “For the ordinary woman, the father held the only possible key to female achievement and the only available encouragement.”

Durga Khote’s relationship with her mother on the other hand, was not as affectionate and strong as that with her father. Adrienne Rich has observed: “It is a painful fact that a nurturing father, who replaces rather than complements the mother, must be loved at the mother’s expense.”

Durga Khote’s picture of her mother is that of a sophisticated, strict, slightly remote woman. Her easy relationship with her mother deteriorated as days passed. She came to rely even more heavily on her father who became now the only emotional support of her life. After her father’s death, her relationship with her mother worsened. And after the early references to her mother, we hear no more about her. There is not even a mention about the date of her death.
In “Laadancha Ghar” (“The Laad Household”), the first chapter of Mee-Durga Khote, Durga Khote has described her mother as a Westernised woman who wanted her children to follow in her footsteps. It was as part of this effort that Durga Khote was admitted to Cathedral High School. Talking of those days she says: “It was my nature to excel in whatever I put a mind to. That is why in school I would win every year the class prize, the Bible prize, the prize for English. I became the class prefect and also the captain of the basketball team. My mother was very proud of me. But Papa would only laugh indulgently and say, ‘The girl has become a brown memsahib.’”

With the last post-script about her father’s reaction, Durga Khote distances herself from her mother’s value-system and laughs along with her father at this pseudo-sophistication. Perhaps it is for this reason that while describing those days in Cathedral, Durga Khote separates the narrator and the subject. She describes herself during this period in the third person: “Baanu did this, Baanu did that.” This is probably to distance herself from the Baanu she was then and the Durga Khote she has become now. She aligns herself strongly with her father and identifies completely with his value-system. Perhaps in the process she tends to become a little prim and
this is reflected in the tone of her autobiography, which is quite serious throughout, rarely playful or humorous.

Durga Khote’s writing style and language lack the spontaneity and immediacy of Laxmibai Tilak’s prose in Smriti Chitren. Durga Khote is painfully systematic in chronicling her life date-wise. Each chapter in fact begins with a date. This points to the self-discipline and regularity that characterised Durga Khote’s career. Unlike Laxmibai Tilak who did not have a career, Durga Khote had a responsibility towards her producers. Dates, chronology, the importance of each minute, had value for her. Personal considerations had to be put away if one had to become a success in one’s chosen field: “A month had elapsed after Mr. Khote’s death. Papa one day came and sat down next to me. He gripped my hands and said, ‘Banu, tomorrow we go to Pune.’ I broke down, ‘Pune? What for?’ He passed his hand lovingly over my face and said, ‘My dear, we have to complete the two pictures. The sets are ready.’ He added—‘We have invested other people’s money in these films. I have told Natwarlal that my daughter will not cause a financial loss to anyone. She will definitely complete your work.” It is thus through a constant reference to dates that one gets an idea of the energy, planning and time that Durga Khote put into her career. She herself never mentions it. She prides herself on her unflagging
energy but does not emphasise the importance of what that energy has enabled her to do. Indeed, to a striking degree she fails to directly emphasise her own importance, though writing in a genre that implies self-assertion and self-display. It is only through indirect means e.g. through her regular mention of dates, the inclusion of several photographs of her receiving awards, the reaction of others about her success etc. that we get an idea of her personal power and effectiveness. She sublimates a powerful Self through her prose-style and indicates her success, as it were, only in disguise.

It is possible that this understated treatment of her success was an unconscious stylistic device. Says Estelle Jelinek: “Women’s self-image is projected by the very means used to distance or detach themselves from intimacy in their life stories—a variety of forms of understatement. In place of glowing narratives, women tend to write in a straightforward and objective manner about both their girlhood and adult experiences. They also write obliquely, elliptically or humorously in order to camouflage their feelings.”

Though in the bulk of Mee-Durga Khote the narration is flat and documentary-like, occasionally the prose becomes poetic. Especially during the description of her various travels, Durga Khote writes like a poet. In fact the disproportionately large number of chapters devoted to her travels gives to Mee-Durga Khote a kind of
restless energy, a kind of homelessness, albeit a wealthy kind of homelessness. Her poetic descriptions of these travels indicate the pleasure she took in these trips. The ardency with which she escaped on her own to these travels point to her desire to escape the chaotic conditions at home. She took pleasure, but a guilty kind of pleasure, from her travels. Mid-way in her colourful description of a beautiful scene in a strange city, she suddenly veers back to the topic of her children. For an Indian woman, especially of Durga Khote’s generation, motherhood was an all-consuming activity. A woman could not have a life apart from her family and children. If a woman enjoyed herself on her own, she had every reason to be guilty. Durga Khote’s extensive and poetic detailing of her travels indicates how much she valued these moments of solitude. But these were stolen moments and she herself is aware of it, as is clear from her recurring references to her children during the description of her travels:”(After coming back from Darjeeling) when I reached Siliguri station, I felt as though I had woken up from a dream. I never realised when this beautiful experience in my life concluded. I resolved in my mind to return (to Darjeeling) of course along with the children and with Mr.Khote. But that was never to be!”24 “After tea, I set off again to sight see in Venice. While leaving Venice I felt – I should continue
sitting here and go to meet Bakul-Hareen in this very same gondola."^{25}

Apart from the description of her travels, the one chapter that Durga Khote writes with beauty and lucidity is the first chapter “Laadancha Ghar” (The Laad Household). Though Durga Khote shows no awareness of perspective, ironically the best known part of her autobiography, and the one which was quoted extensively in magazines and newspapers, is this chapter about her childhood. It is done poetically and shows that this was the section that the author most enjoyed writing. Durga Khote’s extensive use of dialogues, the authentic description of the dialect used at home, the systematic description of the utensils, jewellery and household members of a huge joint family, lend to the first chapter a fluidity that is absent from the other chapters. Jill Conway in a study of the autobiographies of successful women in the era 1850 – 1865 demonstrates that women who “make it” do not identify themselves as women, nor dare to annoy men by their self-identification as women. The only lively sections of their autobiographies are their accounts of their childhood. For girls, childhood is often the happiest and freest time.^{26}

Although Durga Khote does not say so explicitly, she clearly sees herself as an inspiration for women. Her first film “Farebi Jaal” failed at the box-office. She describes the scene after the film was
released: "Papa congratulated me and said, 'whatever the quality of the film may be, but you have shown a way for women to earn a living.'"

However Durgabai is at pains to explain that her entry into films was not due to the attraction of glamour, fame or wealth. She did "Farebi Jaal" purely for the sake of her children and to ensure for them a high standard of living. Personal ambition was not her driving force. Everything she did in life was for the welfare of her children. This strong Mother image that Durgabai portrayed was reinforced by the kind of roles that she did. Most of them were strong maternal roles. Personal ambition for its own sake was considered bad for a woman. But if a woman stepped outside the "lakshman-rekha" (the stipulated boundary-line for a married Hindu woman) for the sake of her children, she could be excused. The deep respect for the image of the mother in Indian culture worked in Durgabai's favour.

In fact, Mee-Durga Khote exemplifies aptly the observation made by Patricia Meyer Spacks in "Selves in Hiding". After analysing several autobiographies of women of high achievement Spacks has come to this conclusion: "In writing of themselves, these women of public accomplishment implicitly stress uncertainties of the personal, denying rather than glorifying ambition, evading rather than enlarging private selves. They use autobiography, paradoxically, partly as a
mode of self-denial. Though they have functioned successfully in outside spheres, their accounts of this activity emphasise its hidden costs more than its rewards and draw back— as women have traditionally done— from making large claims of importance. Even as they tell of unusual accomplishment, they finally hide from self-assertion. Their strategies of narration reflect both a female dilemma and a female solution to it.”

Though Spacks is talking of American women, her observation about the narrative strategy in the autobiography of a public woman fits Durgabai’s autobiography as well.

Fortunately for Durga Khote, her second go at films was under the guidance of an able director—V. Shantaram. The Marathi film “Ayodhyecha Raja” can be said to have started Durga Khote on the road to success. By the end of an illustrious career, Durga Khote was honoured with a number of awards, the highest being the Padmashree in 1968. She had also been awarded the Sahitya Akademi Award before this. But all these accomplishments she does not mention in her autobiography. Only photographs of her receiving the awards have been slipped in between the text. In fact the photographs speak volumes about the extent of Durga Khote’s success and fill in crucial gaps in the narrative. Perhaps heeding the traditional injunction for women to be modest she refrains from mentioning these.
achievements. The photographs speak on her behalf. Similarly, she does not herself mention certain episodes that tell us of the extent of her success. For example, while holidaying in England with son Hareen, she does not directly mention the tumultuous welcome accorded to her by the Indian High Commission in London: “I was keen to skip all the bureaucratic ceremonies and go off to Switzerland by myself... But Hareen adopted a very serious and mature tone of voice and said, ‘Now we are a free nation and the High Commissioner’s office is ours. They have invited you with great respect. You are a popular and well-known person. You must pay a courtesy call for the sake of our country’s honour’... In order to respect his wishes I went to London the next day. I was made much of by the High Commissioner’s office... It issued me a diplomatic visa to visit other European countries.”

Later in the autobiography, she tells of how she bought a house along with a considerable amount of land in Jhiraad of Alibaug district: “In 1968 on Gurupaurnima day, I drove in pouring rain to Alibaug, paid the money and acquired the land... When I returned to ‘Gulistan’ in Bombay, my three granddaughters surrounded me. Widening her huge, grey eyes in amazement Anjali said, ‘You mean you just went in the morning and came back at night after buying a huge property? Granny, you are fantastic!’”
The woman who had lost her marital home due to the unwise decisions of the menfolk of the family had come a full circle. She was a propertied woman with two houses in her name in Bombay and a huge property in Jhiraad. All this she had acquired from her own earnings. It was undoubtedly a considerable achievement and Durga Khote is justifiably proud of it. Through the words of Anjali this achievement is highlighted (indirectly) for the readers. The narrative strategies in Mee-Durga Khote thus reveal the achievements of its author obliquely, not directly.

In fact Durga Khote is keen to portray herself as a woman who never pursued success for its own sake, and to show that the success that she got was not by design but by destiny. When talking about the time in 1961 when she was nominated for the post of the President of the 43rd Marathi Natya Parishad held in Delhi, she is quite modest. She says, “The Presidentship of the M.N.P has a very prestigious tradition. Political leaders, respected writers, journalists, musicians, actors have graced this post. I did not have that stature. But some people have greatness thrust upon them. The situation was somewhat like that.”

Durga Khote calls her professional success a “gift from god”. She is however not as satisfied with her personal life. In a remarkably incisive and insightful chapter entitled appropriately “Shoonya
Jeevan" (Empty Life), she looks back on her personal life with regret and sorrow: "After the passing away of Hareen in 1964, my life became filled with sadness and emptiness...Nothing was going right...The situation was worsening day by day. And I did not have the will to face it. I started feeling that my life was meaningless. I would feel—what have I done in life? What have I achieved?...In my life I had not earned the intimacy, love or selfless friendship of anyone. Although I always kept on good terms with everyone, still I had limited my scope to my house, my children and their families. No clubbing, card-playing or any other hobby had I cultivated. Today I needed some understanding person to share in my grief. But love has to be cultivated and nurtured. It is a give and take. I had kept myself away from everyone. I had stopped all social visits to prevent the world from seeing my grief and family problems. Whatever relationships I had were all superficial, whether in the studios or in the office, because I had limited myself strictly to my work."

Here one senses in Durga Khote her confusion about where to place her sense of Self. This apparently is the dilemma faced by many public women. Patricia Meyer Spacks while reviewing the autobiography of Golda Meir, the former premier of Israel, has this to say: "What feels certain is her self-blame. She thinks about how much better life might have proved had she been different.
Proclaiming her confidence in her public self, she betrays her conviction of an absolute dichotomy between public and private and reveals serious doubt about the self responsible for intimate relationships.\textsuperscript{33}

\textbf{Mee-Durga Khote} too, in spite of the public acknowledgement of Durga Khote's career, exploits a rhetoric of uncertainty about the Self, about the value of womanhood, about the proper balance of commitments. It reveals a constant level of self-doubt and dissatisfaction.

Durga Khote therefore quite clearly separates her professional life from her personal life. The public and private in a woman's autobiography are problematic because a woman describes herself not only through her public achievements but through her personal relationships as well. This is precisely what makes the autobiographical narratives of a publicly successful woman difficult. It is her public career that has made her famous enough to entitle her to write her autobiography. But a woman's life, even a public woman's life, is incomplete without her private life. While a public man in his autobiography often places primacy on his professional life, preferring to rush through his personal life, a public woman's autobiography will place equal importance on the private "I". Out of the thirty-one chapters in Mee-Durga Khote, approximately nineteen
are devoted to her personal life. This distribution makes clear as to which sphere Durga Khote holds more important.

Of all the careers, the Public/Private boundaries in an actor’s life are even more difficult to demarcate. Durga Khote is quite proud of the fact that she kept the line between her public persona and private life very well defined, not allowing one to encroach upon the other. She claims that since she had such a clear understanding of her public and private roles, she felt no remorse once the lights dimmed and she was no longer centre-stage, no longer the heroine, the prima-donna of the production. One wishes that she had elaborated more on this subject and talked more openly about the emotional trauma that famous stars face when the limelight is no longer on them. But she does not linger on this topic, preferring instead to dismiss this crucial aspect of a star’s life with a cryptic line: “The attraction that people have for movie stars is because of the image they see on the silver screen. But their applause, their adulation, is for that dream image, not for the real person.”

In fact after reading Mee-Durga Khote the reader is left wondering about the suppressions in the text rather than the revelations. Durga Khote is sketchy about her professional life—her experiences as a director, her gradual transference from pivotal roles to character roles, and her critical assessment of her growth as an
actress. She claims to be more involved with her private life, but in her autobiography she is even more selective about revealing this sphere. Durga Khote's silences are even more eloquent than her declarations. As Spacks says: "The act of autobiography sometimes inadvertently uncovers at least some aspects of personality and experience which normally remain hidden." Hidden from the surface of the text but suggested very subtly is Durga Khote's regret at placing her sense of identity and idea of Self so totally in relationships rather than in her career. She wonders, ever so tentatively, whether it is better to remain a bit distant, rather than get enmeshed emotionally and completely in relationships: "It was my granddaughter Anjali who opened my eyes—'Granny, you are very nice. But why do you always rush out to help people? And then if you are not thanked for your empathy, you feel bad. Don't you know you can kill people by your kindness and greatness—my dear loving Granny.' This woke me up with a start. In order to acquire a feeling of greatness and goodness, was I putting on my family and friends a big burden packaged as altruism? This is really something worth pondering." 

In fact, so discreet was Durga Khote regarding her private life that unlike the actors of today, even the interviews she gave to the media were diplomatic and were not spiced with details of her private
life. The only talk that she generated was during her brief marriage to Rashid at the height of the Hindu-Muslim tension in India. Almost all the articles, and interviews that were published during or after her lifetime have hardly a negative thing to say about her character. Keeping a clean image while being a busy, full-time actress is a balancing act that Durga Khote achieved beautifully.

The strict distinction that Durga Khote made between her public and private life is textually reflected in the form of her autobiography. All the descriptions of her public and professional life have been given in separate chapters. These descriptions of her public life have been given in neat chapters and inserted in-between the description of her personal life. They have not been integrated into the narrative and act instead like breaks to a smooth rendition. For example, the fourth chapter “Marathi Rangabhoomichya Athavani: 1910-1926” (Memories of the Marathi Theatre: 1910-1926) though an important chapter in evoking the historical importance of the medium of Cinema and the slow demise of the Marathi stage, seems obviously like an afterthought. In this chapter Durga Khote gives us the description of her first hand encounter with that well-loved and immortal Marathi stage artist—Balgandharva. She portrays herself as a witness to the end of an era and as a participant in the dawn of the new medium of Cinema. But unfortunately, this chapter does not
blend in stylistically, chronologically or emotionally with the preceding or succeeding chapters. Stylistically, it is quite unlike the other chapters. It is divided into various sections, not unlike a scholarly essay, and contains sub-headings. Chronologically, it does not pick up from the previous chapter and progress forward in the description of Durga Khote’s life story but rather goes back, to the time of Durga Khote’s childhood. Emotionally too it stands apart from the other chapters where Durga Khote is more involved in the narration of her life story. The fifth chapter, “Arunodaya Prabhat”(The dawn of Prabhat), which also chronicles her public life but in which Durga Khote has no pretensions of a social historian, takes off from the point where the third chapter leaves off. Durga Khote continues with the systematic chronicling of her life-story. She shows no innovation with the form of the autobiography. She does no artistic or literary experimentation with the narrative style either. Except for a couple of rare chapters of introspection, Mee-Durga Khote is a documenting of the events of her life, plain and simple. She displays no sophistication either in the handling of the form or in the use of language. A sense of perspective, so important in this genre, is also absent from this work. Mee-Durga Khote is also unable to evoke the scope and extent of Durga Khote’s multi-dimensional public life.
In an eventful life, Durga Khote played many different roles in her public life. She earned respect and success in most of these roles. Yet at the close of her autobiography she dismisses it as a by-product of her personal circumstances: “Today in my seventy-seventh year when I turn back to look at my life, I feel that whatever problems came my way, were solved due to God’s grace. The only focuses of my life were my children and their welfare. They are all well settled now. It was for them that I jumped into the maelstrom of society early in life. And now due to God’s blessings I can enjoy the fruits of my labour by seeing them happy. This is my true satisfaction!

As for the wounds on a mother’s heart... That sorrow will end only with my life!”

Mee-Durga Khote is thus the autobiography of a strong woman who earned name, fame and money in her professional life but who felt acutely the lack of a happy, fulfilled, satisfying personal life. The form and sequence of her autobiography mirrors this dichotomy.
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Durga Khote, Mee-Durga Khote (Mumbai : Majestic Book Stall, 1982) 184. All quotations from this autobiography have been taken from this edition. My translations have been given in the body of the text. The Marathi original is in the Notes Section.

"खोटयांधी घरातील परिस्थिती विस्तारित झाळी नसली तर - तर - तर -?
तर थोरामोटूंयांच्या घरातील सूत एवढं माझां अस्तित्व राहिलं असतं."

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Page 31. “Papa mhanale, ‘Aaya Ang Prasad, Omega maay gah !’”

Page 55. “Papa taakun auramkharva run indre apa yamala phat mithi marun mhanale, ‘Maaja sinhachcha bhadra ahe ! Gavat nahii khanar ! Bas eukde ! Malal aata samadh niit sang !’”


Page 80. “Shri kodte yonchya bhezand jiwanala kasa apa yamal kuunto aaka chaalava hech samajat nakar... Shri kodte yonchya savdhii vadhuch hotev. Kamaavar galte tare galte - unaid lorikanchi sangat, mulanacha, dharaacha, pishcha kasalacha vichar nahii. Sare bhezand vagon.”
11
Page 76. “हरीनच्या अगदी लहानपणासूनच मला व्याच्याजंत्र धड राहताच आलं नकरत. ते शाय्य आजही माझ्या मनात सलत.”

12
Page 78. “मला हरीनच्या मायेचं फार कौतुक वाटतान. परंतु देवात लिहिलेल्या पुढच्या घटनांनी या जिहाकयाच्या नाजूक बंधनांची जोपासना नीट होऊ शकती नाही.”

13
Page 88.. “माझ्यावर हरीनची अत्यंत माया होती, पण माझ्या वाटत्याला व्याच्या साठी काही करण्यास आलंच नसाव. आम्ही दोघं ही परिस्थितींने नेहमी दूर दूरच राहिलो.”

14
Page 91. “बोर्डगाथे जाणवून सांतानी साफ नाकारलं. व्याला बोर्डगाथे पाटवण्यास माझाही जीव धोजेन. वाटावचं, सारी काम सोडून देऊन त्याला पोटाशी घेऊन बसावं, पण काम सोडून पुढ काय …?”

15
Page 63. “पण तर ‘अयोध्येचा राजा’ हा चित्रपट पाहून भारादून गेले. ते नित्यनियमांने चेज राजू आढ वाजताचा ‘शो’ न चुक्ता पाहत. त्यात कोणता सीन केक्हा येतो, कोणती दाख्त केक्हा येतात, माझं गणं केक्हा सुरू होतं हे सारं त्यानं तोंडपाठ झालं होतं... ‘श्री खोटे यांची प्रतिक्रिया उलट होती. त्यांनी हिंदी प्रत पाहून आमच्या भाषेवर यथेच टीका केली. मराठी प्रत पाहिलीच नाही.”
16

Page 85. "मेरे मुळे, 'इकडेक्रूण कशला उतरता?' इतिहास एवं ममि स्टेजनालां गांडी शिक्षाची मला दिली... पण गांडीक्षण हस्ताक्षरयोग्य पर्यंत आलेआणि त्यांनी आणि ममींन मला उतरून घेतलं. मी पणांना बिलगुण विचारलं, 'पण इकडेक्रूण कशला उतरावलं? आपण तयार घरी जाऊ यां.' पण महामले, 'बाने, आणि हैसिद्धान्त आधी जाऊ यां. चल माझा हात धर.' तेवढा पणांचा धीर त्यांचा चेहरा काळवंडता होतां. पण माझ्या हाताला घातलेली पकड त्यांनी सूतथर सोडली नाहीं.'

17


18

Page 87. "दुसऱ्या दिवशी पण मला पुण्याच्या घेऊन गेले. साहित्यात सेट तयार होतां. मला मेक-आपण रूम मध्ये पोहोचून, मी तयार होई पर्यंत पण बाहेर खुबी टाकून बसून राहिले. सर्व तयारी जास्तीत मला आक्षेपकर एवं इतर मंडळीच्या स्वाधीन करून, 'हिला सोभाजा 'असं संगितलं, माझ्या पाळीवरन हात फिरवून म्हणाले, 'मी तुझ्या ईशारा नेहमी उभा आहे. तू घाबुरा नक्रोष.' दुपारच्या एक्सप्रेस नी पण मुळेला एरतले.'

19


20

21

Page 18. "खाद्यव नमन थेतली की, ल्यात झूट प्राविष्ट्य मिलीवावं असा माझा स्वभाव होता. ल्यामुळे शाळेत प्रातेक वर्षींचं कलासचं बक्षीस, बायब्लंचं बक्षीस, 
इंग्रजींचं बक्षीस अशी किती तरी बक्षीसं मी पठवली. मी क्लासचं प्रिमेक्ट झाले. 
बास्केट बॉल टीमचं केंद्रन झाले. यामुळे ममीलं फार अभिमान वातावरचा. पपा मात्र 
भिक्कुपणां हसून मनणत, 'पौरंगी काळी मझुम झाली हे!'

22

Page 86. "एक दिवस पपा माझ्या जवळ योड वसल. माझे दोननं तात घटून धरून मनणाले, बांधे, उड आपण पुत्रपत्ता जायच व. 'माता अनावर दूहं कोसलं. 
'पुत्रपत्ता कशाता?' माझ्या तोडकून हाय किवलं ते मनणाले, 'बांध, दोननं पिकवर्त 
पूर्ण करावला. सेटस तयार आहेत.' पण पुत्र मनणाले - 'आपण दूसरं थायचं पैसे अडकवले 
आहेत. मी नटवसलना संभितलं आहे. माझी पौरंगी कुरंचं नुकसान करणार नाही, 
ती तुमची कार्य पुरी करून देईल.'

23

Estelle C. Jelinek, Women's Autobiography : Essays in 
Criticism 15.

24

Page 73. "सिंगुरी स्तैण्डनवर आल्यावर स्वानातून जाणं ज्ञात्यासारस्री माझी 
अवस्था झाली. आपुष्पाला हा एक आल्यावरांक अनुभव केला संपता हे कठोर 
नाही. केला तरी आम्ही नर्व मिळण -मूल, श्री. खोटे - योग योड भी जरूर परत इथं 
वेईन असा बेत मी केला. परंतु ती सिद्धीस मात्र कटीव गेला नाही !"
25

Page 105. “चहापान आयोजन केरिनस - दर्शन यासांती मी पुन्हा बाहेर पडले। केरिनस सोडताना वाट्टल, असंच गोडोलात बसूनलं बठूत - हरीनला भेटटायला जावं!”

26


27

Page 35. “पणांची मला शावासकी दिली. ते महणाले, ‘पिक्चर कसंही असो! बट यू हॅंव शोन अ वे पॅर वुडेन दूर,अर्न अ लिङ्ग!””

28

Patricia Meyer Spacks, Women’s Autobiography: Essays in Criticism 132.

29

Page 99. “मी हा सर्व व्याप टाकून स्विट्जर्लांडला निपून जाण्याचा बेंट ठरवला होता. . . . एन हरीनन वडीलथा-या माणसाचा आव्ह आणण मला खूप समजावलं - ‘आता आणण स्वतंत्र झालो आहोत. हायकमिशनरच्या ऑफिस आपल आहे. तुला मानवां बोलावताहे. तुम्हाला लोकप्रिय व्यक्ति आहेच. आपल्या देशाच्या समानाकरिता तुला हायकमिशनरला जाऊन भेटलं पाहिजे ’ . . . त्यात शहराचा मान रखण्या करता मी दूसरा-या दिवशी लंडनला गेले. हायकमिशनरच्या काविसक्षून माझं फार कौळुक झालं. हायकमिशनर नी मला ‘डिप्टोमेंटिक हीसा ’दिला.”
30
Page 160. “1968 मध्ये गुरुप्रीणि मेघा दिवसी भर पावसात भी अलौकिकता जाऊन जैसे दिले आणि जागा ताब्यात घेतली. .. रात्री पुन्हा ‘गुरुप्रीणि’ ता परत आहे. तिनीं पोरी माझ्या गाढवाळ पद्धती. आपले टप्पे घरे घोरे विस्फोटन अंजती असंख्य विचार. ’यू मीन यू जस्ट वेंट इन द मॉर्निंग ओपेट बेंक ऑफ नाइट आप्टर बाईंग अ हयुज प्रोपर्टी? ’ म्हणून, ‘यू आर फॅंटास्टिक!’”

31
Page 119. “मं.पा. च्या अच्छिकापदाची परंपरा फर थोर आहे. राजकीय नेते, थोर लेखक, नगराद, नर, संशोधक अशा मोठी मोठ्या व्यक्तित्वांनी ते फड भूसवल्यां होतात. माझी ती पात्रता नडली. .. बट सम पीपल हेंव प्रेटनेस धस्त अर्योन देव .. .. अशीच काहीशी ती परिस्थिती होती.”

32
Page 158-159. “हरीन गेल्यानंतर माझ्या जीवनात औद्योगीक, निराशा ता देऊन बसली. .. कस्माचाच मेघ जमेना. परिस्थिती दिवसे दिवस चिकित्सक होती. घण तिळा तोडू देण्याची आता मला इच्छा नडली. माझ जीवन आता मला अर्धशून्य वादू लागला. वाटावर्च - आपण जीवनात काय केला? आपल्या पदरात काय पडला? .. .. आता माझ आत्मविवश्था उद्देशीत झाला होता. माझ्या मनाला सा-घाच गेस्टिवी उबग आला होता. वाटावर्च कुठे तरी निघुं आलं. पण कुठे? माझ्या जीवनात कुणाचीही आपल्या, स्नेह स्वरुपेन्याची भी संपादन केली नडली. त्याची स्वरूपिती सत्ता ठेवूनच मी वावरले, पण माझ घर, माझी मुल, त्यांची परिवार या परिवार माझी नजर काहीच गेली नडली. ना कताब, ना खेळ, ना पते. यातला कोणताही विरंचिता नडला. आज मला माझ्या व्ययेव वृद्धी तरी दरी, समजत व्यक्तीक गंभ
33

34
Page 186. "लोकांना क्लासिकरांबंद वाटपारं आकर्षण हे त्योंनी सुंदरी पढवावर पाहिलेल्या छायमुळं असतं. तो सलामीता मुजरा रंग देखलेला असतो."

35
Patricia Meyer Spacks, Women's Autobiography : Essays in Criticism 112.

36
Page 184. "याबाबद्दल अंजलेनं माझ्या होळ्यात चोंगलं अंजन घातलं... गैं यू आर खेसे नाई. पण तुू क्षाला लोकलं बरं क्षाळा जातेस? तुझ्या भावनांची दाद तुला अपेक्षामायण मिळाली नाही की मग तुला ते खटकतं? ठेट यू नो यू कॅन किल पीपल बाय युक्त काईडनेस एण्ड प्रेटनेस - माय डियर लक्हिंग गैंनी?""

37
Information on Durgabai's interviews and articles on her have been culled from the archives of the Sakal Press, Pune.
Page 188. "आज व्यावसायिक ज्या दर्शन करून पाहिलं तर चाटनं, जितन्या समस्या आत्मा त्या सर्व ईश्वर क्रृपें निवारून गेल्या ! माझा एक श्यास म्हणजे मूळ व त्यांचं कर्मणं, ती सारी समंजस, कर्तींवर्ती आणि आणंदी वृत्तींची आहेत. ज्यासाठी मला संसाराच्या सुरवातीलाच समाजाच्या झंडावातात उडी घाती लागली, त्यांचं श्रेयसाधन वाढविलं च्या पुष्पांनं आज डोक्यांनी पाहणांचं भाग्य मला लाभलं ! हेच माझं खरं समाधान !

राहता राहिलं मातृभाषाची ठाव ! त्यांचं दुःख माझ्याबरोबरच जायचं !"