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EXPERIMENTS WITH A NATIONAL LANGUAGE:
A STUDY OF HINDI MODERNISM

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by

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Experiments with a National Language: A Study of Hindi Modernism

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A Note on Transcriptions and Translations

This dissertation uses the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration only under two circumstances: when quoting another author who has used it, and when the phonetic qualities of the Hindi are of particular note, such as the quote from Krishna Baldev Vaid's *Bimal urf Jaayein to Jaayein Kahan* on page 155. In other instances, when the argument focuses upon the quality of Hindi in the original text, I have reproduced the Devanagari script alongside the translation for the benefit of the Hindi-literate reader.

All translations of the primary texts are by me.

Abstract
Experiments with a National Language: A Study of Hindi Modernism
Radhika Prasad

Against the background of immense socio-political upheaval in the wake of Indian independence in 1947 and the Partition of India and Pakistan, mid-twentieth century Hindi literature grappled with two main problems: Hindi's supposed supremacy over other languages and its centrality to the nation on the one hand, and the generation of a literary form that was commensurate to the instability of a new nation on the other. In the same moment, nationalist and official discourses were structured by a belief in a fully formed nation and its heteronormative, patriarchal, and patriotic citizen-subjects, which were to be framed in Hindi. Thus, discourses around the Hindi language postulated the shaping of such a citizen-subject through Hindi, which would in turn evolve into a modern language through its ability to articulate the modern nation.

This dissertation argues that while Hindi modernist fiction held an evasive attitude towards nation building, its emergence in a historical moment that was informed by the Partition, developmentalism, and language debates meant that the history that these texts refrained from directly engaging came to reside in their experiments with form. In the post-independence moment, language channeled the violence of nation-making, language conflict, and caste and gender oppression into narrative. I study Krishna Sobti's (1925-2019), Nirmal Verma's (1929-2005), and Krishna Baldev Vaid's (1927-2020) use of a modernist Hindi to explore the instabilities and incoherencies in the nation form at the level of literary and narrative

form. Sobti's preoccupation with female desire, Verma's attention to the silences within language, and Vaid's existentialist despair reveal the difficulty of evading the nation when using a language that was often central to imaginaries of the nation. The inhering of nation-as-history in narrative form, I argue, is a consequence not only of the historical moment in which these texts were written, but also of the language in which they were conceived, which remains deeply entangled with the nation. Examining the opening of subjectivities, narrative trajectories, and relationalities to the queer and non-normative, I argue that in the context of attempts to nationalize Hindi in the pre- and post-independence periods in India, the use of modernist form invests Hindi with possibilities, drives, and vocabularies that its nationalized form must repress. The intense preoccupation with gender, language, and narrative form found in Hindi modernist fiction is seen as transmuting the violence of nation making and the despair of postcolonial nationhood into experiments with form and style that lead to a change in the texture of the nationalized language.

Chapter 1 looks at Krishna Sobti's constitution of a feminist Hindi in her novellas *Mitro Marjani* and *Surajmukhi Andhere ke*. Reading these novellas in relation to the female body's instrumentalization as a site for the inscription of national and communal identity during the Partition, I argue that Sobti's Hindi ruptures the connections between the female body, an official language, and a dominant nationhood that are situated within normative Hindi. Chapter 2 reads Nirmal Verma's novella *Ve Din* (*Those Days*, 1968) and travelogue *Cheedon par Chandni* (*Moonlight on Pine Trees*, 1964), both of which were written during his

travels in Europe. I argue that Verma's 'creative oeuvre'—here *Ve Din* and *Cheedon par Chandni*—sublimates the grand narrative of history into a modernist aesthetic that illuminates intimate experiences. Further, by using Hindi as a language of travel and translation in these texts, Verma creates a new idiom that is infused with an ahistorical cosmopolitanism. In Chapter 3, I analyze Krishna Baldev Vaid's existentialist novel *Bimal urf Jaayein to Jaayein Kahan* as a Brechtian experiment that registers histories of the nation, masculinity, and literature at the level of form to generate a language that coagulates as it fails to move forward, even as it simultaneously injects non-reproductive pleasure into the text through the use of pornographic obscenity. Hindi thus becomes a language that is placed in the hands of a failed masculine author and that fails to write the nation as well as the masculine protagonist.

Modernist experimentation, with its incumbent defamiliarization of language, draws our attention keenly to the traumas and violences already embedded in a language that can never be 'whole' in the ways that it is assumed to be in its standard, nationalized register. The work of mid-twentieth century modernist writers replaces Hindi as the language of Hinduism, conservatism, and nationalism with Hindi as the language of feminine autonomy, translation, empathy, cosmopolitanism, hesitancy, and pleasure. It is through the complex literary textures that these writers introduce into the "national language" that their texts begin to conjure alternative imaginaries of the nation.

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The eight years over which this dissertation was written witnessed the Covid-19 pandemic, student movements for cost of living adjustments that were led by my own dear friends, and a world riven by conflict. In the midst of such turbulence, which inspired, by turns, faith and fear, this writing could not have been completed without the community and support of my professional and personal networks.

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Preface

The Hindu right's call of "Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan" draws attention to the traumas embedded within Hindi by its instrumentalization as part of communal violence, its division from its Siamese twin, Urdu, and its empathy with Panjabi, tainted due to the spectre of Sikh separatist nationalism. The writing undertaken in this dissertation is an act of recursivity aimed at recovering the possibilities embedded within Hindi by a generation of post-independence writers working in the period that these traumas had emerged. Modernist experimentation, with its incumbent defamiliarization of language, draws our attention keenly to these traumas and violences already embedded in a language that can never be 'whole' in the ways that it is assumed to be in its standard, official, or national versions.

This research arises also out of an intermingled fear of the loss of my language within me, and within my home. Although in 2017, when I began this PhD, this project was purely academic, as is often the case with research it evolved to encompass parts of myself that were deeply enmeshed in the social and political environment of India and the Hindi language. My arrival in the US had coincided with the growing popularity of the political right in India, and the changes in the landscape of my childhood and early adulthood were rapid. As part of this process, the language that I and several generations of my family claimed as our own, was 'cleansed' as it was turned into a potent political idiom that was intellectually and

emotionally all but incomprehensible to one who had grown up speaking Hindustani, with its cross-hatched fabric of Hindi and Urdu.

When I chose this project, I had just begun to notice these changes, and for a short period, the idea of working on writers that had been repeatedly been critiqued as elitist and apolitical seemed unsuitable given the immediacy of the questions that I was preoccupied with. However, the sensitivity and melancholia that I detected in these works stood in such stark contrast to the weighting of Hindi with the nation, and the projected grandeur of nationalism in independence-era India, that I felt compelled to examine them closely. I thought, particularly, about the "democratic, socialist" nation form as I had inherited it from a developmentalist generation, the fascist form that it was taking before my eyes, the connected lineages of the two, and Hindi as the bearer of those lineages. Besides performative citizenship, what was/is the individual expected to feel in the face of the grand narrative of the nation? How is the experience of nationhood at the scale of the individual and the intimate registered upon language? And finally, what are these elusive objects that we call 'Hindi,' the 'language of the nation,' the 'mother tongue'? Do they belong to us, or to the nation? Do they mediate our ability to articulate our position in the nation, or do they open other, perhaps more threatening trajectories of the anti-national?

My project is thus in many ways guided by this desire to understand in my own making in Hindi, in a nation that called itself a secular democratic republic, whose narrative and constructed nature was heretofore only a theoretical knowledge, but which has now become a lived experience—yet not as embodied as it is for those

who are deemed outsiders or "anti-nationals." As Hindi continues, in the twenty-first century, to be appropriated to signify nationalism of one form or the other, reading its post-independence output helps me locate a few tears in the fabric of its identification with the nation, its repressed possibilities of transcending the national.

Introduction

In May 2022, the International Booker Prize was awarded for the first time to a Hindi novel, Geetanjali Shree's *Ret Samadhi* (translated by Daisy Rockwell into *Tomb of Sand*). While the novel continues a long tradition of Partition writing, it is also marked by multiple forms of border-crossing, as the narrative complicates normative conceptions of age, gender, religion, and species. However, in the reign of a right-wing government, Shree's use of Hindi for the purpose of writing a feminist novel, and her refusal to write in a register of Hindi directly associated with a Hindu nation became consequential strategies of registering dissent against a quasi-fascist state.

Shree's achievement not only drew international attention to a female writer from the global South but also showcased Hindi's dual position as a language that is marginalized in a global context and hegemonic in a national one. This paradox became particularly stark when the right wing Indian government, formed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (Indian People's Party) and Prime Minister Narendra Modi and deeply invested in the imposition of Hindi as a national language, refused to recognize Shree's award. Thus, in July 2022, an event organized to honour Shree's award in Agra was cancelled because of complaints regarding her representation of Hindu deities, and the claim that her book "hurt Hindu sentiments" (Dasgupta, *the-independent.com*). In the context of this controversy, the novel can be seen as embodying above all a literary-linguistic transgression wherein Hindi comes to be

invested with energies that cannot be contained within the rubric of nationalism, which has historically appropriated the discourse around Hindi. Frequently represented through the slogan "Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan," this discourse invests Hindi with forms of identity and kinship that can only be articulated in nationalist or nation-building terms. By dedicating her novel to the writer Krishna Sobti, whose literary oeuvre spans over the second half of the twentieth century and early years of the twenty first century—that is, from Partition and nationhood to the rise of the right wing in India—Shree's novel performs a significant act of recursivity. It returns to an earlier moment of Hindi that was momentous because of Hindi's simultaneous proximity to the nation and proclivity to experimentation. Like Shree's novel, this dissertation too turns to the moment of nation-formation as an attempt to rethink Hindi in a moment when its weaponization has been reinvigorated. Central to the examination that I present is the question of the linguistic registers that take shape within experimental literary texts, and the potentialities of these linguistic registers to resist the nationalist appropriation of Hindi.

Against the background of immense socio-political upheaval in the wake of independence and the Partition, Hindi literature written in the mid-twentieth century grappled with two main problems: Hindi's supposed supremacy over other languages and its centrality to the nation on the one hand, and the generation of a form that was commensurate to the instability of a new nation on the other. However, nationalist and official discourses were marked by the espousal of a belief in a fully formed nation and its heteronormative, patriarchal, and patriotic citizen-subjects, and discourses

around the Hindi language postulated the shaping of this citizen-subject through Hindi, which would in turn evolve into a modern language through its ability to articulate the modern nation. This dissertation studies Krishna Sobti (1925-2019), Nirmal Verma (1929-2005), and Krishna Baldev Vaid's (1927-2020) use of modernism to register instabilities, incoherencies, and inconsistencies in the nation form at the level of literary and narrative form. In varying degrees of antagonism to the nationalist discourse around Hindi, the texts studied here use formal experimentation to destabilize the Hindi language and invest it with energies that do not clearly align with hegemonic nationalism and nationhood. Examining the opening of subjectivities, narrative trajectories, and relationalities to the non-normative, this dissertation argues that modernism facilitated a shifting of the significations of Hindi beyond and beneath the scale of the nation. Despite their temporal proximity to independence and language protests and the enmeshment of their medium with the nation, the works studied here rarely address nationalism, nationhood, or nation-building directly. Instead, their use of modernist form and style destabilizes and reconfigures the interconnections between historicized categories of nation, kinship, gender, language, and literary form. I argue that in the context of attempts to nationalize Hindi in the pre- and post-independence periods in India, the use of modernist form cathects Hindi with possibilities, drives, and vocabularies that it is devoid of in its nationalized form. By considering texts in which the hegemonic framework of nationhood is referenced subterraneously through acts of desiring, traveling, translating, reading, and doubting, it becomes possible to locate the nation

as well as its discontents not only in narrative form, but also in the very fibers of the language that is used to write the narrative.

Hindi as the Nationalized[1] Language

While the slogan "Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan" has become ubiquitous in contemporary politics, its origins lie in the early nineteenth century, in a period when Hindi had not yet become a standardized language, yet was beginning to be invested with a sense of cultural coherence and communal pride. After India's independence from British colonialism in 1947 and the Partition of India and Pakistan on communal grounds, while most vernacular language literatures grappled with the effects of the Partition, nation-building, and questions of aesthetic form, Hindi came to stand at the center of another debate that was crucial to the identity of the newly formed nation. The national language debates, which began immediately after independence, led in 1949 to Hindi being appointed as one of the two official languages of India alongside English, even in the face of intense resistance from other languages.[2]

19th and 20th century efforts to invest the language and literature of Hindi with a Hindu idea of the nation consisted of distinguishing Hindi from Urdu as well as from Hindi's own 'dialects,' and standardizing it by "purging . . . colloquialisms,

[1] My use of the word "nationalized" here references Vasudha Dalmia's seminal contribution to Hindi studies in *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*. While Dalmia does not elaborate on her use of the word "nationalized," I use it here to address the location of Hindi as a proto-national language that is simultaneously enshrined as an official language and mistaken as the national language, yet whose becoming-national, through its appropriation by the nation, is perpetually in anticipation.
[2] See Sadana, *English Heart, Hindi Heartland*, and Rai, *Hindi Nationalism*

regional usages and 'Urdu' words," limiting loanwords to Sanskrit, and streamlining as well as rigidifying the syntax (Orsini 5).[3] The increasing appearance of Hindi in print and the authority of editors such as Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi played a significant role in enforcing these changes in syntax and vocabulary. The journal *Saraswati*, which was edited by Dwivedi, and which committed itself to reforming the nation while reforming Hindi, is an important example of publications that were shaping Hindi into a language fit for a Hindu-dominant India. Sujata Mody, in her book *The Making of Modern Hindi*, credits Dwivedi with "the standardization of language and script; and the production of a literary repertoire with a past, present, and future corresponding to an overarching national narrative that till then had not existed" (4). This standardized Hindi was later established in and through concrete spaces such as schools, universities, literary associations, and journals, and discursive and institutional spaces such as the press, education, and literary genres. At the same time, Dwivedi's standardization also deprived Hindi of the grace and flexibility of, for example, Braj, which came to be known as a "dialect" of Hindi, and which had been honed into a poetic language over many generations.[4]

In *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940: Language and Literature in the Age of Nationalism* Francesca Orsini traces the development of standard Hindi as an elastic and flexible idiom through intense discussion and debate, establishment in institutions, and growth in literary journals—that is, through the formation of a public sphere. Orsini shows how, in the pre-independence period, this idiom is eventually

[3] See Dalmia, *The Nationalization of Hindu Traditions*
[4] See Agyeya, *Rachnavali*, Vol. 7

framed as a standard language, and, based on claims to 'national' representativity, entwines itself with burgeoning nationhood. In Orsini's study, we see the processes through which Hindi develops into a language whose modernity is deeply embedded in both a capability and a willingness to articulate hegemonic nationhood, and through which it is "singled out as the bearer of the peculiar values of Indian tradition and the means to reach out to and unite the whole (Hindu) [*sic*] population" (Orsini 5). The standardization of Hindi and its incumbent diversification from Urdu ultimately led to Hindi becoming what Orsini calls a "culturally loaded language" (20). The early 20th century thus witnessed the evolution of a Hindi that was on the one hand politically flexible and enriched with resources to articulate modern and nationalist notions of society and subjecthood, and on the other rigidly segregated from registers that were reduced to 'dialects.' Such a cultural circumscription of Hindi was necessarily accompanied by the sedimentation within it of what Orsini calls the "normative attitude" of the public sphere, which reinforced ideals of a homogenous cultural identity, the nature and purpose of literature (reform and nation-building), and femininity. What came into being was a "pure" and standardized Hindi that "mirrored, and brought into being every time it was used, an (ideal) [*sic*] community of serious, equal, educated, and public-minded Indian citizens, without any visible markers . . . differences of caste and status were therefore pushed outside (written) [*sic*] language" (Orsini 12).

Embedded within this idea of the nation and its cultural identity, as articulated through a homogenized and standardized Hindi, was a set of patriarchal values that

prescribed normative and nationally-sanctioned forms of relationality. Writing of literature propagated by the reformist Hindu group of the Arya Samaj, which "made a significant contribution to the association of Hindi with Hindu," Charu Gupta remarks that this "strand of Hindi literature was strategically tied to the nation, and to the assertion of civilisation and pride" (40). The "quest for a new and 'proper' Hindi literature" was marked by "attacks on . . . eroticism and obscenity," a "fear of romance, (and) of sexual and bodily pleasure," and "a shift in emphasis from the erotic and sexually active nayika[5] . . . to the chaste and virtuous Hindu wife and mother" (Gupta 40). This shift was particularly visible in the figure of the woman, who "was gradually transformed from a figure of eroticism, sexuality, excess and playfulness to a classic, calm and perfect figure in most of 'high' literature" (Gupta 40-1). The early 20th century Hindi public sphere thus saw the solidification not only of the relationship between Hindi and Hinduism, but also of Hindi's reliance on the heteropatriarchal forms upon which nationhood would pivot.

The Coloniality of Hindi

In her discussion of the Hindi public sphere, Orsini references the concept of the 'literary *saṃskāra*,' which appears frequently in Hindi literary criticism. Orsini describes the term as gesturing towards "a taste which settles upon other tastes according to one's individual experience in life" as well as "the creative process of

[5] The Oxford Hindi-English dictionary defines "nayika" as "leading female character, heroine . . .; *rhet*. mistress, beloved."

acquiring and combining tastes" (44). Orsini's description of the *saṃskāra*—a term that she finds difficult to pin down to definitions, and to describe which she considers what it "suggests" or "emphasizes"—attempts to speak of a process by which writers synthesize the material that they come across throughout their lives. Although Orsini writes of a "literary" saṃskāra, in the list of discourses that influence a writer's saṃskāra she refers not only to other texts but to an entire world of language use: *saṃskāra* "suggests" a system of thought that may have been "inherited from one's family, local traditions and tastes, or . . . acquired through education and contact with the outer world and with literary trends" (44). In this discussion of the literary saṃskāra as literary patterns of thought that the writer acquires from the world around them, including family, local traditions (both textual and oral), and educational systems, Orsini is inevitably writing at the same time about a *language saṃskāra* as well.[6] I use the phrase "language *saṃskāra*" to foreground the marking of language by the contexts, spaces, and communities it is used in, and the purposes to which it is put. At its simplest, a language *saṃskāra* is an idiom that gives voice to the values of its contexts and spaces.

Orsini's discussion of *saṃskāra* as well as my extrapolation of her discussion into a notion of language *saṃskāra* both challenge the notion of a standardized literary and/or linguistic idiom. Where Orsini characterizes a writer's literary *saṃskāra* as composed of the overlapping and interweaving idioms, or styles of use, that the writer encounters in the world around them, I contend that it is not only the

[6] The Oxford Hindi-English dictionary defines "saṃskāra" as "1. perfecting, finishing, refining, adorning. 2. an inborn power or faculty; instinct. 3. influence, impress (of nurture). 4. a concept, idea."

writer's *literary* language, but any language as it exists in the world is a heterogeneous composition of multiple idioms—a Bakhtinian polyphony that inheres within the voice. This notion of language as a heterogeneous composition may be considered through the concept of "languaging," which Rey Chow in her book *Not Like a Native Speaker* uses to describe the layered, archaeological, and material processes of the formation of a language:

> If language is no longer viewed as a linear, logical progression but rather as actual discourses that are dispersed and found in bits and pieces, language *use* would amount to a new type of act—an archiving in process, involving shifting series of transitions among different levels of deposits, remains, excavations, and adaptations. Above all, language use would enable us to come in touch with the temporally cumulative yet often vague and seldom entirely verifiable experience left behind by others. It is in such use, at once particular and anonymous, at once individual and impersonal, that language mutates and renovates itself in the process I have been alluding to as "languaging." (56-7)

If "languaging" is the process of archiving by which a language comes into being, standardization can be seen as an attempt to check such archiving or layering. Instead, it reaches into the past to create a specific, even linear heritage for a language, and to flatten vertically the "levels of deposits, remains, excavations, and adaptations." The nationalization of Hindi can thus be seen as embedded with the desire to create particular kinds of native speakers—Hindu, upper caste, male—who would then be seen as representative of a supposedly homogenous national culture.

Yet, following Chow, the process of standardization can also be seen as always incomplete, negated constantly through the irrepressible force of "languaging," that is, through language use. The modernist use of Hindi is an instance of such a process of languaging that negates the nationalist appropriation of Hindi. In

their own ways, each of the texts studied here offers a point of contrast to the use of the nationalized Hindi of Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi, which imagined the nation into being by imbuing it with upper-caste Hindu patriarchal values. If what Orsini calls the Hindi public sphere's 'normativity' gave birth to a normative *saṃskāra* through processes of standardization and purification, I study the *saṃskāra* that surfaced through the practice of modernist experimentation. This *saṃskāra* was shaped by influences as disparate as the codification of Hindi and its enshrinement in the nation form, 'regional' Hindi literatures, languages such as English, Panjabi, and Urdu, Euro-American modernism and postmodernism, the Partition, and feminism. While Sobti's, Verma's, and Vaid's Hindis continue to be preoccupied with a national imaginary, this imaginary deviates from the normative patriarchal Hindu imaginary that a codified Hindi is cathected with in a number of ways. In particular, their writings reject a Hindi that relies on civilizational cultural identity, homogeneity, and xenophobia to define national modernity, and instead generate a Hindi infused with feminism, transgression, cosmopolitanism, translation, doubt, and irony. Further, by looking at modernist experiments that alter the homogeneity of a language by using it to represent forms, subjectivities, intimacies, and narratives that transgress normative and nationalist ones, this dissertation also questions the idea that a standardized and codified language embedded within the frame of nationhood is representative of a native speaker. The writers studied here both address the potential for Hindi to be nationalized, and refuse to write the nation with it.

Agyeya, *Prayogvaad*, and Hindi Modernism

In an essay titled "Khadi Boli ki Kavita: Prishthabhumi" ("*Khadi Boli* [modern Hindi] Poetry: A Preface") Satchidanandan Vatsyayan Agyeya, often considered the progenitor of modernism in Hindi, credits Dwivedi with Hindi's "ground clearing," comparing his contributions to the laying of a building's foundation. At the same time, Agyeya also points out that in Dwivedi's hands, Hindi stood the risk of "losing all elasticity and flexibility," and becoming "wooden and lifeless" (p. 61, vol 7). While earlier, "Braj poets were only too eager to borrow from languages such as Urdu, Persian and Sanskrit and other regional languages such as Bengali and Marathi to enrich Hindi," the Dwivedi era focused on curbing these 'external' influences upon the language (Agyeya, p. 60, Vol 7).

Agyeya's efforts towards building a modernist register in Hindi began with his 1943 compilation of the volume of modernist poetry, *Taar Saptak* [*The Upper Octave*], which inaugurated what critics came to call the "*prayogvaadi*" or "experimentalist" movement in Hindi. For critics,[7] the term was a pejorative that was used to critique the poetry contained in *Taar Saptak* as overly existentialist and derivative of European modernism. They also rejected the modernist experiments of the *Taar Saptak* poets for their emphasis on form to the detriment of content, and for their lack of intelligibility for the common reader. Despite the harsh criticism it drew from Hindi critics and the stir it created in the Hindi literary sphere, which Agyeya is

[7] See Sharma, *Nai Kavita aur Astitvavaad* (*Existentialism in The New Poetry*).

in contention with in his prefaces to the *Taar Saptak* and its sequel anthologies, the experimentalist or *prayogvaadi* "movement" was a watershed moment in its demarcation of a modernist idiom of Hindi.

Agyeya's preface to the second volume of experimentalist poetry that he edited, which was called the *Doosra Saptak* [*The Second Octave*], is written as a manifesto for Hindi modernism wherein he argues that the introduction of literary-linguistic novelty is a prerequisite for any language to evolve with the times. Responding to critics who viewed *prayogvaad* as a coherent movement that aspired to western modernism and as a withdrawal from the political commitment that marked the Progressive Writers' Movement (PWA), Agyeya disavows any notion of a coherent *prayogvaadi* movement and instead frames literary modernism as inextricable from the coming of modernity. He argues that the fragmentation of language into multiple idioms is part of the same processes that have led to the fragmentation of knowledge into siloed fields:

> In ancient times, when the domain of knowledge was limited and more consolidated, when separate designations of poet, scientist, literary scholar, etc. were unnecessary and the reader or student was familiar if not adept with all branches of knowledge, the problem of common intelligibility was of a different kind. At that time language had only one idiom. Or it may be said that the educated classes had one idiom and the masses had another–Sanskrit and Prakrit. But . . . in the current world of specialization, despite there being one language, there are several idioms. (Agyeya, *DS* 9)

In response to this constantly changing and fragmenting linguistic world, the poet is tasked with renewing language by "transcending the inclination of all scientific knowledge towards specialization . . . to see and show that fragmented truth as whole" (Agyeya, *DS* 11).

It is significant that Agyeya's defense of formal experimentation in the preface is carried out through the use of examples drawn from linguistic experiments, such as in the notion of "generating astonishment," or bringing new meanings to words:

> Consider the question of language. How does meaning enter a word, and how and why does it change to become more or less relevant? An understanding of hermeneutics is unnecessary here. We can work with a very simple example: when we use the word "rosy," it brings a specific color to mind. Undoubtedly, this gestures towards the color of a rose; the image is located in the word. In the beginning, in order to arrive from the word "rosy" to the color, the mediation of the image would have been necessary; only through the medium of the image could the meaning be arrived at. While at that time such a usage would have been novel, it is not any longer. Now, we arrive directly from the word to the color, and the mediation of the flower is unnecessary. Moreover, our understanding is not obstructed by the fact that roses come in several colors–white, yellow, red, and even black. This process constantly takes place in language and is necessary for its progress. The novelty of words keeps dying out, and meanings gradually become familiar. In a manner of speaking, the language of poetry is constantly turning into the language of prose. Thus, the poet repeatedly faces the problem of generating astonishment. He constantly fills words with new concepts, and those concepts gradually infiltrate the mind of the common man over time, thus becoming useless to the poet in that form. (7)

For Agyeya, modernism is a step towards such a renewal of language, whereby new meanings emerge within familiar words; further, this renewal is the means by which language responds to historical change. Thus, rather than a withdrawal from political commitment, Agyeya's defense of modernism shifts the historical grounding of the literary text from the level of content to the level of the word, and emphasizes formal experiments that insert new meanings into words. The word, that is, language, here becomes the site for the link between the literary text and an external reality to be forged.

Writing that the poet "does not comprehend the suggestion that he should leave poetry altogether till the time that all knowledge becomes unified and accessible to everyone—when different idioms reunite under the cry of 'one language, one idiom,'" Agyeya frames his support for literary and linguistic experimentalism directly in opposition to the slogan "Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan" and the circumscription of Hindi within a cultural nationhood (Agyeya, *DS* 11). Agyeya's argument shows an awareness of the entanglement of critiques of Hindi modernism with conservative demands to nationalize Hindi. As such, his arguments in favour of modernism carry a sense of urgency as regards the relationship between language, literature, and history: it is only through formal and stylistic changes that language—and via language, literature—can fully represent the current moment. Agyeya's argument carries a slight slippage as he on the one hand deems the demand for simplification placed upon modernist writers as unfair and rejects the creation of a single register on the lines of "Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan," and on the other asks the poet to rise above the "fragmented truth" and "show . . . (it) as a whole" (Agyeya, *DS* 11, 9). There seems to be a qualitative difference here between a political/cultural homogenization or flattening of a language, and the capacity of modernist language to be synthetic at the level of form and aesthetics. Through the *Saptak* anthologies, his novels, his poetry, and his editorship of the journal *Pratik*, Agyeya played a crucial role in shifting the discourse around Hindi from a social realist one, which emphasized political intervention, to one which argued for the autonomy, though not irresponsibility, of the writer as a kind of artist. Further, it was through such

autonomy—practiced, for instance, in the registering of history in form—that the author was capable of representing as well as responding to historical changes.

While the work of several Progressive Writers such as Ismat Chughtai, Sa'adat Hassan Manto, and Ahmed Ali was definitively 'experimental' in nature, the Progressive Writers' Movement was renowned for its emphasis on the political responsibility of literature. Thus, the Hindi novelist Premchand's 1936 address to the Progressive Writers' Association, which served as a manifesto for the Movement, stated that "The only art that has value for us today is that which is dynamic and leads to action" (83). Agyeya's critiques of the politicization of literature and notions of its common intelligibility, then, are often directed towards such "Progressivist" notions of literature, which became the basis for critiques of experimentalism. It is in response to these critiques that Agyeya emphasizes historical specificity over common intelligibility, the impossibility of a single popular register in a world that is increasingly fragmenting into different registers, and the need for the poet to take note of the changing nature of language within this flux. Agyeya's claim that the poets included in the *Saptaks* did not belong to a school but came together as a matter of chance, as it were—his rejection, in other words, of any semblance of homogeneity in the work of the *Taar Saptak* poets—corresponds with the varying degrees of political engagement that the work of the poets exhibits. At the same time, as an expression of Agyeya's own position on literature, it also contains an insistence on the autonomy of art and a refusal to let his statements be read as manifestoes that he or other writers could be held accountable to. This emphasis on the autonomy of the writer defines

not only Agyeya's own literary oeuvre as seen in his novels and short stories, but also that of the writers included in this dissertation.

In her article "Gender and Geomodernism," Yogita Goyal addresses the apparent incommensurability of questions of "race and place" with the profusion of style detected in modernism, and points out that

> (i)n shifting away from omniscient narration and realist construction of familiar worlds, much modernist fiction not only raises questions about how we know what we know, but also shows that such knowledge is incomplete, distorted, and shifting. Although this type of experimentation was once seen as a withdrawal from history and politics, such a binary between aesthetics and ideology is now being dismantled. Repetition, return, or the recursivity of time signals not the disavowal of trauma, but its haunting presence and formal experimentation can be tied to a text's negotiation of history rather than its disavowal. (2)

It is such a "dismantling" of the "binary between aesthetics and ideology" that modernist Hindi literature too demands, especially when its refusal of politics is coupled with an equally vociferous rejection of art for art's sake. Hindi modernists' insistence upon the autonomy of art, I argue, is underpinned by what Goyal calls the text's "negotiation of history rather than its disavowal" as well as a sublimation of the historical into the intimate, domestic, psychological, and private, and its shifting from the level of content to the level of literary-linguistic style and form. It is, further, through this move that language is "renewed" per Agyeya's prescription in the preface to the second volume, as it proliferates through the injection of "incompleteness, distortion, and shifts" and its significations begin to exceed those of the hegemonic, standard register (Goyal 2). As such, Agyeya's resolute insistence

upon the need for experimentation in the face of charges of apoliticism and escapism highlights the need to read *prayogvaad* as a form of politics.[8]

The Hindi Intellectual

This dissertation argues that the formal shift in the literary "negotiation" of history that we view in Hindi modernism was a response to the newly formed nation's attempts at narrating, legitimising, and delegitimizing forms of individual as well as collective existence under the nation (Goyal 2). In her article "What was So New about the New Short Story," Preetha Mani postulates that the *prayogvaadi* New Short Story's "(replacement of) history with literary history allowed the nayi kahani (New Short Story) to articulate dissatisfaction, discontent, and estrangement—sensibilities which were incongruent with the postcolonial state's project to install 'unity in diversity'" (231). Mani's argument, which I contend with in Chapter 3, here allows us to see Hindi modernism's apparent turn away from the overtly political, and its valorization of formal and linguistic experimentation as a cognizance of the limits of conventional definitions of politics. The formal choices made by these writers and their apparent withdrawal from politics arose out of a sense of disillusionment with

[8] Although Agyeya's comments in his prefaces pertain specifically to poetic language, the term *prayogvaad* spoke to several literary forms. While the *prayogvaadi* poems of Agyeya's anthologies gave birth to the 'Nayi Kavita' or New Poetry movement, the realm of the short story saw the emergence of the 'Nayi Kahani' or the New Short Story. The tendency to innovate, further, was equally present in theatre, and in genres such as the diary and travel-writing, some of which wove through the above-mentioned forms, as well as in the novel, which is under discussion in this dissertation.

and failure of the political, especially the collective movements that had led to independence. As Nirmal Verma writes in the preface to *Shabd aur Smriti*,

> after independence, the writers of my generation had built up many hopes. Today's generation will neither be able to understand the fire of those hopes, nor the frost that sets when a fire dies out. From time to time, we had invested ourselves in different movements and principles, and they had given warmth to our cold and shivering hands. Today, those coals have faded, and only ashes remain, which blow hither and thither in the wind.

The reformulation of the political by cathecting it into language and form can thus be seen as an effort towards developing alternative literary resources to respond to the demands of history.

In addition to disillusionment with the postcolonial nation, modernism's repudiation of politics—particularly its incorporation into nationhood—was also engendered by the postcolonial state's failure to support experimental literary and artistic styles whose representations of postcolonial reality evaded nationalism. In her analysis of Mohan Rakesh's novel *Andhere Band Kamre* (*Dark Closed Rooms*, 1961), Vasudha Dalmia sees the lack of state patronage for innovative forms of cultural production as entwined with the absence of as well as the need for an idiom that could describe the predicament of the Hindi intellectual. Dalmia argues that Rakesh's novel is in part concerned with the intellectual's experience of urban modernity and its representation—or the lack thereof—in literary and cultural products. While the intellectuals who gather in the coffee house in Rakesh's novel talk at length about how the arts are doing, the state patronage they are or are not receiving, and whether it will nurture their artistic practices, they are all "at odds with the general direction of state support," which is concerned mostly with the rural as the foundation of

'national' culture (Dalmia *Fiction* 387). Ventriloquizing the characters who haunt the coffee house in the novel, Dalmia writes, "Modern literature in the Indian languages, of which Hindi is just one, though placed in a position of some privilege, is left without a rudder. Bharat Mata (Mother India) looks only to the rural, to folk-art" (387). This preoccupation of the state with the 'rural' as the source of inspiration for cultural production is re-emphasized towards the end of the chapter, when Dalmia draws on Tapati-Guha Thakurta's discussion of the absence of 'the modern'/modernism in the art exhibition of 1948:

> Caught in the web of the burgeoning cultural scene in Delhi with its newly evolving national culture, its paucity of patronage for the modern, its reliance either on government funds which stressed the importance of classical and folk culture or on foreign cultural agencies—driven in their turn by the rigid ideologies fostered by the Cold War—the contemporary writer and artist was left without dependable orienting grids. On surer ground was all that betokened the past. (402)

Both Dalmia and Guha-Thakurta's statements draw attention to the state's preoccupation with representing the nation by means of an imagined past, and its disavowal of the fractured and alienated experience of the postcolonial, post-Partition, Cold War-era city. Here, opposition to modernism comes not only from realism but also from the folk, a form that merged with realism in the "regional" (*aanchalik*) novels of writers such as Rahi Masoom Raza and Phanishwarnath Renu (who were important influences upon Krishna Sobti). Drawing on Dalmia, then, this dissertation sees modernist style not as an imitation of the west, but rather as the innovation of an idiom that allowed the intellectual to explore the singular experiences of urbanization, alienation, and industrialization that characterized the postcolonial existence. As such,

it echoes Agyeya's framing of modernism as a use of language that is adequate to its historical moment.

Thinking Modernism Postcolonially

In using the term "modernism"—conventionally read as specific to innovations that arose in early 20th century Euro-American literature—to describe postcolonial Hindi literature, I draw on scholarship in the field of New Modernist Studies that approaches literary modernism in geographically and temporally expansive terms. In her book *Planetary Modernisms*, Susan Stanford Friedman contests the idea of "(m)odernism as a distinctive 'period' and aesthetic style following romanticism, realism, and naturalism" that is necessarily grounded in European history (5). Challenging the institutional impulse to periodize, Friedman's book "argues that such limitations in the field shut the door on effective globalisation of modernist studies by institutionally reifying the West as the centre, the Rest as periphery, a structure of knowledge that is misleading and potentially pernicious in its long-term effects" (5). Similarly, in their introduction to *Bad Modernisms*, Rebecca Walkowitz and Douglas Mao claim that

> scholars working today under the umbrella of transnational modernism . . . veer away from the old international modernism in several notable ways. For one thing, their work often aims to make modernism less Eurocentric by including or focusing on literary production outside Western Europe and the United States. For another, it engages with postcolonial theory and concerns itself with the interrelation of cultural, political, and economic transactions. (740)

Postcolonial studies of modernism, further, point out the ways in which Euro-American modernism itself was not an isolated phenomenon but rather embedded in European colonization and imperialism. Thus, Dalmia problematizes the notion of a derivative postcolonial Indian modernism by noting that "(i)ssues of cultural diffusion . . . can be informed by innate hierarchies. After all, direct influences were drawn from African and Oceanic art by Picasso, Persian art by Matisse, and Polynesian art by Gaugin" (*Fiction* 72). Proposing that the relationship between western and non-western modernisms be looked at through a lens of borrowing rather than influence, she writes,

> It is by now well established that art does not exist in isolation but always arises out of influences. Cultural diffusion is a universal phenomenon that cannot be privileged in any way as the exclusive domain of any country. It is far more fruitful to examine in what sense art is borrowed, and how it is invested with meaning. (Dalmia, *Fiction* 72)

Dalmia's statement on "cultural diffusion" aligns with multiple studies of the realist novel. Meenakshi Mukherjee's *Realism and Reality*, for instance, closely studies and elaborates on how the growth of the novel form in India drew not only on European models but also on indigenous ones. Franco Moretti, in his paper "Conjectures on World Literature," draws partly on Mukherjee to make his claim that "the modern novel first arises not as an autonomous development but as a compromise between a western formal influence (usually French or English) and local materials" (58). In Laetitia Zecchini and Anjali Nerlekar's studies of the Marathi modernist poet Arun Kolatkar, similarly, it becomes necessary to acknowledge the ways in which Kolatkar's writing is enmeshed with "the historical experiences of colonialism and

decolonization" as well as with "so-called Euro-American modernism" (17). Such commentaries on both modernism and realism upend Eurocentric perceptions of literary and cultural movements that are afflicted with a unidirectional notion of influence.

The indigenization of supposedly European forms may be thought of in terms of Dipesh Chakrabarty's theorization of modernity, which he approaches not only as a "sociological problem of historical transition," but also as a "problem of translation" (17). For Chakrabarty, "translation" is a relationship which, rather than thinking in terms of "equivalents that successfully mediate between differences," retains the "translucence" of "difference" (17). Such a "translucence" is perceptible, for instance, in Agyeya's essay "Roodhi aur Maulikta" ("Tradition and Originality"), which Harish Trivedi reads as Agyeya's selective engagement with and translation of T. S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Trivedi claims that for Agyeya, "Eliot's classic . . . is not a finished, received document to which Agyeya must show translatorial allegiance, but more like an agenda for discussion, a lump of clay out of which Agyeya will fashion something to his own critical liking" (150). This willingness to appropriate western modernism and engage with its terms through the lens of one's own traditions is also visible in Agyeya's preface to *Doosra Saptak*, where he obliquely references western modernism, yet grounds *prayogvaad* in a Sanskritic ethos, using concepts of aesthetic experience and the poet's "duty" that are drawn from Indian classical treatises such as the *Natyashastra*. By doing so, Agyeya grounds his arguments for the poet's "renewal" of language under modernism within

a turn towards tradition, and the disavowal of any novelty in the innovation of language: modernism both is and is not a break from the past. In the same preface, Agyeya also weaves together an eclectic selection of texts without directly referencing them. Sanskritic sources such as Bhattanayaka and Kalidasa appear alongside the ideas of Viktor Shklovsky, Eliot, and Bakhtin. For instance, while Agyeya cites Kalidasa's attribution of constant renewal of language to poetry, he also draws on (as well as distorts) Eliot's notion of tradition as an inheritance, arguing that the successful poet spiritually engages with tradition only when she/he/they "sounds it out, breaks and distorts it, and internalises it" (*Doosra Saptak*). The overall effect of such a synthesis is to posit linguistic innovation as inspired by the West, yet inherent to the Hindi canon.

This dissertation takes seriously Dalmia's recommendation to "examine in what sense art is borrowed, and how it is invested with meaning" rather than infusing its study of modernism with the anxiety of western influence. As in Walkowitz and Mao's discussion of recent studies of transnational modernisms, I read Hindi modernism in relation to postcolonial Indian history to understand how modernism allows the writers under consideration to illuminate and complicate narratives of nation-making, gender, kinship, and language politics in the South Asian context. An examination of this postcolonial iteration of modernism destabilizes the neat periodization that Susan Stanford Friedman references, of romanticism, realism, naturalism, modernism, and one may add, postmodernism. Sobti's *Mitro Marjani*, for instance, carries clear resonances of regional realism, while Vaid's *Bimal urf Jaayein*

to Jaayein Kahan lends itself as much to a postmodernist reading as to a modernist one, particularly due to its attention to the text-as-commodity. However, more significant than the contribution of this archive of literature to the study of modernism is the fact that their adoption or appropriation of modernist strategies into Hindi facilitates their subversion of nationalism from within. The destabilization of a nationalized language and the incumbent attempt at reconfiguring an equally nationalized readership and public sphere can thus be seen as the specific interventions that this archive makes to the discourse of transnational modernism.

Thinking Modernism through Realism

While western modernism was indigenized and/or appropriated by mid-twentieth century Hindi writers, it is also important to note that European and postcolonial modernisms took shape against the background of radically different historical contexts. Where the backdrop for European modernism was constituted by imperialism and the Second World War, postcolonial modernism took shape against the background of multiple anticolonial movements, the Cold War, the Bandung Conference, and the possible formation of a second world bloc. Jed Esty and Colleen Lye's placement of the modernism/realism binary within the frame of the Cold War argues that "political nonalignment for the Third World writer in fact entailed an agnostic stance, with both modernist and realist forms usable for anticolonial expression" (269). Like Esty and Lye, Vasudha Dalmia also sees the split between

realism and modernism as a consequence of the Cold War and notes that "(i)n the Cold War clash of cultures, abstract expressionism, as it was called, was seen as representing the Free World, with New York and the United States in the lead. Figural art, social realism, was the domain of the Soviet Union" (*Fiction* 394).

If modernism in the postcolonial context involved a process of selective engagement and appropriation, recent theorizations also see it as altering the defining boundaries of the category of modernism, including its distinction from realism. Esty and Lye destabilize the mutually exclusive definitions of realism and modernism that emerge from studies of Euro-American archives and replace them with 'realisms' that are more porous in the forms in which they engage with a 'totality.' Reading Lukacs' emphasis on totality in realism as centered on an "aspiration to totality, with 'totality' defined not as something out there but as the demand to consider interrelations and interactions between disparate phenomena," they point out that realism requires "a depiction of historical forces in motion or the dynamics of society" (277). "On the account," they continue, "reality is by definition not what it seems, or else it could be comprehended by mere description; a realistic mode of representation is meant not to reproduce reality but to interrupt the quasi-natural perception of reality as a mere given" (277). This redefinition of the realist text's relationship to reality becomes the basis for Esty and Lye's positioning of the "peripheral modernisms" of the Third World as realism (281). Peripheral realisms, in their account, "invite their publics to grasp the world-system, via its local appearances or epiphenomenal effects, and not to imagine it as a foreclosed or fully narrativized entity" (285). This blurring of

distinctions between realism and modernism arises in both Dalmia and Preetha Mani's commentaries on Hindi modernism. Dalmia's study of *Andhere Band Kamre* (*Dark Closed Rooms*), which begins with a description of the novel as "an extreme form of realism" (366), ends by calling it a "very modernist narrative" (403). Mani's article "What Was So New About the New Short Story?" argues that the Hindi New Short Story's "modernist realism" is situated upon "a discursive continuum concerned with the nature and representability of reality and individuals' relationship with it" (230). For Mani, this form arises specifically through an engagement with and questioning of past forms of more "realist" representation, both of which lead to a sublimation of history into literary history.

The texts studied here offer a similar complication of the modernism/realism binary. While their formal experiments often conceal these texts' relationship to an 'external reality,' these experiments can be thought of "not as a liquidation but as an attempted sublation of realism into more spatially and cognitively expansive forms," so that the external reality—here, the newly formed nation with its incoherencies and inconsistencies—may seem illegible when approached through the generic expectations of the realist novel (Cleary 261). To return to the Lukascian notion of totality, albeit by way of a critique of it, we may look at Brecht's "Against Georg Lukacs," where the playwright redefines realism against Lukacs' formulation by challenging the latter's insistence upon the realism of Balzac and Tolstoy as the most suitable models for a historical literature:

> We must not derive realism as such from particular existing works, but we shall use every means, old and new, tried and untried, derived from art and

> derived from other sources, to render reality to men in a form they can master. We shall take care not to describe one particular, historical form of a novel of a particular epoch as realistic—say that of Balzac or Tolstoy—and thereby erect merely formal, literary criteria for realism. We shall not speak of a realistic manner of writing only when, for example, we can smell, taste, and feel everything, when there is 'atmosphere' and when plots are so contrived that they lead to psychological analysis of character. Our concept of realism must be wide and political, sovereign over all conventions. (82)

As opposed to Lukacs, for whom realism needed to be faithful to external reality, Brecht writes of realism as an ideal that engages actively with contemporary reality, stating that "(r)ealism is not a mere question of form. Were we to copy the style of these realists, we would no longer be realists" (82). Agyeya's argument about the need for a suitable idiom for the present, as well as his refusal to develop a fixed poetics of *prayogvaad* is pertinent here, as it rejects the fixity of realism and modernism as well as their binarization, and instead centers the historicity of a literary idiom. In some ways, Agyeya's postulation about the need to fashion a contemporary literary idiom echoes—and perhaps unfaithfully translates—Brecht's statement that "time flows on, and if it did not, it would be a bad prospect for those who do not sit at golden tables. Methods become exhausted; stimuli no longer work. New problems appear and demand new methods. Reality changes; in order to represent it, modes of representation must also change" (82). While Brecht does not directly address the question of language, the theatrical technique of the alienation effect that he developed in his own playwriting was to him truly realist because it willingly allowed itself to be altered by the needs of society and of the class struggle.

A Modernist Hindi

Notwithstanding the destabilization of the realism/modernism binary, the modernist texts examined in this dissertation contain formal and linguistic experiments that set them apart from a realism that was established in prior decades in Indian literature. In *Realism and Reality*, drawing on Benedict Anderson's model of the emergence of the novel as a counterpart to the 'imagined community' of the nation, Meenakshi Mukherjee writes about the birth of the novel in India as signaling the birth of the individual as bourgeois national subject. In India as in Europe, the realist novel maintained unities of space, time, and subjectivity, and contributed not only towards the representation but also the imagining of nationhood, thus writing the nation into being. As Anderson demonstrates in *Imagined Communities*, the representation of a common, identifiable world created through a shared language, in which readers could locate themselves, was facilitated by the growth of print culture and was essential to the envisioning of nationhood and citizenship.

In the case of Hindi, it was particularly the realism embodied in the novels of Premchand, who is often considered the father of modern Hindi literature, that did this work of 'writing the nation' by representing it as a diverse landscape shaped by variations of caste, class, and gender. In Premchand, national modernity often took the form of political consciousness and a spiritual change of heart that allowed the individual to overcome her/his/their individual status. Thus, Premchand's final, and arguably most significant novel, *Godaan* (*Gift of a Cow*, 1936), follows the life of a

poverty-ridden peasant and his wife, while also depicting a range of characters from sections of society as disparate as the brahmins, the moneylenders, the zamindar (landlord), the bourgeois industrialist and intellectual, and the urban working class. Despite being marked by a Bakhtinian polyphony, Premchand's novels are dominated by an omniscient narratorial voice that determines the reader's reactions to the narrative.

While Premchand's *Khari Boli* Hindi, which encompassed regional dialects and was often synonymous with Urdu, evokes the nation through an expansive heterogeneity of classes, castes, and professions and their corresponding registers, the Hindi of Agyeya's first novel *Shekhar*, which draws on Sanskritic registers in its poeticism, depicts the individual coming-of-age as a parallel to the life of the nation. Overlapping with Premchand's later writing, Agyeya's novelistic oeuvre is often seen as an alternative tradition to Premchand's social realism. Agyeya's two-volume bildungsroman, *Shekhar: A Life* (1941, 1944), reflected the growth and coming to political awareness of the nation in the figure of the eponymous protagonist Shekhar. Addressing Shekhar's exploration of his emotions through an engagement with literature, Dalmia describes the Hindi novel as "the site to which people resorted for information regarding matters of emotional life, and when needing help in, as much as naming, emotions" (4). Dalmia cites *Shekhar* as demonstrating this reliance of the individual's spiritual formation upon the novel in the moment when a young Shekhar turns to the novel to comprehend what he feels for his friend Sharada: "It is with literary help from the realm of novels that (Shekhar) tentatively recognizes what he

feels for Sharada . . . as 'love'" (5). Agyeya's novel depicts Shekhar's maturation, closely following him from his childhood to his radicalization as a young man. Marked by a surrealist ethos and an emphasis upon the protagonist's subjectivity, the narrative is nonetheless linear and informed by a bildungsroman structure. It begins with the surfacing of both spiritual and romantic emotions and a sense of rebellion towards figures of authority in Shekhar. As the novel progresses through two volumes, these emotions are ultimately subsumed into an anti-colonial nationalism, so that the novel and the titular character come to be identified with the nation.

As opposed to both Premchand and Agyeya's representations of the nation through Bakhtinian polyphony and a burgeoning political consciousness respectively, the texts studied here foreground alienation and a growing sense of an individual consciousness that is detached from social and political belonging. Correspondingly, the registers of Hindi employed by these texts, rather than forming a coherent image of society by way of either linguistic diversity or Sanskritic 'purity,' defamiliarize the language through their use of non-linear syntaxes marked by jokes and puns, stream-of-consciousness narration, translation, doubt and hesitancy, obscenity, and more. In doing so, I argue, they reshape Hindi into an alien, unfamiliar idiom that does not easily align with the nation and nationalism, in part due to the absence of what Agyeya's critics call "common intelligibility" or *sadharanikaran* (Agyeya, *DS* 9). If, for Anderson, the novel was not only an object that circulated in the public sphere, but also one that shaped it by providing it with a common idiom, the modernist grammars shaped by the writers studied here fragment the public sphere by

demanding new forms of reading, inhibiting empathetic identification with their subjects, and injecting disorder, doubt, incoherencies, and other languages into what was meant to be a shared language.

While the writers studied in this dissertation did not outrightly reject the nationalization of Hindi, their approach to the notion of the 'national language' differed from the standardizing impulses of the discourse around Hindi leading up to independence, which required its diversification from Urdu and from Hindi's 'dialects.' For these writers, Hindi's claim to representativity was rooted in its ability to expand through experimentation and borrowing from other linguistic cultures. Thus, in the hands of Krishna Sobti, Hindi is both stretched to its limits under a practiced minimalism and infused with Urdu and Panjabi in a maximalist style; for Verma, Hindi is infused with silences and inarticulacies; and in Vaid's writing, Hindi becomes a means of deconstructing itself through an unrelenting interrogation of textuality. Further, these writers' claims to Hindi in spite of their bilingualism or multilingualism means that they establish a personal and spiritual relationship to the language both as intellectuals and as citizens. This entwined register of the national and the personal comes through in their use of modernism, which repudiates any notion of a standard, common idiom or point of view. Linguistic experimentation then also becomes a way for the writers to construct their personal relationship with the language, which simultaneously mediates their relationship to the nation, and circumvents the nation in the favor of other, non-national forms of being. Considered from this biographical perspective, modernism in the hands of postcolonial Hindi

writers becomes more than the antithesis of realism as it offers a means to reconfigure a nationalized language in terms that are private/individual/subjective, and that are capable of representing non-normative modes of identifying with the nation.

Although the term "modernism"—"*adhuniktavaad*"—rarely makes an appearance in the discourse around postcolonial Hindi writing (except as a pejorative denoting the imitative nature of any form of literary experimentation), I use it to characterize a set of literary tendencies that facilitate the destabilization of standardized Hindi and its nationalist associations. The texts studied in this dissertation operate at two interconnected levels of disruption: of the nation form, and of the linguistic hegemony that it imposes. While a disruption of language was encountered in realist novels such as the work of Premchand, Phanishwarnath Renu, and even Krishna Sobti, through their incorporation of *Khari Boli* (the ubiquitous Urdu-inflected colloquial Hindi spoken in much of northern India) and of other dialects and colloquialisms, their realist expansiveness, diversity, and linearity was placed in the service of imagining the nation into being. The modernism of the texts studied here, however, disrupts the integrity of Hindi as a national language by embedding it within non-linear and open-ended narratives that destabilize the narrative of nation-making as it was heretofore contained in the realist novel.

Why Hindi, and Why Modernism?

Arguing for the study of postcolonial modernist writing, Laetitia Zecchini points out that "literatures that invent forms, lineages, idioms and modernities which do not lend themselves easily to fashionable postmodernist and postcolonial catchwords (hybridity, alienation, diaspora, mimicry, magical realism, chutneyfied English, etc.) are excluded from the canon or ignored altogether" (2). As opposed to this, she argues, Marathi modernist poet Arun Kolatkar's work—as well, we may say, the modernism encountered in the work of Sobti, Verma, and Vaid— "constantly confuses what has come to be expected of 'postcolonial' literature" (2). Zecchini's argument draws attention to the large volumes of Indian writing in indigenous languages that do not make it into discussions of postcolonial literature, undergirded as they are with the implicit assumption that postcolonial literature is written only in English, and always involves writing back to the empire—an assumption that continues to place a metropolitan audience at the center of literary discussions. In his essay "The Language of African Literature," Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o offers a detailed critique of the neglect that indigenous languages are subjected to and highlights the relationship between the uses a language is put to, and what it comes to represent:

> distortions, dictatorial directives, decrees, museum-type fossils paraded as African culture, feudalistic ideologies, superstitions, lies, all these backward elements and more are communicated to the African masses in their own languages without any challenges from those with alternative visions of tomorrow because they have deliberately cocooned themselves in English, French and Portuguese. It is ironic that the most reactionary African politician, the one who believes in selling Africa to Europe, is often a master of African languages; that the most zealous of European missionaries who believed in rescuing Africa from itself, even from the paganism of its languages, were nevertheless masters of African languages and often reduced them to writing. The European missionary believed too much in his mission of conquest not to communicate it in the languages most readily available to the

> people: the African writer believes too much in African literature to write it in those ethnic, divisive and underdeveloped languages of the peasantry! (125)

The commitment of the writers studied in this dissertation to a modernist exploration of Hindi, as well as the motivations of this dissertation itself, need to be understood in Ngũgĩ's terms of evolving a language to represent values that cannot be collapsed into patriotism and normative nationalism. Beginning with *prayogvaad*, and moving into the *nayi kahani*, *nayi kavita*, and the novels studied here, the experiments with Hindi that were undertaken in the post-independence period were significant to the development of Hindi into a modern literary idiom that could critique the nation not only through realism, but also by exploring at the level of form the ability of language to shape, misshape, and reshape the values upon which national stability was predicated. It was through such efforts at experimentalism that Hindi became a language that could represent postcolonial modernity as seen in alienation, urbanization, the breaking of community structures, changes in sexual morality, and more.

In the essay cited above, Ngũgĩ makes a passionate case for writing African literature in African languages rather than in colonial languages. Commenting upon being asked why he writes in Gikuyu and not in English or French, Ngũgĩ writes,

> It was almost as if, in choosing to write in Gikuyu, I was doing something abnormal. But Gikuyu is my mother-tongue! The very fact that the dictates of common sense in the literary practice of other cultures are being questioned in the case of an African writer is a measure of how far imperialism has distorted the view of African realities. It has turned the reality upside down: the abnormal is viewed as the normality and the normality is viewed as abnormal. (126)

Ngũgĩ's framing of the problem of the coloniality of metropolitan languages not only takes into consideration his own relationship to Gikuyu, but also the extractivism implicit in asking postcolonial writers to write in metropolitan languages, which he frames in terms of the "enrichment" of "other tongues" by postcolonial mother tongues:

> Why, we may ask, should an African writer, or any writer, become so obsessed in taking from his mother-tongue to enrich other tongues? Why should he see it as his particular mission? We never asked ourselves: how can we enrich our languages? How can we 'prey' on the rich humanistic and democratic heritages in the struggles of other peoples in other times and other places to enrich our own?

The organic continuity between the writerly self and language is also posited by Geetanjali Shree, with whom this dissertation began. Annie Montaut quotes Shree in her essay "Why Hindi?":

> English I got, from early childhood, through a schooling that reinforced an unequal relationship between the two languages, giving English the higher status. So much so that on learning to write, it was mostly assumed that it must be in English! And on learning it is in Hindi, there was and still is sometimes, amazement and responses of the following kind—wow, Hindi, how exotic, or Hindi, how stupid when you can do it in English, or Hindi, good good, be patriotic, or Hindi, how brave of you to be willing to be isolated and poor, etc. The point I am making is that it is not seen as a natural choice that I am writing in my own language! Normally if one is writing in a foreign tongue there would be this curiosity and surprise. This is the classic colonial condition!

For both Ngũgĩ' and Shree, the mother tongue is not only an "organic" medium for the writing of fiction, but also a position from which to challenge what Shree calls "the colonial condition." To both, the question of writing in metropolitan languages speaks to assumptions about the inherent superiority of those languages despite those assumptions at times being couched within an argument of reaching a wider audience.

Like many indigenous languages that colonialism attempted to eradicate, Hindi has always posed, and continues to pose, a challenge to the dominance of English in India. On the one hand, Hindi was one of the many indigenous languages that Thomas Babington Macaulay in his Minute of 1835 denigrated in comparison to the "intrinsic superiority of the Western literature" (par. 10). As Rashmi Sadana shows in her book *English Heart, Hindi Heartland*, this disparity continues in the postcolonial nation due to the global prestige of English, and its ability to grant access to educational and professional opportunities, and thus mobility. In India, Hindi continues to be associated with the provinces, and globally, it struggles to achieve an international readership, with less than a small fraction of its literature being translated or published outside of India. On the other hand, the process of establishing Hindi's hegemony over other indigenous languages, as discussed in the introduction, began well before independence, and continues in the present. Any study of Hindi literature must take this duality into account: a 'parochialism' that is attributed to Hindi based on structures of reception that remain rooted in the metropolis, and Hindi's dominance over other Indian languages in the national context. Hindi, thus, necessitates the consideration of the interconnected perspectives of both, the evolution of an indigenous language in the face of the imposition of and assumed 'superiority' of a colonial language, in this case English, and the coloniality of the 'national language,' which is assumed to be superior to and thus is imposed upon speakers of other languages.

However, in Ngũgĩ's notion of "preying" on "the rich and humanistic and democratic heritages" of the west, as well as in Rey Chow's discussions of postcolonial writing, the colonial encounter is seen as capable of effecting not only the loss of the indigenous language, but also an opening. In her engagement with the Ngũgĩ-Achebe debate, Chow argues for the need to think about colonial language imposition not only in terms of the language loss that it effects, which Ngũgĩ emphasizes, but also the opening up of the indigenous language seen, for instance, in the writing of Chinua Achebe as well as Indian English writers such as Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan, G.V. Desani, and Salman Rushdie. Chow turns to Walter Benjamin's discussions of the "aura" of the work of art, noting Benjamin's

> grasp that such a loss (of aura) is part of the making and remaking of a larger world history, in which those experiences that were once deeply rooted in specific times and places—and bound to specific communities—are increasingly 'emancipated' for circulation in a global medial environment. The decline of the aura, seen from this perspective, is the coming of a world in which the nature and quality of collective experience as such have fundamentally shifted. Instead of being tied exclusively to previously known communities, collective experience will henceforth assume the form of an open source characterized by unexpected comings and goings of strangers, juxtapositions of disparate things, and assemblages of distant or unrelated happenings. (Chow 51)

Chow then asks if "the spirit of Benjamin's complex readings of the aura be borrowed for an alternative approach to the postcolonial demise of indigenous languages" (51). Chow's argument remains deeply preoccupied with this "demise" and moves, I contend too swiftly, past Ngũgĩ's attention to the native speaker of indigenous African languages to focus instead on the complexity of the layered "languaging" of the non-native speaker's use of (metropolitan) language. However, the central questions

that Chow asks of postcolonial languaging—"How, in postcoloniality, to conceive of the transmission (or movement) of experience without forgoing the quality of depth and sedimentation?" and "How, in postcoloniality, to conceive of the depths of experience without construing them as irretrievable losses?"—must be considered in the context of indigenous languages as well, which are as resistant to "full possession" as colonial languages, particularly in cases where they have not been replaced entirely by colonial languages (57).

The use of modernism by the writers studied in this dissertation must be seen in terms of this 'opening' to the west, which dehomogenizes the indigenous language. Like Ngũgĩ and Shree, the writers studied in this dissertation frequently frame their choice of Hindi as the medium of their writing not as a choice but a necessity owing to the fact that it is their mother tongue. At the same time, Sobti, Verma, and Vaid evolve Hindi by drawing not only on indigenous languages and cultures that were contested by Hindi (Panjabi, Urdu), but also on European languages (Czech, English, French), including some with colonial legacies. If colonialism is a rupture from which the indigenous language cannot return, and after which it is irreversibly opened, we see this opening in the use of the modernisms studied here.

Form, Temporality, and Queer Subjectivity

As in Agyeya's defense of modernist poetry, this dissertation approaches the writing of modernist narratives as expanding the significations and possibilities of Hindi by

investing it with possibilities—Agyeya's "new concepts"—that are prohibited by existing, nationally prescribed social forms (Agyeya, *DS* 7). As such, the study of literary form presented here is embedded within an examination of social forms that were deeply inscribed within the postcolonial Hindi public sphere. In fact, this dissertation argues that the possibilities and potentialities of literary form were both shaped by, and aspiring to shape existing social forms. Thus, while I focus on the formal experimentation and use of modernist strategies seen in the texts studied here, my inquiry is rooted in affective examinations of gender, sexual desire, kinship, and linguistic identity as well as the nationally informed discourses around each.

Thinking through 'forms,' Caroline Levine reminds us, entails "an attention to both aesthetic and social forms [that] returns us to the very heterogeneity at the heart of form's conceptual history" (3). In her book *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*, Levine works to reunite the attention paid to literary and social form, and asserts that forms are not the singular domain of literature or culture, but rather "the stuff of politics" (3). At the same time, her account leaves the particular forms of gender, race, sexuality, and nation curiously separated, even fetishized. While this study takes into consideration Levine's suggestion of reading literary and social form together, it also pays close attention to the queerness and non-normativity of the spaces and manners in which forms of gender, sexuality, and nation overlap and interweave. Thus I use the term "queer forms" to refer to textual and social forms present in Hindi modernism of the nationalist and post-independence period, as well as the often disorderly influence of these forms upon one another. Through an

exploration of these forms, this study surfaces alternate possibilities to the heteronormative, bourgeois, forms of erotics, sexuality, and selfhood that espousal by the state presented as the horizon of possibility in post-independence India.

Drawing on Achille Mbembe, Srirupa Roy writes of the nation-state positing itself as the 'master code' which would inevitably become the framework of self, society, and polity in the early years of nation-making (16). While Roy's analysis is preoccupied with the public institutions and the mode of the spectacular through which the nation-state made itself visible as this 'master-code,' I propose to extend it to think about the more private realms of subjectivity, identity, sexuality, familial relations, and other affective forms such as friendship. Commenting on the state's appropriation of affective forms, Leela Gandhi's *Affective Communities* urges a "politics (that) is obliged creatively to renegotiate ideas of community, communication, conatus (18). "There is no dearth of models," she writes, "for the figuration of community. Yet when confined to the canonical generalization of established affective formations (of family, fraternity, genealogy, filiation), community lapses all too often into a dull, replicative economy, ill-equipped to the task of positing alternatives" (18-19). The use of the term "replicative" for the formations of "family, fraternity, genealogy, filiation" underscores the reproductive perpetuation of a heteronormative patriarchy without which the nation cannot function (19). For an alternative to these state-sanctioned affective ties, Gandhi turns to friendship, referring to it in Derridean terms as an "unscripted relation," as well as, citing Jean-Luc Nancy, as "compearance … the appearance of the *between* as such:

you *and* I" (19). Where such a "compearance" gestures towards the in-betweenness of the relationships explored in these texts, it also illustrates the enmeshing of textual and historical form, rhetorics of state and desire, and critical lenses of queerness and modernism that inform my reading.

The work of affect studies scholars such as Sara Ahmed, Leela Gandhi, and Lauren Berlant has been significant in tracing familial and affective relationalities and subjectivities as realms over which the state has historically practiced jurisdiction.[9] In her examination of the politics of friendship, Leela Gandhi, quoting Derrida, states that "the canonical forms of western politics achieve their taxonomy within a 'schematic of filiation'" (28). "In other words," she continues, "these forms—indeed, 'the political' itself as we know it—gain their inspiration from the domestic space of the family, thereby perpetuating in public life the perennial romance of self-repetition, similarity, resemblance, the order of the same" (28). In the case of postcolonial India, this jurisdiction was first established in the nationalist movement's appropriation of the private realm by framing it as extra-governmental, since the colonial government could only adjudicate the public realm. Contrary to Partha Chatterjee's claim in *The Nation and its Fragments* that the extra-governmental identity of the private realm went on to pose a crisis for the postcolonial state, its regulation by the nationalist movement can be seen as having provided a model that was replicated by the postcolonial state, as it continued to serve as the site for cultural identity. The intensely private form of the realist novel—which Chatterjee, drawing on Benedict

[9] See Ahmed, Living a Feminist Life; Berlant, Intimacy; Gandhi, Affective Communities.

Anderson, describes as "that celebrated artifice of the nationalist imagination in which the community is made to live and love in 'homogenous time'"—not only facilitated the imagining of such a community based in compulsory heteronormativity, but equally of the individual as an integral component of this community: in other words, the realist novel imagined the private life of the citizen, thus interpellating the members of the "imagined community" to imagine themselves as its (heteronormative) members (8).

Although Hindi modernism of the anticolonial and post-independence period is historically situated within this moment of the interpellation of the individual as citizen by the nation-state, the non-synchronous, fragmentary, multiplicitous, and non-linear trajectories that it offers counter the linearity of the nation-state and its narrative of progress. Its repudiation of "homogenous time," further, allows it to transgress forms of relationality that were embedded deeply within discourses not only of nation and nationalism but also of the nationalization of Hindi.

In her discussion of paranoid and reparative reading, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick talks about the "dogged, defensive narrative stiffness of a paranoid temporality . . . in which yesterday can't be allowed to have differed from today and tomorrow must be even more so" (26). This temporality, she claims, takes its shape from—and, I would argue, shapes—"a distinctly Oedipal regularity and repetitiveness: it happened to my father's father, it happened to my father, it is happening to me, it will happen to my son, and it will happen to my son's son" (26). Sedgwick's weaving of the progress of time and of the narrative with reproductive heteronormativity surfaces a feature that

was central to the notions of growth embedded in the novel form, and through which it was sutured to the nation. In comparison to this "paranoid temporality," Sedgwick posits the "queer possibility" of relationalities wherein "generational relations don't always proceed in this lockstep" (26). Such a spurning of the "lockstep" of reproductive heteronormativity and generational continuity is associated by Jed Esty with the "antidevelopmental temporality" of modernism. Studying Woolf, Conrad, and Joyce, Esty points out how the protagonists presented in the work of these authors were "(i)n open and sustained violation of the developmental paradigm that seemed to govern nineteenth-century historical and fictional forms" (3). Instead of the maturing individual coming to terms with society, modernist novels "tend to present youthful protagonists who die young, remain suspended in time, eschew vocational and sexual closure, refuse social adjustment, or establish themselves as evergreen souls" (3).

Such a rejection of the temporality of the bildungsroman can be seen in the texts studied in this dissertation, both due to the forms taken by their narratives, and the characters presented therein. At times, as with Sobti and Verma, this "antidevelopmental temporality" can be located in the authors' choice of the novella form, whose brevity cancels out any possibility of showing a characterological depth through complex experiences. Instead, Sobti's *Mitro Marjani* is arranged in the form of connected vignettes, where the reader moves from one scene to the other encountering different aspects of Mitro, and at times, of other characters. Although the narrative establishes a set of family dynamics between the characters, they are

also presented as largely static. Mitro's about-turn at the end of the narrative, where she chooses not to cheat on her husband, is caused by treating her mother as a cautionary tale; however, this change-of-heart is not built into the text for the reader. Rather, the novella contracts it into a single scene. At the same time, the complexity accorded Mitro as a character is in line with the roundedness that is typical of the protagonist of realist novels, even though the text does not give us too many psychological cues as to Mitro's interiority. The form of connected vignettes becomes even more pronounced in Sobti's other novella, *Surajmukhi Andhere ke*, where it is combined with psychological complexity. The mnemonic structure of *Surajmukhi*, and its use of stream-of-consciousness narration means that disparate moments in time do not come together to form a cumulative personhood. While *Bimal urf Jaayein to Jaayein Kahan* is long enough to be called a novel, the text deliberately undermines the novelistic impulse through the disorientation and lack of direction of both the protagonist and the narrative—an impulse present in the very title of the novel, which asks "Where do we go from here?" The narrative covers the span of a single day, during which Bimal moves on foot from one point to the other without finding the fulfillment of his desires, or evolving in any way. In *Ve Din* and *Cheedon par Chandni*, time pans into and out of different moments in the narrative. As in *Bimal*, here too, the span of time covered by the text is brief—no longer than three days—although the three days are set within a longer duration, to create a constantly telescoping temporal structure rather than a linear one.

As demonstrated by Sedgwick and Esty, however, these experiments with temporality are often inseparable from the texts' treatment of desire and sexuality. Particularly significant in this regard are the characters of Ratti, the protagonist of *Surajmukhi Andhere ke*, and the eponymous protagonist of *Bimal*, both of whom are marked by a queer desire that remains unfulfilled for a large part of the narrative. Even when this desire is fulfilled, the protagonists remain outside of reproductive heteronormativity—for Ratti, this repudiation is a choice, whereas Bimal's fulfillment is contingent upon the reader choosing it for him, in addition to being situated at the margins of society. Both Ratti and Bimal, as well as Mitro, are significant for the non-reproductive nature of their desire. *Ve Din*, in comparison, is significant for its repudiation of familial domesticity for a community based in transnational friendship.

Chapter summaries

My examination of each text included in this dissertation is fixated upon the absence of the nation in narratives that are written in a language deeply enmeshed with the nation, and within a few decades of nation formation. Instead of reading them as "national allegories," I read their intense preoccupations with the female body, silences, and the intersection of narrative form and sexual desire as transmuting the violence of nation making and the despair of postcolonial nationhood into experiments with form and style that lead to a change in the texture of the nationalized language. This change, further, constitutes a non-normative readership

for Hindi and as such codes a desire for the reorientation of the public sphere. While in texts such as Vaid's *Bimal urf Jaayein to Jaayein Kahan*, this desire to fashion a critical Hindi reader is explicit, in the writing of Sobti and Verma, the desire to address a Hindi readership that is feminist or cosmopolitan undergirds the experiments.

Chapter 1 begins with a discussion of the gendering of Hindi by the normative public sphere, and turns to a reading of language during the Partition. It then looks at Krishna Sobti's constitution of a feminist Hindi in her novellas *Mitro Marjani* and *Surajmukhi Andhere ke*. Though neither of these novellas is normally included in the canon of Partition literature, I read them in relation to the gendered violence as well as state appropriation of the female body that were seen during the Partition. I analyze Sobti's representation of femininity in relation to the female body's instrumentalization as a site for the inscription of national and communal identity during the Partition. Against this background, Sobti questions the domestic spaces through which such normative femininity was defined and within which it was circumscribed, and formulates open-ended intimacies that center feminine desire and autonomy. Sobti's experiments in the two novellas highlight the ways in which Hindi operated in the public sphere as a language that encoded the national identity, and by undermining those dominant codes of Hindi and inserting different forms of feminine autonomy within them, reimagines both the language and the nation signified by it. While her use of colloquialisms in *Mitro Marjani* reinvests Hindi with the idiomatic complexity that standardization deprives it of, her use of modernism in *Surajmukhi*

Andhere Ke surfaces forms of reading that draw upon Ratti's embodiment of a resistant femininity, and her assertion of a complete selfhood even in the face of patriarchal violence. Ultimately, Sobti's novellas rupture the continuities between the female body, an official language, and dominant nationhood that are situated in the normative forms of Hindi. Although the linguistic registers seen in the novellas studied here differ radically from each other, both at times disrupt and at others unquestioningly represent dominant forms of mapping borders upon femininity, land and language. Where *Mitro Marjani* questions Partition violence by freeing language from its 'official' shackles to represent an unrestrained as well as unreproductive feminine sexuality, *Surajmukhi* both absorbs that violence and resists it.

If Sobti sublimates the violent history of nation-making into an exploration of the female body, and thus infuses Hindi with idioms of feminine desire and autonomy, Verma sublimates that trauma into translation and empathy. Chapter 2 reads two of Verma's texts that were written while he travelled in Europe, *Ve Din* (*Those Days*, 1968) and *Cheedon par Chandni* (*Moonlight on Pine Trees*, 1964), alongside one collection of essays, *Shabd aur Smriti* (*The Word and the Image*). Verma's writing in what I call his 'creative oeuvre'—here *Ve Din* and *Cheedon par Chandni*—enacts a tension between literature and history, wherein literature comes to be shaped by the force of history while rarely addressing that shaping force directly. Within the text, the individual and individual memory hold precedence over a historical sense of being and over a collective memory, even as the former bears marks of the latter that are registered upon the narrative. This "pressure" of history is,

I argue, sublimated into a modernist aesthetic in the two texts; further, the experiments to which language is subjected ultimately create a new idiom that is cosmopolitan and translational.

In addition to modernism, the use of translation in Verma's writing enacts multiple forms of border-crossings, and contests the idea of language as an extension of nationality and culture. Here, not only is language no longer "naturally" embedded in one landscape, its placement in unfamiliar landscapes and in proximity with other languages and worldviews highlights what Rey Chow calls the artificial, "prosthetic" nature of language.[10] In *Ve Din* and *Cheedon par Chandni*, the combined use of translation and modernist style leads to a defamiliarization and therefore denaturalization of language, both in terms of its functioning, and in terms of its embedment in a national identity. At the same time, Verma's experiments and the non-national nature of his language both arise not only from a belief in the need to cosmopolitanize it but also from an individual relationship with Hindi as mother tongue as opposed to a national language. Modernism here becomes the site for the coming together of cosmopolitanism and alienated individualism. Finally, this chapter looks at Verma's usage of a standardized Hindi in his essays, the dominant idiom that he believes is necessary for writing about philosophy, history, and materialism. I

[10] In her book *Not Like a Native Speaker*, Chow points out that because of the colonized's "experience of (colonial) language as a foreign object . . . the colonized is arguably more closely in touch with the reality of language as a type of prostheticization, whereupon even what feels like an inalienable interiority, such as the way one speaks, is—dare I say it?—impermanent, detachable, and (ex)changeable" (15). I will engage at length with Chow in the essay and the coda appended to this dissertation.

argue that it is through the autonomy that he attributes only to his fiction that Verma is able to create another Hindi with alternative imaginaries embedded within it.

In Krishna Baldev Vaid's writing, particularly in his 1974 experimental novel *Bimal urf Jaayein to Jaayein Kahan*, history is sublimated into sexual desire and narrative form, the main preoccupations in the text. Chapter 3 reads *Bimal* as a Brechtian experiment that uses Hindi to describe the existing Hindi readership as passive and voyeuristic, and to constitute a new readership that is agential and involved in the writing of new literary as well as social forms. The text's registering of histories of the nation, masculinity, and literature at the level of form leads to the generation of a language that coagulates as it fails to move forward, even as it simultaneously injects non-reproductive pleasure into the text through the use of pornographic obscenity. Hindi thus becomes a language that is placed in the hands of a failed masculine author and that fails to write the nation as well as the masculine protagonist.

Taking an antagonistic stance towards the sentimental novel, *Bimal* tries to re-educate its readers in new forms of reading consistent with a historical moment that demands new forms of social relationality. In doing so, it reconfigures the novel form and disrupts the relationship between the novel and the nation. *Bimal*'s critique of the nation form takes place through a repudiation of the linear narrative that shows the protagonist's growth and progress, and ultimate subordination to the nation as citizen, as well as through a rejection of a readership that demands such growth. In *Bimal*, Vaid sees such a readership as a precursor or extension of the 'consumer' of

art, who ultimately turns the text into a commodity. Experimentation is thus centered as necessary for producing a critical and engaged reader, and ultimately for creating a broader Hindi readership that is critical of the calcified socio-sexual forms that are considered foundational to the nation's cultural identity. Bimal's irrepressible sexual desire drives the narrative forward even as it operates as the grounds for ridiculing the reader's expectations of narrative to move forward. At the same time, the centrality of desire codes a utopian impulse—the novel's insistence upon failure and impossibility and the stifling circles in which Bimal's thought moves without reprieve forces the reader outwards in a Brechtian manner to look for answers to the question of where the novel form, as well as the nation, are to "go."

Conclusion

This dissertation argues that while the Hindi modernist novella and novel were characterized by an evasive attitude towards nation building, their emergence in a historical moment that was informed by the Partition, developmentalism, and language debates meant that the history that these texts refrained from directly engaging came to reside in their experiments with form. Sobti's preoccupation with the female body and desire, Verma's with silences and that which is difficult to represent, and Vaid's despair reveal the difficulty of evading the nation in texts that are written in a language that was often central to imaginaries of the nation. This inhering of nation-as-history in form, I have centrally argued, is a consequence not

only of the historical moment in which these texts were written, but also of the language in which they were conceived, which remains deeply entangled with the nation. In the post-independence moment, language siphons the history of nation-making, and the immediate present of a narrative of national development that was "going nowhere," into narrative. The whisper of nationalism haunts the language, and while the texts look elsewhere, it nonetheless traces their words.

This research is undoubtedly inspired by writing that takes colonial languages as its focus, in particular Derrida's theorization of a self divided by a language that is and is not its own, Assia Djebar, for whom the language of colonialism is a "veil," and Rey Chow, whose discussions of the appropriation of the colonial language by the postcolonial subject address the extensive traditions of Indian English writing, including writers such as Raja Rao, R. K. Narayan, and Salman Rushdie, whose experiments with the colonial language were a starting point for wresting English from the violence of British imperialism and 'soiling' it with indigeneity. Thus, while this dissertation examines modernist form, it also attempts to think about the decolonization of language, which here takes the shape of the denationalization of language, assuming that colonial nationalisms, with their impetus for territorial expansion and the marking of insiders and outsiders, provided the model for decolonial nationalisms. At the same time, it is also an attempt to resituate those questions from conversations around colonialism to those around nationalism, or to more thoroughly weave together colonialism and nationalism within the context of language. In other words, while there is a willingness to study the forms that colonial

languages take when they are appropriated, this dissertation is preoccupied with the need to shape a discourse around the same questions with regard to indigenous languages. Although such languages may not carry the specific burden of colonial hegemony, and although they may be the colonial/postcolonial subjects' "own" languages, I argue that they are not devoid of their own hegemonies and strategies of othering. Even when a language is one's "own," it is still always incompletely commanded or possessed.

Chapter 1

Rivers, Cliffs, and Sky: Krishna Sobti's Feminist Vocabularies

[The female body as history]

In an interview with the critic Alok Bhalla, Krishna Sobti points to how Partition narratives in Hindi begin to emerge almost a decade after the event, stating that "Time is a strange alchemist: at first, one wishes to forget the past, and then one wishes to relive it" (Sobti, *Lekhak* 27). While Sobti's reference here is to the change that time effects upon the individual's capacity to relate to the past, her metaphor of "alchemy" seems equally apt for the narrative distortions that enable literature to "relive" the past belatedly. The chapters in this dissertation are in part an attempt to grapple with the lag between literature and history, and the "alchemy" of the time in between. Sobti's literary oeuvre, which took shape over the latter half of the twentieth century and consisted of short stories, novellas, and novels, remains deeply informed by the Partition even when it does not directly address that moment of originary violence. Considered in equal parts a pathbreaking writer of androgynous female voices and a Partition writer, Sobti was also well known for her ability to infuse Hindi with the sounds, textures, and tones of those languages and "dialects" from which Hindi had been segregated in the process of standardization.[11] Her straddling of the canons of Partition writers and women writers is symptomatic of her explorations of the mapping of geographical borders upon women's bodies, to which an experimental

[11] See Sukrita Paul Kumar, *Krishna Sobti: A Counter Archive*; Rosine-Alice Vuille, *Krishna Sobti's Views on Literature and the Poetics of Writing*; Rohini, *Ek Nazar Krishna Sobti par.*

approach to Hindi and its possibilities is central. This experimentalism not only enables her to embed a violent history of nation-making in her texts, but also to alter the inherent potentialities of Hindi. I argue that the novellas studied in this chapter, coming close to two decades after the Partition, register in their linguistic fabric what Veena Das calls the "descent" of violence from the exceptional to the ordinary through its attention to the language of women.

This chapter analyzes two of Krishna Sobti's novellas, *Mitro Marjani* (*To Hell with You, Mitro*, 1966), and *Surajmukhi Andhere Ke* (*Sunflowers of the Dark*, 1979) with a focus on their representation of female subjectivities through the use of colloquial and modernist registers of Hindi respectively. Although lacking any direct references to Partition, and thus excluded from the canon of Partition literature, the texts studied here betray a preoccupation with the female body that, I argue, needs to be read in relation to the gendered violence of the Partition. At the same time, their experimental[12] use of Hindi to write feminine characters that broke convention places them in conversation with language debates around Hindi that represented it through tropes of virtuous femininity. This chapter begins with looking at the feminization of languages such as Hindi and Urdu and the dominant Hindu investment of both with specific patriarchal values in the early 20th century. Based on the delineation of specific kinds of femininity through Hindi, I then consider the anthropologist Veena Das's discussion of gendered violence during the Partition and the figure of the

[12] Although this dissertation is a study of Hindi modernism, the influence of regional realisms upon *Mitro Marjani* means that it poses some challenges to reading within the rubric of modernism. Rather, it can be situated somewhere on Preetha Mani's "discursive continuum" between realism and modernism (230). Because of this, when addressing both novels together, I choose to use the word "experimental" rather than "modernist."

displaced or kidnapped woman as the "sexed citizen" (18). Das's analysis of the gendering of the female body by interweaving narratives of kinship and nationhood, as well as of the effects of trauma upon language are significant to my examination of both novellas discussed here. While in *Mitro Marjani* they illuminate certain forms of transgression in relation to kinship structures that the Partition had disrupted, in *Surajmukhi Andhere Ke*, they draw attention to the ways in which gendered trauma alters language.

The feminization of language

The introduction discussed Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi's editorship of the journal *Saraswati*, which was invested in shaping a nationalist idiom for Hindi and in evolving Hindi into a language capable of representing the modern nation—goals that were accomplished by restricting loanwords from languages other than Sanskrit on the one hand, and simplifying it by bringing it closer to a spoken idiom on the other. Even as later appraisals of Dwivedi's work on Hindi acknowledge its importance in shaping Hindi as a modern language and in developing a deeper relationship between Hindi and a current socio-political reality through its investment in a humanist ethos, they also point out the unsuitability of this idiom, which Agyeya describes as "wooden and lifeless," for literature (61). Nonetheless, the standardized Hindi that evolved at the hands of Dwivedi became and continues to be immanent not only to all subsequent Hindi literature, but also to discourses as varied as education, media, and

statecraft.[13] The capacity of this dominant idiom of Hindi to represent both national modernity and a conservative cultural identity was based largely in what Francesca Orsini refers to as its "normativity," that is, its reproduction of the heteropatriarchal proclivities of the nation state (12). This capacity, further, was especially relevant to its adoption as the official language of the nation.

A late nineteenth century play titled *Nagari aur Urdu ka ek Svang* [*A Satire of Nagari* (Hindi) *and Urdu*, 1889], written by Pandit Gauri Datta offers an illustrative example of the embedment of normative gender ideals within languages by the Hindi public sphere. In Christopher King's analysis of the play in his article "Forging a New Linguistic Identity: The Hindi Movement in Benaras," we see characters titled "Begam Urdu" and "Queen Devanagari" vying for ascendance to the "throne" of national language in a court of law. Queen Devanagari "complains that Begam Urdu has usurped her former rule over all works of wisdom and virtue" (King 180). Queen Devanagari herself is associated with "righteousness," "wisdom," and the ability to "become wealthy" (King 180). Her lawyers argue that in her reign, "fraud would vanish, good deeds would multiply, (and) people would feed Brahmins" (King 181). On the other side, Begam Urdu, along with her train of witnesses, all of whom carry markedly Islamic titles, is characterized as disreputable, wanton, and licentious, as she announces that she shall teach people to become "lovers and rakes," "squander (their) treasure" upon prostitutes, and neglect the "(t)asks of the household" (King 181). Datta's play pivots on multiple values that Hindi had been invested with in the

[13] See Schomer, *Mahadevi Varma and the Chhayavaad Age of Hindi Poetry*; Agyeya, *Rachnavali Vols. 1-15*; Nijhawan, *Women and Girls in the Hindi Public Sphere: Periodical Literature in Colonial North India*; Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere 1920-1940*

nationalist phase, and that were central to a dominant imaginary of the nation: Hindu morality, a domestic and modest femininity, upper-caste piety, patriarchal sexual order, hard work, and thrift. These values become visible both through their embodiment in Queen Devanagari, and the embodiment of their opposites in Begam Urdu. As King points out, where Queen Devanagari imbibes values that were foundational to the identity of the Hindu merchant class, thus emphasizing thrift and economy and upper-caste Hindu piety (performed by the Hindu wife by leading the task of "feeding Brahmins"), Begam Urdu teaches her subjects how to "squander" their wealth and neglect the "(t)asks of the household" (King 181). Her association with "lovers and rakes" and prostitutes marks her as belonging in the non-domestic, masculine spaces of the street and the market and, as King points out, her "witnesses . . . bear names unlikely to mollify the judge: Begam Twenty-Nine Delights, Prince Passion-Addict Khan, Begam Wanton-Pleasure, and Emperor Ease-Lover. Urdu's witnesses all testify to the licentiousness and depravity of their mistress and the pleasures that follow in her train" (181).

Pandit Gauri Datta's use of female figures for the embodiment of the Hindi and Urdu languages, and implicitly of the Hindu and Muslim communities, from a Hindu perspective is illustrative of a misogyny embedded in both the use and the idea of the Hindi language. In the play, Hindi frames and articulates normative patriarchal performances of gender, while non-normative and disruptive social behavior is displaced onto the Muslim 'other' embodied by Begam Urdu, who represents both the Urdu language and Muslim femininity. Datta's figuration of Hindi as a good

Hindu woman shows Hindi establishing a stable patriarchy upon the site of 'good' Hindu femininity as well as domesticity, while Urdu is figured as 'bad' Muslim femininity that threatens to disrupt a Hindu configuration of a normative cultural, and by extension, national identity.

While Datta's play is from the late 19th century, his attribution of gendered and communalized values to Hindi and Urdu persisted into the twentieth century. In her book on Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi's journal *Saraswati*, Sujata Mody analyses the use of visual media in *Saraswati*, including several cartoons that depict Hindi and other languages as women. In one cartoon by Radhakrishna Das, where Hindi is represented as an old woman wearing a sari and seated on the floor, and Urdu as a younger woman wearing the 'fashionable' and less modest dress of a *churidar*, we find the two languages/women attributed with a rhetoric that is similar to what we see in Datta's play. Mody notes,

> The personification of Hindi as a selfless and noble mother tormented by her self-serving, defiant, and profligate daughter, Urdu, reflects the extant gender biases of the Hindi public sphere in which women were indeed the subjects of literary discourse, but only insofar as they needed to be idealized, protected, reformed, or excluded. (31)

She adds that "(S)uch gendering categorically recommended the rejection of Urdu in favor of Hindi as a contender for official and/or national status on moral rather than linguistic grounds" (Mody 31). Mody's analysis draws attention to the instrumentalization of the moral or immoral female body as the battleground for language politics, such that an argument in favor of Hindi would simultaneously be an argument for a Hindu heteropatriarchal order wherein the morally 'good' woman

is Hindu, a mother, and thus a suitable metaphor for Hindi, and the woman of loose morals is Muslim, a sexually depraved courtesan, and a metaphor for Urdu.[14]

In King and Mody's analyses of the representations of Hindi and Urdu, the two languages are seen as containing radically different cultural imaginaries that are narrated through notions of domesticity, wealth, and morality. Pandit Gauri Datta's play as well as the cartoons studied by Mody are early examples of how the Hindi language writes "good" and "bad" women in order to service a Hindu national cultural identity. The categories set into motion by these texts serve as a pre-independence anticipation of the enactment of communal and national tensions upon the female body and upon language, which, in post-independence writing, become explicit. Further, these categories not only remain relevant in the post-independence period, but also come to be cathected with a heightened charge on account of the Partition and the use of the female body as a site for communal violence.

The Partition, the state, and the "sexed" citizen

In her book *Life and Words: Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary*, Veena Das addresses patriarchal constructions of the female body as central to the state's narration of a national-cultural identity during the Partition. Das first observes that state narratives and popular culture frequently narrativized the Partition in terms of

[14] See Sarangi, "Languages as Women: The Feminization of Linguistic Discourses in Colonial North India"; Gupta, *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims, and the Hindu Public in Colonial India*.

horror and rumor, in what she calls an "excess of speech" (36). Pointing out that the use of numbers "(functioned) as gestures towards the enormity of the violence"–an indication of social disorder in which the state could then position itself as the "rational guarantor of order"–she argues that the state's attempts to reestablish order were predicated upon the rehabilitation of abducted women, whom she also refers to as the "sexed" citizen (Das 19, 19, 18). By intervening to reinstate the women's relationships with the "'right' kinds of men," that is their male relatives by patriarchal contracts of birth and marriage, the state established itself in the moment of the Partition—and therefore in the moment of the nation's foundation—as deeply imbricated in the sexual contract (Das 19). Further, the state's interest in women, Das states, "was not premised upon their definition as citizens but as sexual and reproductive beings . . . (W)hat was at stake was the honor of the nation because women as sexual and reproductive beings were being forcibly held" (26). In Das's analysis, the foundational moment of the Partition becomes one in which the state's links to patriarchy and the connections between the social and the sexual contract are surfaced in the figure of the abducted woman. Her argument about the abducted woman as the "sexed citizen" is, further, based upon the premise that the family as an institution is not merely located in the domain of the private. Rather,

> sovereignty continues to draw life from the family. The involvement of the state in the process of recovery of women shows that if men were to become ineffective in the control they exercise as heads of families, thus producing children from 'wrong' sexual unions, then the state itself would come to be deprived of life. (Das 33)

Das's attention to the overwriting of the social contract upon the sexual contract is significant not only for the light that it sheds upon Partition-generated trauma, but also because this overwriting was foundational to national identity. As Rochona Majumdar has shown, opposition to the Hindu Code Bill, which in the 1950s proposed to give daughters the same property rights as sons in a joint family,[15] and the passing of the Hindu Succession Act in 1956, which "sought to ensure . . . that property remained in male hands" were indicative of the continuing centrality of the joint family to national identity.[16] Majumdar notes that arguments that opposed women's right to inherit property employed a "rhetoric . . . of the family as a necessarily harmonious unit" and "saw the extended family . . . as the ballast for a free Indian society" (230, 231). The "masculine nation" as it was thus established came to be structured around the reproductive heteronormativity instituted in the joint family (Das 13). As we will see, the forms of kinship that Das and Majumdar locate in a nationhood mediated through patriarchy become objects of critique in both *Mitro Marjani* and *Surajmukhi Andhere ke*.

Mitro Marjani: Folk language and deviant femininity

In the face of the Partition, the instrumentalization of the female body, and the feminization of language, Sobti's 1966 novella *Mitro Marjani*, significant for its use

[15] The term "joint family" is used by Majumdar, based on the Mitakshara and Dayabhaga branches of Hindu Law.
[16] See also Majumdar, *Marriage and Modernity: Family Values in Colonial Bengal*

of a Hindi that draws on Hindi and Panjabi dialects, presents a narrative that is deeply preoccupied with the female body and its place in the patriarchal joint family. Using the language of the north Indian "folk," Sobti not only depicts tradition but also its dissolution as facilitated by the very female bodies that it surveils, and upon which its stability is predicated. Sobti's use of a "folk" idiom to contain the narrative of Mitro is significant because, as noted in the introduction, "rustic" representations drew greater state patronage than modernist or experimental cultural production because they were seen as vehicles for a golden age for the nation. Sobti both uses the language of the folk to present Mitro as a prototype of the sparring yet attractive "rustic" woman, and undermines that language by also writing Mitro's assertions of selfhood and desire and a modern intimacy that transcends the legitimized intimacies of the joint family.

The novella depicts scenes from the life of Mitro, the middle daughter-in-law in a joint family of three married brothers, also addressed in the narrative by way of her position in the family, as "Manjhli" ("the middle one") or "Manjhli bahu" ("the middle daughter-in-law"). As the narrative opens, we see Mitro being disciplined by her husband, Sardari, for her flirtations with other men from the neighborhood. After a prolonged scene of domestic chaos, as her mother-in-law, Dhanwanti, and co-sister-in-law, Suhag, try to protect her from her Sardari and try to suppress her taunting laughter at his inability to provide sexual satisfaction, the narrative shifts

tone, as we see Mitro involved in household labour, sparring with her younger co-sister-in-law Phoola, and bailing her husband, and therefore her marital family, out of debt despite his ill-treatment of her.

Parallel to Mitro's story are the stories of her co-sisters-in-law, Suhag and Phoola. In the duration of the narrative, while Suhag becomes pregnant, Phoola's increasing demands for control over the jewelry she brought with her during marriage, and what is presented as her greed, lead to the family's insolvency and more domestic strife. As a response, Phoola exits the marital home along with her husband, the youngest brother of the family. Simultaneously, to protect the family from disrepute, Mitro too is sent to her natal home, with the hope that either she will not return, or will return once the dust has settled on her scandals. At the palatial home of her mother Balo, who, it is suggested, earned her wealth through prostitution, Mitro is tempted by Balo to sleep with a man who Balo herself has slept with, and who may even be Mitro's own father. However, at the final moment, as Mitro makes her way to the room where the man awaits her, Balo is overcome by an unknown fear and calls her back. Overwhelmed by her loneliness, the abandonment of society, and her old age, Balo begins to cry and beg for Mitro's help, and complains about the house, which once was filled with her admirers but now seems haunted. Balo's lamentations cast her in a different light to Mitro, as she now appears

desperate, pathetic, and shameful. Balo's repentance ultimately sends Mitro reeling back into the arms of her husband and her marital family.

As her willingness to betray her husband illustrates, Mitro deviates severely from the norms set in place for her as a married woman, as she is defined not through her purity and chastity, but rather through her vanity, sexual desire, and autonomy. Although we encounter Mitro's disregard for familial relationships in her taunts at her husband, in a conversation with Suhag, we see that this disregard is not a conscious decision on part of Mitro, but is rather the product of a genuine incomprehension of patriarchal norms because of her own distance from normative kinship systems:

> An astonished Suhag touched her hand to her chin—tell me the truth, *devrani*,[17] what brought you to such bad ways?
>
> Mitro did not hesitate. Lying on the bed, she explained—Upon the seven rivers, my mother, black as the bottom of a pan, brought me into her womb, white as snow. She says, Mitro is the spitting image of the most powerful tehsildar of the area. Now you tell me, *jithani*,[18] where should I find willpower like yours? And my husband, he fails to understand my affliction. Enough of having it every once in a while . . . my body craves so much more, so much, that I feel tortured. (Sobti, *Mitro* 17)

Mitro's narration of her origin story frames her own lack of "willpower" in terms of her upbringing. As we will see later, Mitro's mother's "blackness" acts as a corollary to her status as an outcast, while also directly referencing lower-caste positions. Thus, if Mitro lacks Suhag's modesty, it is because her own birth has denied her both the morality and sense of hierarchy that are reproduced in her marital family: her home

[17] Kinship term for younger co-sister-in-law
[18] Kinship term for older co-sister-in-law.

lacked not only the father's presence but even the father's name and identity as a structuring factor.

'Pot of sin': Feminine labor, desire, and greed

Mitro's reference to Suhag's modesty indicates that it is not only Mitro's body but several female bodies and sexualities that the text is preoccupied with. In order to center the patriarchal joint family in the text, Sobti rightly draws attention to women's bodies as the fulcrum upon which the institution turns and the instrument through which it perpetuates itself. Thus, we see women's domestic labor in images of Suhag and Mitro working in the kitchen, women's arrivals and departures to and from their natal homes, and the articulations of multiple forms of sexuality/bodily preoccupation/femininity.

One such sexuality that is presented in the text as a foil to Mitro's is that of the oldest daughter-in-law, Suhag. Soon after the explanation of her origins, Mitro strips to nakedness and accosts Suhag with overt declarations of her sexuality. Suhag's initial repulsion to Mitro's words turns quickly into an anger through which she articulates a vision of sexuality that recalls the internalization of trauma witnessed in the utterances of Partition survivors in Das' writing:[19]

[19] Das quotes one of her interviewees, "What is there to be proud of in a woman's body–everyday it is polluted by being consumed" (54). While the words spoken by Suhag are reflective of a general attitude towards femininity, the uncanny resemblance between them and the words of the interviewee

> Tormented by (Mitro's) lack of shame, Suhag thought to herself, if a woman who puts the community's pride to shame has no remorse, then the body of a woman, corrupted nightly, is nothing but a pot of sin. She covered her face with the quilt.
>
> Mitro called out to her—my dear *jithani*, open your eyes for just a moment!
>
> . . .
>
> Irritated, Suhag opened her eyes and asked, what is it now?
>
> Mitro sat up. Holding her breasts in her hands, she asked, now tell me the truth, *jithani*, does any other woman have breasts like these?
>
> Rage blazed through Suhag. Smacking her head, she strode up to Mitro, and said—You fallen woman! Once you die, you'll never know you lived! Such arrogance for the body of a woman, which dissolves each day? Shame on you! Every house has a woman like you, dark or fair. They too have two hands like you, two feet, two eyes, and just like you, two breasts! Are you the only one with these? (Sobti, *Mitro* 19)

As the only daughter-in-law who bears a child in the narrative, Suhag's paradigm of the woman's sinning body is validated through childbearing. When Mitro reacts to news of Suhag's pregnancy by describing her as Dhanwanti's "maid from her previous birth" who, "If you tell her to sit, she will sit, if you tell her to stand up, she will stand up," we find Suhag's pregnancy depicted less as a consequence of her pleasure than of her dutifulness and obedience (Sobti, *Mitro* 64-5). Further, Suhag's notion of the woman's body as a "pot of sin" and "dissolv(ing) each day" form a corollary to her mother-in-law Dhanwanti's belief that "(i)t is only a hard-working body that brings true returns." Dhanwanti's glorification of the labouring/reproductive female body over the female body that experiences pleasure, further, is acquired from her own mother-in-law (Sobti, *Mitro* 11). Dhanwanti's mother-in-law, Dhanwanti, and

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gestures to the undertow of historical, specifically gendered, violence, an awareness of which is embedded in Sobti's writing. This violence surfaces in Mitro's speech, too, such as when she states that had Sardari and Banwari truly been "men . . . they would have either licked me clean or eaten me whole like prey" (Sobti, *Mitro*, 15).

Suhag thus become links in the chain of the reproduction of the joint family as an institution that circumscribes women's bodies by negating them while at the same time instrumentalizing them for domestic and reproductive labour.

If Suhag acts as a foil to Mitro's character, the family's youngest daughter-in-law, Phoola, who is marked by an excess of speech, a preoccupation with her body, and financial autonomy that mirror Mitro's, acts as Mitro's alter ego.[20] Phoola claims to suffer, among other diseases, from the quintessentially feminine affliction of hysteria, in response to which she extracts herself from all household labor while continuing to reap the fruits of the other women's labor. Phoola particularly mirrors Mitro's assertion of sexual autonomy through her own assertions of financial independence from the joint family. When her mother-in-law Dhanwanti, who sees herself as the custodian of her daughters-in-laws' jewelry, insists that in "a house that belongs to everyone," there is no reason for "mine and thine," Phoola asserts, "this is not about being a stranger or a relative, mother, it is about *my* jewelry" (Sobti, *Mitro* 24; italics mine). Phoola's assertion of financial autonomy, further, offers a corollary to an earlier scene in which Mitro brings Sardari, and therefore the family, out of debt by willingly giving up the jewels she had inherited from her mother.

[20] Also see Martin Christof-Fuchsle, "Questioning Norms in Krishna Sobti's Mitro Marjani" in *Narrative Strategies: Essays on South Asian Literature and Films*

However, Mitro's hoarding of her jewelry is itself a deviance from the norms of the joint family which, as the mother-in-law Dhanwanti argues, is to be considered the common owner of the wealth that the family comes into possession of through marriage, an argument that is rejected by Phoola.

> Dhanwanti controlled her anger and spoke softly . . . Phoola, this is a joint family—its seams are secure, and we share everything. Such talk of animosity doesn't suit the women of the family!
>
> Phoola, spoiling for a fight, cried, Why should anyone have the gifts given to me by my mother? Why should they be distributed? Are they common property to be looted? (Sobti, *Mitro* 24)

Dhanwanti's anger at Phoola and her claim that in a joint family all the "seams are secure" gesture towards the accumulation of wealth that takes place in the husband's family through marriage, and in particular, its movement with the female subject whose reproductive body is part of the dowry received—an ownership rejected by Phoola as well as Mitro. It is by acting upon her assertions of autonomy that Phoola departs from the narrative, forsaking her marital family for her natal home with her husband in tow, thus breaking the "secure seams" that Dhanwanti evokes. In the parallelism of Mitro and Phoola, Sobti simultaneously attributes agency to both women and shows the equivalence between material wealth and the female body: Phoola breaks the "secure seams" of the house by leaving with what the family considered its own wealth, and Mitro does so by making her body available to other men, thus "opening" the "closed" kinship network. In their self-assertions and in their

respective use of vocabularies of sexuality and individuality, both Mitro and Phoola resemble Begam Urdu rather than embody the values of Queen Devanagari.

The margins of language

We learn early in the narrative that Mitro's marriage into Sardari's family, given her dubious heritage, took place by way of a lie that concealed Mitro's identity as the daughter of a prostitute. Thus, language becomes the basis for the destabilization of the joint family not only through Mitro's profanity, but through a speech act that determines Mitro's very entry into the family. Mitro's disregard for familial relationships is inherently connected to the excessive sexual desire that defines her as a character. Her repeated articulations of her husband's failures to satisfy her sexually is anathema to the rest of the family members, both because it ruptures their veneer of respectability, and because it questions the son's, that is Sardari's, virility. Mitro's desire, however, is agnostic to any notions of respectability. Unlike Suhag, she places greater value upon her sexual fulfillment than upon her impregnation. Thus, in language that references her mother Balo's profession, she wonders, "What a strange trade of life and procreation—if your own sons provide the seed, it's a blessing, and if other's sons do, it's a sin!" (Sobti, *Mitro* 51).

Mitro's use of language frequently overflows with jokes and innuendos directed towards the joint family's regulation of sexuality. Although such 'rustic' speech is attributed to almost all characters in the novella, Mitro's unfulfilled sexual desire invests her speech with a charge that proliferates language to the point of chaos. Thus, in her speech, terms that reflect the hierarchy of patriarchal kinship—*jeth*, *jithani*, *sasu ma* (brother-in-law, co-sister-in-law, mother-in-law)—fail to exert the authority that they should, or to regulate the flow of desire in directions conducive to the maintenance of patriarchal order. In Mitro and Balo's anarchic world, the patriarch can be tricked, brothers-in-law and sons-in-law can be desired, mother and daughter can spar about sex, and Mitro can come dangerously close to sleeping with the man who may have been her own father. As such, Mitro's hedonistic speech embodies the "shamelessness" for which she is chastised early in the narrative by Sardari.[21]

In an interview, Sobti describes the prototype of Mitro's character as "a living, breathing garden of trembling flowers" (Sobti, *Lekhak* 14). In her description of an undeveloped "photographic negative" of Mitro, Sobti draws on nature for images that help her articulate a romantic rusticity within which both the prototype and Mitro become extensions of an 'earthy' landscape (Sobti, *Lekhak* 14). In Sobti's discussion

[21] For a discussion of the subversive possibilities of inversions of kinship terms in North Indian women's jokes, speech, and songs, see Gloria Goodwin Raheja and Ann Grodzins Gold, *Listen to the Heron's Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India*, which considers both the ways in which "such communication often subverts the official language of the dominant discourse and subtly articulates a contrapuntal reading of gender and kinship relations" and their operation as pressure-release mechanisms that ultimately reinstated existing gender and kinship hierarchies (23).

of *Mitro Marjani* as well as in the novella, this landscape comes to represent the fecundity of both a folk idiom and land figured in terms of the feminine body. Thus, Mitro herself is described as "a lively river" (*nada-nadiyā sī khulī-ḍulī bahu*) (Sobti, *Mitro* 66). Throughout the narrative, Sobti makes extensive use of a folk or rural idiom that brings together colloquial Hindi [*jis din se is ghar ko pāoṃ rakhā hai, merī jān ko ban āyī hai* (Ever since I set foot in this house, my life has been under threat)] with Panjabi [*bhalī-caṃgī, gabrū javān* (well and good, strapping young man)], and at times with Urdu [*Dhanvaṃtī ne bebasī se imdād ke lie beṭe kī or dekhā* (In her desperation Dhanwanti looked to her son for support)], and that lacks standardized spellings and grammar (*jiṭhānī* instead of *jeṭhānī*, *nā mār* instead of *mat mār*). In doing so, she draws upon speech registers specific to north Indian regions that straddled Partition borders. The text is also infused with an orality that is visible (and audible) in its use of repetition, alliteration, and irregular grammar ["*Phūlavaṃtī sir pīṭ-pīṭ dahāḍne lagī* " (Phoolavanti beat her head with her hands and bemoaned her fate); "*nirakh-parakh*" (lovingly gazed); "*kivāḍoṃ ke viraloṃ se chan-chan ātā bahu-beṭe ke kamre kā ujiyālā*" (the light filtering through curtains and filling her son and daughter-in-law's room)]. Sobti frequently describes this language of 'the folk' as an 'organic,' or 'natural' phenomenon, once again employing metaphors drawn from nature.

However, if the language of 'rusticity' and 'the folk' recalls a land without borders, it is also used to articulate lines of power. Thus the Hindi of the folk on the one hand proliferates and destabilizes in the hands of Mitro, Balo, and Phoola, and on the other, contains, segregates and prescribes in the hands of the patriarch Gurudas, the mother-in-law Dhanwanti, and Suhag. This tendency of language to contain becomes most visible in the persistence of casteism in the narrative. As Poonam Tushamad points out in her essay, the text is riven with instances where lower castes' titles are used as derogatory terms. Referring to Sobti's repeated use of the titles of certain lower castes in proximity to the word "garbage," Tushamad argues that "Krishna Sobti finds it quite suitable to refer to *chuhras* and *chamars* after referring to 'garbage' because she knows that these castes, historically, are associated with the labor of cleaning, and are considered low in society" (par. 7). This casteism, which features generously in the characters' speech, becomes particularly visible in the text's treatment of Mitro's mother, Balo. Mitro's visceral reaction to her mother towards the end of the narrative takes specifically racist/casteist tones, and presents numerous instances of casteism towards Balo: the house is characterized as a graveyard or "*masaan*," a cremation ground where people of the Dom caste perform the spiritual but outcaste labor of burning the dead, the fear evoked by Balo's face is primarily on account of the color of her skin, her comparison to a snake associates her with the lowest rung of creatures in the Hindu chain of being, and Mitro compares her

to a demoness and to a "priestess of evil," mythical figures into which people of lower castes have frequently been transmuted. As Tushamad shows, the terms used in *Mitro Marjani* are not all casteist slurs, but rather they are often the names of untouchable castes whose work is considered so lowly that the name itself acts as an insult grievous enough, for instance, that despite her arguments with Phoola, Mitro defends her from it. It is thus in the interweaving of those names within the Hindi spoken by upper caste yet 'rough' characters that their nature as casteist is revealed. While Sobti's use of casteist language is one aspect of her use of a folk idiom, it also shows the surfacing of a casteism that otherwise remains repressed in hegemonic dialects of Hindi that are implicitly upper-caste.[22]

It is not only through a language of caste that the text punishes Balo for belonging to the margins of the patriarchal economy that Mitro now inhabits the center of. Mitro ultimately abandons her mother as well as her questionable caste background before she relinquishes herself to the patriarchal joint family. As such, Balo becomes the point of intersection of the failure of the novel's linguistic experiments and the limits of its exploration of female autonomy. As an illustration of the impossibility of female autonomy, Balo comes to represent an unresolvable conflict in *Mitro Marjani*. Although she possesses both sexual and financial

[22] See also Brueck, *Writing Resistance: The Rhetorical Imagination of Hindi Dalit Literature*. In her chapter on language use and form in Dalit literature, Brueck points out the use of dialect in the work of Dalit writers such as Surajpal Chauhan and Omprakash Valmiki as "underscoring the backwardness of casteism" (105).

autonomy, the climax of the novella invests her with a longing for incorporation into what we can now see as an upper-caste heteronormativity. It also reveals her autonomy as circumscribed by a patriarchal objectification of feminine youth and beauty, both of which Mitro possesses and Balo lacks. The narrative of Mitro's supposed autonomy is thus revealed as built on the foundation of her youth as well as her circumscription, however tenuous, by a casteist patriarchy.

Interiority, intimacy, and individuality

In her use of non-standard forms of Hindi in *Mitro Marjani*, Sobti draws on the work of the 'regional' realist writer Phanishwarnath Renu, whose Hindi was well-known for "encompassing dialects such as Avadhi, Bhojpuri, and Maithili in their modern and medieval forms, Bengali, Nepali, tribal language, as well as Sanskritized Hindi, Bazar Hindustani, English, and Urdu" (Hansen 282). In an analysis of Renu's "heteroglossia," Kathryn Hansen argues that by using non-standard Hindi, Renu referenced Hindi texts that preceded the standardization of Hindi, such as the work of 18th century poets Tulsidas and Kabir, thus harking back to a "simpler period, purer in spirit (at least in the imagination) to the present age" (278). Although Sobti's Hindi in *Mitro Marjani* shows the clear influence of Renu's use of dialect in his "regional" literature, it evades placement in a category that, as Toral Gajarawala argues, "took

location as its driving force" (99). Instead, *Mitro Marjani*'s depiction of the joint family independent of references to place or time lend to it an element of timelessness, and characters stand somewhere in between being individuals and character-types. This liminality of characters is in fact significant for *Mitro Marjani*'s representation of a historical moment when the joint family was transitioning to nuclear and fragmented forms of relationality.

This liminality begins with the interiority of Gurudas and Dhanwanti. Unlike the realist novel where interiority is placed in the service of a linear evolution, however, Gurudas and Dhanwanti become mute spectators of the dissolution of their family. While Mitro is not attributed a similar narrative voice, we see that her disregard for familial relationships is accompanied by a lens of individuality through which she is able to display and experience affection and appreciation for her family members. Additionally, Mitro's autonomous, non-reproductive sexuality is accompanied by an intimacy with Sardari despite his impotence. This intimacy and desire for Sardari transcends the legitimized forms of intimacy that structure the joint family, such as Suhag's and Sardari's sister Janko's sexual relations with their husbands, which are oriented towards childbearing, and Suhag's performance of duties towards her mother-in-law and father-in-law. These legitimized forms of intimacy are embedded in the physical spaces of the house, where Dhanwanti, as the

mother-in-law, can spy on her sons' rooms. As opposed to this, Mitro's intimacy with Sardari is located in her expressions of desire and affection for him.

In *Mitro Marjani*, Sobti's use of the oral, folk idiom is used to simultaneously re-create in compact form a feudal landscape as well as a modernity that is gradually altering that landscape—for instance, Mitro's marital family, around which the narrative is set, does not perform agricultural work but belongs to the same merchant class within which "Queen Devanagari" is located. If non-standard Hindi is used in *Mitro Marjani* to evoke a pre-Partition world wherein the fertile and undivided land is comparable to the sustenance-providing body of the mother (as in Sobti's later novella *Zindaginama*), it also represents an unremitting sexual desire and the failure of bearing a child. In other words, the Hindi of *Mitro Marjani* is embedded in a changing, semi-urban landscape, and its representation of maternal femininity is subordinated to and contrasted with a non-reproductive femininity. Thus, we see that although the narrative generously presents Suhag, Mitro's older co-sister-in-law, as a picture of normative femininity, that picture is contrasted with Mitro and Phoola, who despite—or perhaps because of—their flaws make the patriarchal authority of the feudal joint family a subject of ridicule, anger, and questioning.

While Mitro's return to her husband in response to her mother's seemingly demonic cry for help brings her back into the fold of the family, the family has by this time been destabilized by the demands for autonomy made by Mitro and Phoola. In

these representations of assertive self-definitions, *Mitro Marjani* shows us the emergence of a citizen-subject who is no longer defined by older networks of kinship, but rather as an individual. However, by making this citizen-subject the woman, Sobti not only draws the woman out of her definition through patriarchy, but also surfaces the fragmentation of older networks of kinship that relied upon the woman's body, particularly its reproductive labour, for cohesion. Sobti's emphasis here upon wealth and sexuality as parallels points towards the sexual economy of the patriarchal joint family for which the reproductive labour and paternal wealth become resources that the woman brings to the joint family for the purpose of increasing its store and perpetuating its name. Yet the control of these resources in the hands of Mitro and Phoola also destabilizes the same economy and threatens to put it out of order. Mitro's sexuality and her voice mirror each other in their excess, while Mitro herself refuses to participate in what Das calls the "orderly exchange of women"—both because she steps out of the threshold of the joint family to fulfil her desire, and because her sexual desire remains, for the duration of the narrative, non-reproductive (21).

***Surajmukhi Andhere Ke*: Trauma and autonomy**

In contrast to *Mitro Marjani*, *Surajmukhi Andhere ke* grapples with the possibility of an autonomous female subject who stands outside of marital security. The movement

from Balo and Mitro in the former to Ratti in the latter is a movement from the fragmentation of the joint family to the inadequacy of the nuclear family, from the rural to the urban, and from the impossibility of the autonomous female subject to an assertion of the same. Published in 1979, *Surajmukhi Andhere ke* is preoccupied with the question of sexual violence and how it inheres in the female body, and as such, directly calls up spectres of the Partition. The novella presents vignettes from the life of the protagonist, Ratti, a middle-aged woman whose character seems to be defined by an experience of childhood sexual assault. Although ostensibly a narrative of surviving rape, *Surajmukhi* is also a narrative about the woman as agential subject, as the character of Ratti is written simultaneously through trauma and pleasure: even as Ratti remains deeply informed by her past of sexual violation, her name references sexual fulfillment.

The novella opens with Ratti's revisitation of the place where she was raped as a child, and her struggle with the past. The third person narrative voice of *Surajmukhi* largely follows Ratti's perspective, though this mimicking of a first-person perspective seems to indicate her dissociation from herself.

> This time the gin wasn't sharp. It wasn't dull either. She herself simply is. Her sharpness, her bitterness, all have died. She's no good. A useless woman. A young girl who was never a young girl. A woman who was never a woman.
>
> The third drink shook her. There was a storm on her waist, and a flood of thorns on her breasts.
>
> Every time, an undying desire to get somewhere, and every time, returning empty-handed to oneself. Again and again. (Sobti, *Surajmukhi* 7)

If in *Mitro Marjani*, language proliferated as a representation of Mitro's unfulfilled fertility and sexual desire, in *Surajmukhi*, it dwindles into a formalist

minimalism marked by ellipses and short sentences. These hiatuses in speech seem to encapsulate unarticulated thoughts that further fracture the non-linear narrative. Such devices, which come together to shape a modernist idiom that is radically different from what we see in *Mitro Marjani*, are accompanied by the frequent recollection of a past that is rarely made available to the reader. Though the past occasionally appears in the form of a pleasant memory, these recollections are often incomplete and seemingly disconnected from the present.

> "You know, Rima, there's one thing that always bothered me. It doesn't mean anything, but even so."
>
> Rima held her breath. "And what is that?"
>
> "Do you remember, in Mukteshwar, that apple orchard with a high gate? Why didn't we stay that evening? I always wonder."
>
> Rima watched Ratti with a strange look in her eyes, a loving perplexity spread across her face. She seemed on the brink of solving an intricate riddle. Softly, she said,
>
> "All this while, you were thinking about that place!"
>
> Ratti nodded her head.
>
> "Yes! The luggage-porter didn't want to stop—but even then, as we departed from that gate, I knew that I would always want to go back there. Right there."
>
> Ratti's eyes lingered on Rima's shining, innocent face.
>
> "I would like to arrive at that gate, but never enter."
>
> "Why is that, Ratti?"
>
> "There's something about it, Rima, that…" Ratti fell silent.
>
> "Go on?"
>
> "No. The moment has passed."
>
> Rima looked at her with concern—
>
> "You've been drinking too much. Yesterday, when you were in town…"
>
> Ratti trampled the snow with her heavy boots.
>
> "Don't speak of yesterday. Yesterday, I should have died of drinking" (Sobti, *Surajmukhi* 14).

Here, while Ratti's memory of sighting an apple orchard with Rima shifts the syntax of the text briefly, showing a continuity between Rima and Ratti's thoughts, the

memory is cut off abruptly with a telling image of Ratti locked outside of the apple orchard. The image of prohibition is further echoed in Ratti's refusal to say anything more about it—the answer to why she would always be locked out of the orchard being her past trauma. The text quickly reverts into a register of repressed trauma, as there is a shift from the image of tenderness on Rima's face to Ratti squashing the snow—a symbol of her 'frigidity'—under her boots.

The dual narrative voice

In *Surajmukhi*, both the violence of a patriarchal language and Ratti's resistance to it come to be represented through modernism. Where *Mitro Marjani* is characterized by linguistic experiments in which standard Hindi is stretched to encompass dialect and colloquialisms, here, language is compacted so that each word, sentence, or phrase is potently cathected with multivalence and made open to (mis)interpretations, and a disrupted linearity becomes the container for fragmented cognition as a response to trauma. Recollections in the form of unintelligible fragments inhibit the reconstruction of a past that nonetheless constantly impinges upon Ratti's present.

In its simultaneous encryption of Ratti's anger and repression, *Surajmukhi Andhere ke* is characterized by a schizophrenic use of language that narrativizes on the one hand a normative discourse that figures her as a victim and on the other a resistant discourse in which she is an agent. Thus, the text is constituted by both the voice of the survivor, which circles the site where the trauma originated without ever

landing upon it, and frustrated and open-ended conversations replete with ellipses that encode her anger at being forced to normalize patriarchal subjection. To the extent that the narrative voice remains preoccupied with Ratti's trauma, the ensuing sexual frigidity and barrenness of her reproductive environment, and her haunting by the past, it narrativizes patriarchal codes of honor by which a woman, once "tainted," occupies the position of being "socially dead but physically alive" (Das 49). In the same breath, however, the voice also narrates Ratti's refusal to participate in or even aspire to heteronormativity for the sake of convenience, as well as her resistance of the aforementioned patriarchal narrative of her as dead, frigid, and infertile—in other words, unavailable to be instrumentalized.

Such a reading, which looks at both the patriarchal construction of the rape 'victim' and the survivor's extension of her identity beyond sexual trauma, is significant since the trope of reading is one that Ratti deploys in speaking or thinking about herself. Twice, Ratti accuses men who are otherwise sympathetic to her—Keshi and Diwakar—of training a male gaze upon her, and of offering her a narrative of herself that is overdetermined by her trauma and that swallows her within a singular framework. In the first section, "Bridges," she confronts Keshi, saying, "Why do you insist upon 'defining' me for myself with such cold objectivity? You typecast me, and then narrate me for myself!" (Sobti, *Surajmukhi* 27). Later, she admonishes Diwakar similarly, referencing her exchange with Keshi: "One day I found Keshi's eyes groping their way through my innermost contradictions and felt so exposed that I broke down. Now it feels as though you too are turning the aperture of your camera

towards me, and repeatedly trying to capture me" (Sobti, *Surajmukhi* 78). Ratti's chastisement of Keshi and Diwakar at their attempts to "narrativize" or "capture" her shows their approaches to her to be alternative forms of male gazing, different only in degrees from the overt gaze and violation that she had experienced in encounters with other men, a recurrent motif in the fabric of the narrative. The metaphor of reading thus functions as a warning for the reader to on the one hand probe the narrative for more than sexual trauma, and to probe for an alternative narrative that may not be available on the surface of Ratti-as-text as well as of the narrative that we are reading.

For instance, the text frequently references the "thorns on her breast" as a sensation that Ratti experiences repeatedly, apparently indicating an anger that can only be traced back to her rape and mistreatment by society (page?). However, a closer reading shows that her experience in the moments when she feels "thorns on her breast" is not that of victimhood but rather of her reduction to the status of victim. At times, this reduction takes place through ostracism by her peers, such as when she is in school, and at others, when the men she encounters throughout her life treat her as a potential sexual conquest.

Ratti's rejection of domesticity

Set in an urban milieu, *Surajmukhi Andhere ke* portrays the fragmentation of the kinship network that was located in the traditional form of the joint family through its focus upon the nuclear family. However, this covert representation of the failure of

the joint family as it transforms into the nuclear family is accompanied by representations of dissatisfactions within the nuclear family as well. With the exception of the marriage of Ratti's close friends, Rima and Keshi, which is shown to be in conversation with the possibility of gender parity and based upon companionship rather than marital duty, the nuclear families we encounter in the text, including Ratti's own family while she was growing up, are marked by unfulfillable aspirations. Thus the pressures of politeness and civility bearing upon Ratti's family make Ratti a victim of her parents' anger towards her dirty fingernails, as well as for her having been raped. As a young woman, Ratti is also repeatedly pursued by men who are already married, a motif that undermines the stability of heteronormativity.

If Ratti is repeatedly typecast as a "frigid" woman for refusing the advances of men, both by herself, and the men she rejects, the text also subtly grounds her rejections not merely in trauma, but in a narrativization of herself as an autonomous individual. Thus, Ratti's repudiation of romantic relationships extends into a spurning of a normative marital relationship and domesticity: while she feels like an outsider in the households of married men, she never aspires to be the insider. Entering the home of Shripat, one of her pursuers, Ratti notes the ubiquitous presence of his unknowing wife, Una, throughout the house, and observes the individuals' loneliness in the spaces:

> Shripat's home.

> She felt as if she lived far away from the village, and Shripat had drawn her out of her loneliness and brought her in the midst of the noise and bustle.
>
> Past the threshold, Ratti looked at the thriving domesticity of Shripat's house with fascination. The doorways of homes, steeped in warmth. Each door a face. Each face a body, and each body a room, living side-by-side. Bound to each other, and divided from each other.
>
> Shripat drew the curtain aside and drew her into his arms—
> "Come, Ratti!" (100)

Ratti's gaze of "fascination" estranges her from the domestic space that she enters, as she sees not only the feminine labor of Una, and the fruits of Una and Shripat's life together, but also the distance between them, as embodied in Shripat's desire to sleep with her. This disaffection later reappears in Ratti's interactions with Subba and Jainath, who bring Ratti proposals of companionship and domesticity respectively, both of which she declines, the latter with the claim that she is infertile.

As the protagonist, Ratti not only repudiates marriage but, like Mitro, shows little regard for marital relationships. While her relationship with Diwakar is mediated by her trauma, the consummation of this relationship is free from any sense of shame arising from its extra-marital nature. Thus, she has sex outside of marriage, and is willing to have sex with married men.[23] In addition to this, Ratti's infertility serves two purposes that are at odds with each other—on the one hand, it marks her as "frigid" and "barren", and therefore unproductive for patriarchal purposes. On the

[23] The text is careful to point out that Diwakar, the only married man she ultimately does sleep with, has marital discord that is unrelated to his affair with Ratti, and ultimately has an amicable separation from his wife—thus circumventing the depiction of extramarital affairs that are exploitative towards women inside as well as outside of the home, as in the case of Shripat and Una.

other hand, like in the case of Mitro, it serves to validate Ratti's sexual pleasure as an end in itself, and thus grants her agency.

The language of the survivor

As we have seen in the above discussions of Das and Majumdar in relation to *Mitro Marjani*, the sexual violence that women were subjected to was intrinsically connected to their position in kinship structures. In *Surajmukhi*, which unlike *Mitro Marjani* is set in urban spaces and in a middle-class milieu, Sobti seems to utilize the possibilities of these spaces and this milieu to subject traditional kinship structures to multiple forms of questioning. Unlike the abducted women who were instrumentalized for the narration of a national cultural identity, despite having the heteropatriarchal narrative violently inscribed upon her body, Ratti refuses to be appropriated by that narrative.

Central to Das' analysis is an attention to language as it was used by the state, by perpetrators of gendered communal violence, and by survivors of that violence. While the state and perpetrators of violence instrumentalized both language and the female body—the former through an "excess of speech" that allowed it to posit itself as the "rational guarantor of order," and the latter through, among other actions, the inscription of nationalist slogans on women's bodies—Das notes that the survivors of gendered violence were afflicted by silence (36, 19). In her interviews, Das locates "a

zone of silence around the event," as a result of which the "actual experience of abduction and rape remains unstated" (54).

Although Ratti's sexual trauma is not located within the Partition, it is interesting to consider the changes that Hindi undergoes when Sobti uses it to depict the consequences of sexual violence in the wake of the Partition. Here it is useful to look at Das's discussion of the "fracturing" of the relationship with language that is experienced by survivors of prolonged violence, wherein language is divested of its ordinariness and invested with the memory of violence (46). Das's observation here points to at least two scales at which language functions—the exceptional and the ordinary—and the porosity of these scales in the consciousness of the survivor. The subtitle of her book, "Violence and the Descent into the Ordinary" itself points towards the "descent" or trickling of violence from the scale of the exceptional, the "Event," to the ordinary or everyday.

It would be interesting to take Das's observations about exceptional versus ordinary language as applied to the survivor of prolonged violence and apply them to particular languages that are culturally embedded in violent events. In this framework, following the 'Event'—the moment of violence, in this case the Partition—a language that mediated the occurrence of the Event may be seen as henceforth tainted with violence, not only for the survivor of rape, but also for the culture that inhabits that language, or that the language inhabits. In other words, the trickling of violence from the exceptional to the ordinary can perhaps be located as much in the speech of a survivor, as in the language that speaks through the survivor.

In the case of the Partition it is dialects of Hindi, Panjabi, Urdu, and Rajasthani—languages that form the linguistic fabric of *Mitro Marjani*—that can be seen as registering such violence. As discussed earlier, Sobti's literary use of these languages embeds a nostalgia for a pre-Partition world, even as it erases the borders drawn upon those languages. In both these texts, Sobti's contestation of linguistic borders codes her contestation of the geographical and religious borders drawn by the Partition. In contrast, in *Surajmukhi*, which is written about three decades after the Partition, language can be seen as marked with violence and the failure of representation. Thus, the Hindi of *Surajmukhi* no longer flows like a "river" through other languages, but rather moves haltingly through its representations of an emotional landscape of cliffs, barren trees, thorny bushes, and fallen snow. As such, instead of coding nostalgia for a lost world, it mediates a relationship to the past by internalizing the trauma of the Partition. This internalization of trauma within the language both echoes and articulates Ratti's trauma as a survivor of childhood sexual violence, for instance by the use of a stunted language that replicates Ratti's infertility. The change in the movement of language that becomes visible in the shift from a 'folk' idiom of fertility to a modernist idiom of loss not only represents the trauma in the character's past, but also the historical trauma of the language in which the text is written, and as such reconfigures the parallelization between language, land, and the female body that we encounter in *Mitro Marjani*. Ratti's rejection of the heteropatriarchal narrative that was central to a national cultural identity presents

itself in linguistic terms as the rejection of the feminization of language as seen in Datta's play.

'Reading' femininity and modernist Hindi

If the language of *Surajmukhi Andhere ke* is marked by a trauma encoded in its fragmentary nature, it also carries the potential for renewal. Significant here is Ratti's insistent refusal of how she is 'read'. This discourse of styles of reading is interesting when considered alongside Das's elaboration of the surface/depth binary, which also appears in Sobti's theorization of Ratti. In her discussion of the inscription of nationalist slogans on women's bodies—an instance of the weaponization of language—Das writes:

> In the fantasy of men, the inscription of nationalist slogans on the bodies of women (Victory to India, Long Live Pakistan), or proclaiming possession of their bodies (This thing, this loot—*ye mal*—is ours), would create a future memory by which men of the other community would never be able to forget that the women as territory had already been claimed and occupied by other men. The bodies of the women were surfaces on which texts were to be written and read—icons of the new nations. But women converted this passivity into agency by using metaphors of pregnancy—hiding pain, giving it a home just as a child is given a home in the woman's body . . . (However) the subsequent act of remembering only through the body makes the woman's own experience displace being from the surface to the depth of the body. The only difference is that unlike the child, which the woman will be able to offer to the husband, this holding of the pain inside must never be allowed to be born. This movement from surface to depth also transforms passivity into agency. (55)

Das here references an "agency" that is located in appropriating an outwardly inflicted trauma—the slogans written upon the women's bodies—into an inward

holding, akin to a fetus through which the women now identify themselves. Ratti's character displays a similar transformation of the female body into a text to be read, as well as the "displacement" of pain from the surface to depth into something akin to an unborn and unbirthable child, which is figured in the novella as Ratti's infertility. Further, the transmutation of pain not only into a child but also into sexual frigidity/infertility, and thus passivity into agency, is also visible in Ratti. However, unlike the survivors of the Partition that Das interviews whose "being" is "*displace(d) . . . from the surface to the depth,*" and who thus experience a fragmentation between their outer and inner selves, Sobti emphasizes Ratti's ability to sustain the relationship between the inner and the outer world (italics mine). She writes, "Ratti's struggle is located in the waves that pass from surface to depth, and depth to surface, which form the grammar of sentient existence" (Sobti, *Lekhak* 19). Here Sobti uses a vocabulary that references language and processes of reading to describe Ratti's being. Rather than being "read" through a piercing of her "surface" to reach the "depth"—an extractive style of reading that Ratti associates with men such as Diwakar and Keshi—Sobti draws attention to a non-binary or deconstructed relationship between surface and depth, which is mediated by "waves." If Ratti operates as a kind of analogy to language, then Sobti is also insisting upon a redefinition of Hindi through forms of reading that do not seek to reveal a meaning *underneath* the text.

Ratti's view of herself is riven with a self-hatred engendered in her by the patriarchal voice that calls her desecrated, hideous, and frigid. Yet, in moments when she isn't actively reflecting on herself, that is, when the narrative voice becomes

externalized, we see her as an active subject of desire who demands parity. This duality, which appears as a shadowing of the patriarchal voice by Ratti's autonomous narrative but can also be thought of as an undulating movement between the two similar to the "waves" Sobti writes about, is perhaps most visible in the verse with which the narrative closes, as Ratti stands in an assertive posture awaiting Diwakar, without confirming whether she accepts him or not:

> Only the sky—
> In the sky you build no houses
> In the sky grow no flowers of the earth
> They simply do not
> They do not!
> No! (Sobti, *Surajmukhi* 96)

Ratti's infertility is now accompanied by the freedom of the "Sky," and a stubborn attachment to that freedom. While so far, the narrative has repeatedly metaphorized Ratti's body as the barren earth, owing to her infertility, for the first time we see the use of the metaphor of the sky, whose freedom she seemingly chooses over home and hearth. Although she wants Diwakar, we do not know whether she takes him. It is thus Ratti's refusal to detach mind (depth) and body (surface), and to normalize or accept the physical as well as social violence of patriarchy, that allows her to persist as a desiring subject. In *Surajmukhi*, Sobti takes the figure of the raped woman, and rather than placing her back into the hands of the nation or her male relatives as the passive site of the reproduction of patriarchy, invests her with desire and autonomy. It is particularly in this centering of female autonomy that the text writes an alternative to a nationalist, patriarchal, and communal Hindi.

While the text's use of modernism and its reconfiguration of the textual surface/depth binary becomes the site for the redefinition of Hindi, the scene of sexual fulfillment between Ratti and Diwakar, which is depicted in an efflorescent classical Sanskritic register, presents a contrast to the elisions and omissions that the text is otherwise riven with, without forgoing the text's preceding formal complexity. As a parallel to the barren landscape that has so far been used to represent Ratti's psyche, her pleasure is represented in terms of a vastly different landscape of lakes, forests, and caves.

> A calm breath rises and falls in the deep blue song of the night… Ratti begins to tremble, with a wish to once again lie with Diwakar. When Ratti lays her body down by the gentle, golden warmth of the dying fire, a tiredness spreads upon her eyelids. Joy, joy, amber dripping upon tender branches! Wandering fingers. The fire, like the coupling of two friends, a hesitant gratification of your flame. You have set the desert of Ratti's solitude aflame. I pray to you, give me one more moment, one more drop of yourself that I may see this light within me once more. Ratti raised her hand and summoned the flashing tip, and in the light that spread through her mind and her body, began to search for Diwakar again. Her hand moved with reverence from her neck to the very south of her body. Everything is in its place. Nothing has been destroyed. Everything is complete. Diwakar had reached into her depths and left her speechless, as if in prayer. She trembled and called out—"Diwakar!" (Sobti, *Surajmukhi* 87-88)

> [गहराती रात के नील संगीत में उठते–गिरते परिश्रान्त साँसों की लय...सहसा रत्ती को फिर से कँपाने लगी। ऐसी कि फिर दिवाकर में जा लेटे। मन्द होती लकड़ियों के हल्के–सुनहरे ताप के सामने रत्ती ने अपनी देह लिटा दी तो आँखों में अलसाई थकन झरने लगी। सुख। सुख। नरम टहनियों पर पड़ता रस का बौर! यहाँ–वहाँ भटकती उँगलियों के पोर। अग्निका, सखी–सखा के जुगल हो जाने की सी, तुम्हारी इस आँच की संदिग्ध परितृप्ति। रत्ती के मरु एकान्त में तुमने एक लहक लहकाई है। प्रार्थी हूँ, एक क्षण...एक कण मुझे और दे दे कि अपने विस्तार में दिव्या को एक बार और जेगा लूँ। हाथ उठा रत्ती ने लपलपाती शिखा का आह्वान किया और तन–मन में जग आए आलोक में फिर दिवाकर को खोजने लगी। आदरपूर्वक गले से धुर दक्षिण तक अपने पर हाथ फिराया। सभी कुछ अपनी जगह है। कुछ भी खंडित नहीं हुआ। सब समूचा है। दिवाकर द्वारा माप ली गई अपनी थाह से अवाक् रत्ती मानो किसी के आगे नमन होती हो। काँपकर पुकार की– "दिवाकर!"]

Here, we find the hegemonic register of Sanskritic Hindi appropriated for the explicit representation of female sexual pleasure and/or the use of such a register to render such a representation more 'respectable'. Even more significant is Sobti's overstepping of the dominant Sanskritic Hindi to reach for a classical register and appropriate 'tradition' for her own purposes, so that we find a Hindi that, despite being inflected with a Hindu tradition, operates as a language of transgression and pleasure rather than a language of chastity and female sexual virtue. Sobti's use of a Sanskritic register seemingly references tradition only to rewrite a literary and historical present that has been bequeathed upon her.[24] Thus, redefinition of the language in *Surajmukhi* takes the form of modernism as well as the classicism of the scene of Ratti's fulfillment, circumventing the problematic 'folk' through which standardization was undermined in *Mitro Marjani*.

Conclusion

Mitro Marjani and *Surajmukhi Andhere ke* rupture the connection between the female body, an official language, and a dominant nationhood situated within normative Hindi. Although Sobti employs radically different linguistic idioms in the novellas analyzed here, her literary samskara is one that at times disrupts and at others unquestioningly represents dominant mappings of femininity, land, and language upon one another. As protagonists, both Ratti and Mitro are non-reproductive and

[24] See Simona Sawnhey on Mohan Rakesh and Dharamvir Bharati in *The Modernity of Sanskrit*

sexually desiring subjects. While the parallelism of their bodies with land draws on a feudal/patriarchal milieu that was also appropriated by the nation-state, their narratives invest them with autonomy and—to a limited degree in the case of Mitro, but more so in the case of Ratti—allow them to resist appropriation by a masculine narrative.

Speaking of literary records of the Partition, Sobti states that "it is necessary to look past the barbarism of the present, it is important to save that which has remained untouched by violence" (Sobti, *Lekhak* 26). While she emphasizes the need to rewrite history as more than a record of violence, in other interviews, Sobti also notes that language itself is a historical record of reality, and that the appearance of language in multiple registers in her texts reflects an existing reality that cannot be encompassed in a standard register. The two novellas analyzed in this chapter embody both of these perspectives in different ways. In their assertion of feminine autonomy, both novellas undermine the association of Hindi with Hindu patriarchal nationalism. *Mitro Marjani* embodies a fluidity of language cultures that questions the drawing of communal borders and encapsulates female sexual agency, even though its idiom also reinforces violent cultural hierarchies. *Surajmukhi Andhere Ke* both writes female sexual autonomy in the person of Ratti and surfaces the trauma of communal violence as it was written upon the female body. At the same time, Sobti's use of modernism in *Surajmukhi Andhere Ke* also surfaces styles of reading that draw upon Ratti's embodiment of a resistant femininity and assertion of a complete selfhood in the face of patriarchal violence. Sobti's experiments in the two novellas highlight the ways in

which Hindi operated in the public sphere as a language encoding a deeply patriarchal national identity. In her own parallelism of land, language, and the female body, Sobti writes Hindi as a modern language that locates its autonomy through a feminist idiom.

Sobti's linguistic excursions and literary experiments both resist dominant nationalism and reference its emergence in the Partition. The next chapter turns to the work of Nirmal Verma to locate a similar duality of the nation's absent presence. Where Sobti's use of Hindi to articulate a feminine autonomy draws attention to the exclusion of that autonomy from the nationalized register of the language, Verma's travel narratives extrapolate Hindi from the nation, and use it to articulate a notion of cosmopolitanism that implicitly undermines nationalism.

Chapter 2

Translation, Empathy, and Form: Nirmal Verma's Grammars of Intimacy

[Translation, empathy, and intimacy as history]

In the late 1950s, about ten years after independence and the Partition, during which he assisted in relief work for refugees in New Delhi, Nirmal Verma traveled to Prague on a fellowship from the Czech Oriental Institute. While in Europe, Verma experienced the art and culture of a continent that was inseparable from his postcolonial experience, but also, in the mid-twentieth century, from the violence of nationalism. His presence in Europe granted Verma an outsider's perspective towards both Europe and India, which refracted his essays as well as his novels and short stories.[25] This chapter looks at Verma's 1968 novel *Ve Din*, and his travel memoir *Cheedon par Chandni* (published 1964)—both autobiographical texts that are based in Europe—to examine Verma's identity as a Hindi writer, and his relationship to Hindi. Read alongside Verma's essays in the collection *Shabd aur Smriti*, the texts become part of a "dichotomy" in his oeuvre—a word that he attributes to his critics—whereby his fictional writing evades the historical and the political, which are dealt with in his non-fictional writing. Exploring Verma's narrative negotiations of

[25] Since this dissertation focuses on linguistic experimentation in Hindi as they were taking place in the post-independence decades, I only briefly take into consideration Verma's later writing and pronouncements, on the basis of which he was frequently cast as a proponent of right-wing Hinduism by his critics. These pronouncements, however, are not entirely absent from his earlier oeuvre, and they particularly emerge in some of his essayistic writing, which I engage with here. Especially because Verma's Gandhiist views moved further towards the right later in his life, reading his early oeuvre through his later pronouncements would be problematic.

time and memory through the use of translation and modernist style, I argue that his fiction both changes the nature of Hindi and embeds Hindi with an aspiration for a cosmopolitan, transhistorical, and transracial empathy.

The analysis presented in this chapter begins with a distinction that Verma's writing sets up between literature and history as forms of referencing, remembering, or returning to the past. While Verma's fiction refuses to address history directly, and focuses instead on 'smaller' scales of intimacy and subjectivity, it nonetheless sublimates history into modernist style, so that despite its absence, history becomes an invisible force that shapes the text formally and stylistically. History is also, however, transcended in Verma's and his character's formation of cosmopolitan intimacies, which are mediated through a translation that deeply shapes the Hindi of his texts. Taken together, modernism and translation defamiliarize and denationalize Hindi as by using Hindi to depict a milieu from which it was absent, Verma infuses it with a non-national, cosmopolitan desire.

The locus of Verma's cosmopolitanism is both his attention to the (ahistorical) intimate, and a translatory idiom. At the same time, Verma's own identification with Hindi as his 'mother-tongue' also undermines the scale of the national by emphasizing his spiritual intimacy with the language. While his fiction sublimates the historical and/or subverts the national, those forms as well as the standard, national idiom of Hindi appear as central to his essays which, he argues, are the ground where he addresses history and politics directly. It is thus the autonomy from politics,

history, and materialism that Verma attributes to his fiction that allows him to develop a new idiom of Hindi.

The individual trapped in history

In an essay titled "Beauty and Ethics in Art," Verma describes Anna Akhmatova's poem "Requiem," written as a record of the Stalinist purges, as a "struggle" to turn the "individual, solitary experience into a memory that is shared by everyone" (Verma, *Shabd* 22). While every writer is "solitary" in his experiences, Verma writes,

> he is never alone in the memories that summon the experience and change it into a fiction. These are the collective memories within which each artist is bound to the other. This journey from the solitary experience to the collective memory illuminates not only the world of Anna Akhmatova's writing, but also the circumstances to which those creations are tied. (Verma, *Shabd* 22)

The arc that connects an individual recollection to history thus "illuminates" Verma's approach to literature, and is visible in *Ve Din*, which is haunted by a historical violence that it fails to name.

Set in Prague in the years following the Second World War, *Ve Din* depicts three days in the life of the narrator, who, like Verma in the 1950s, is a student living in a hostel, and a flâneur who moves with ease amongst the snow-covered streets, churches, and markets of Prague. The narrator's fluency in Czech and English finds him a job in the holidays as a translator for an Austrian tourist, Rayna Reimann, who is visiting Prague with her son for three days. As he shows Rayna around the city,

which has begun to feel like ‘home’ to him, the narrator gradually finds himself falling in love with her. Besides his meetings with Rayna, we also see the narrator in the company of a set of multilingual friends—TT, Franz, and Maria—who belong to different nationalities (Burmese, German, and Czech respectively). Franz's departure from Prague is imminent because he faces censorship upon his creative choices by the university where he is enrolled along with the other characters. His decision to leave, in turn, puts a strain upon his relationship with Maria.

Despite the multi-national configuration of the characters with whom the narrator interacts, and the centrality of translation to those interactions, in both the tracks upon which the narrative moves—the narrator’s time with Rayna, and with his friends—historical and national identities remain largely repressed. Although the narrative sporadically reveals small pieces of information about each character’s past, such as Franz’s upbringing in a family of Nazis and Rayna’s experience of forced labor during the Second World War, it refrains from substantially historicizing its characters. Rather, history seems to be relegated to a past that no longer impinges upon the present, and national identity is made to seem somewhat irrelevant.

The conspicuous absence of history in the narrative of *Ve Din* is surprising given Verma’s insistence in several interviews that the individual could not be severed from history. It was, further, the work of literature to record the influence of history upon the individual:

> I [. . .][26] feel that like astrology, history has something very deeply personal in our lives. I don't think that history, historical events, have nothing to do with us. Even though I may not be participating in a historical event (such as) the rise of Hitler, Stalin, and certain movements, communist parties [. . .] in (the) twentieth century, they do make inroads in the individual, very private lives of people. Sometimes, when people ask me about the social utility of (my) stories, I say, well, it is precisely whether what is happening in the broad daylight, and what is being printed in the newspapers, whether it has a certain resonance, and a parallel evocation in our private lives, which are the areas of silence which we are not able to articulate. And if a writer is able to capture the parallel consciousness within his fiction, I think he has done something of tremendous significance, because that is not there in history books or newspapers. (Verma, "Argument" Part 2 00:3:51-00:5:06)

While Verma's distinction between history as found in "history books or newspapers," and the "parallel consciousness" of living within history draws a distinction between history and lived experience as two kinds of time and realities that may overlap and intersect but are not the same, what is particularly interesting is his comparison of history with astrology, which highlights the individual's passivity and helplessness. This vulnerability of individuals in the face of history is perceptible in the lives of the characters of *Ve Din*, who are depicted as left behind or excluded from history, and deprived of agency over their lives. Thus, Franz and Maria's relationship is at the behest of the totalitarian control of the Stalinist state upon Czechoslovakia. While Franz can choose to leave Prague because of his dissatisfaction in his film program, without Maria being granted a visa, he must either face the loss of his relationship, or marry unwillingly. Franz's own desire to leave Czechoslovakia arises from the fact that existing censorship norms prohibit him from tackling certain subjects in his films. A similar helplessness is infused in the unseen

[26] Since Verma makes abundant use of ellipses in his writing to encapsulate the silences within language, I use bracketed ellipses to indicate words omitted by me. Ellipses without brackets are a reproduction of Verma's usage.

character of Yugoslav Malenkovich, whose melancholy is diverted into the strains of his guitar and accordion, as political exile bars him from visiting his wife and children in Belgrade. What we see here is a notion of politics that operates in exclusion of the lives of individuals, while at the same time closely surveilling and controlling those lives. The lives of Franz, Maria, and Malenkovich are impacted directly by the Soviet dictatorship and national borders that form the historical conditions of existence that Verma chooses not to address directly in the narrative. Instead, history is experienced as an invisible force shaping the characters' existence, and simultaneously, the narrative.

Although this powerlessness is engendered by the distant operation of history and politics—what in his essay Verma calls the "reality that is [. . .] shapeless, frightening, and beyond our understanding"—in an interesting slippage, the narrator refers to the part of one's life that is defined by history as "private lives" (Verma, *Shabd* 22; *Ve Din* 57). After a description of both his own and his friend TT's inability to sustain a meaningful relationship with their nationalities, the narrator refers to a shared "tradition … of staying out of each other's private lives" (Verma, *Ve Din* 57):

> It was not as much out of respect for each other's privacy, as because we knew that our interference would make no difference. This was not cynicism. A cynic would be someone who takes pride in his ideas and considers himself superior to others. We had no pride to speak of. We had come to know each other enough to know that there was no point in trying to help. You might help, but you could never give the other person what they needed, and in that case, you might as well not be helping at all. (Verma, *Ve Din* 57)

Where the phrase "private lives" here references the public/private binary that characterizes modern society, wherein the private is constituted by the individual's personal relationships that are either enshrined in domesticity or moving towards it, the narrator's statement about private lives blurs the difference between the public and the private. "Private lives" here become those parts of one's life that are defined by history and politics, the uncontrollable forces that cannot be helped by well-meaning friends. Rather than referring to the otherwise hidden functioning of desire, domesticity, or intimacy, it calls attention to an aspect of the narrator and his friends' existence that is shaped by politics and located within a larger history, such as the prohibitions upon Franz's work, Maria's inability to get a visa, or Malenkovich's inability to go back home.

In spite of the proximity of *Ve Din* and *Cheedon par Chandni* to the Partition of India and nation-building and Verma's own embedment in that historical moment, Verma's writing is rarely historical in the sense of displaying an awareness of its determination by history. In fact, it often seems unmoored from the narrative of "history books and newspapers" (Verma, "Argument" Part 2 00:5:00-00:5:06). Yet, even though the interweaving of the violent interconnected histories of India and Europe in the mid-twentieth century in Verma's fiction is often so subtle that it is difficult to discern, a preoccupation with the ways in which history operates to the inclusion or exclusion of the individual and with bureaucratic processes of maintaining national borders and managing flows across them betrays the enmeshing of these texts with the historical events that formed their 'backdrop.' Thus, the

characters of *Ve Din*, who rarely speak about history or express a sense of national belonging, nonetheless seem to be pinned down by and helpless before both, and historical determination appears in a repressed form as the very condition of their existence. This repression of history was itself a response to the proto-fascist forms that politics took, particularly in twentieth century Europe, including in Czechoslovakia during the 1960s, where the literary norm was to write about politics while rarely mentioning it. Verma's witnessing of censorship in Czechoslovakia and his beliefs in literature and history as separate but related spheres were reinforced during the 1975 Emergency in India, which was characterized by widespread repression of the media (though not so much of literature). Much like the work of the Czech writer Milan Kundera, which Verma translated to Hindi, and in which an intense preoccupation with eroticism stands in for the unnameable political-historical, Verma's representation of apolitical and often ahistorical friendship and love in *Ve Din* acts as a substitute for the overtly political.[27]

The historical and the intimate

In *Ve Din*, history and historical time comes to refer not only to the time of large-scale events that affect a large number of people, but also the time of the nation, bureaucracy, and the management of subjects and borders, as we see not only in the case of Maria and Malenkovich, but also in Rayna's haunting by the Holocaust. When

[27] See Verma's conversation with Udayan Vajpayee, Madan Soni, and Dhruv Shukla, published in the Ashok Vajpayee edited anthology *Nirmal Verma* (pp. 17-56).

Verma speaks of fiction as capturing what is "not there in history books or newspapers," he references a historical time as a space of overlap between the long duration of history, and the shorter duration of the newspaper, which records shifting borders, bureaucracies, and systems of control on a daily basis (Verma, "Argument" Part 2 00:5:00-00:5:06). In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson thinks about the newspaper through the lens of Walter Benjamin's concept of "homogenous, empty time," so that the newspaper comes to resemble a "novel whose author has abandoned any thought of a coherent plot" (24, 33n54). Inquiring about the relationship between the seemingly unconnected events reported in a newspaper, he points out the significance of "calendrical coincidence":

> The date at the top of the newspaper, the single most important emblem on it, provides the essential connection—the steady onward clocking of homogenous, empty time. Within that time, 'the world' ambles sturdily ahead. The sign for this: if Mali disappears from the pages of *The New York Times* after two days of famine reportage, for months on end, readers do not for a moment imagine that Mali has disappeared or that famine has wiped out all its citizens. The novelistic format of the newspaper assures them that somewhere out there the 'character' Mali moves along quietly, awaiting its next reappearance in the plot. (Anderson 33)

While the "calendrical time" of the newspaper, the nation, and of history "ambles sturdily ahead" in a secure succession of days and events, *Ve Din* offers another perspective of time, which hinges upon the individual's recollection of singular moments of intimacy (Anderson 26). The book's epigraph, drawn from Rilke's poem "Lament" highlights this act of attributing individual significance to a moment:

> (Of all the stars that perished long ago)
> I believe I know

which one
still lasts
and stands like a city, white
in the sky at the end of the beam of light[28]

If "the stars that perished long ago" point to the passage of linear time, the one that "stands like a city, white/in the sky" is the star/memory that has overcome the passage of time. For the narrator, the intimate memories of friendship and love embedded in the three days recounted in the narrative are equivalent to this star that "still lasts." Rather than being extinguished only to be replaced by other moments, the continuing light of the star that lasts calls for a recurring return to itself, and figures time in terms of a circularity. The individual here comes to be informed not by historical time, but by their own recollection of moments of intimacy.

This sense of recurrence as well as the isolation of the remembered days from other days is encapsulated in the title, which translates into "those days," and echoes throughout the text in a narrative voice that repeatedly underlines the act of return and remembrance. Sections of the narrative often seem to begin in media res, as if speaking of something that the reader has heard before, once again establishing the circularity of return. The first chapter, for instance, begins with the sentence "It would always be at this time, this part of the day" ["यही समय होता था। यही घड़ी।"] (Verma, *Ve Din* 9). Here, rather than stating what part of the day it is referencing, the narrative voice chooses to leave the referent unspecified, assuming the reader's shared knowledge of the subject. Similarly, phrases such as "someone had knocked on the door lightly" ["किसी ने धीमे से दरवाज़ा खटखटाया था"] without specifying this

[28] The verse appears in English, likely translated by Verma himself.

commonly held sense of time and place, silently gesture towards it: "(on that day/that afternoon/while I was sleeping) someone had knocked on the door lightly" as opposed to "someone had knocked on the door lightly" (Verma, *Ve Din* 11).

Small details such as the knock on the door and the time of the day also become integral elements of the landscape of the narrator's memory, wherein the memory of meeting Rayna and the feelings evoked by that meeting, for instance, are nestled within smaller movements or actions that become part of the memory and take on its aura, which emanates outwards from the moment of togetherness to the time before and after. The larger effect of the accumulation of small details in the narrative is to place the memory of intimacy at its center, and to claim greater significance for it than the historical juncture within which it is located. By obfuscating the history of the characters, the text presents them to us not as placed within a longer arc of historical and national determination, but in terms of the narrator's closeness with them. While we are given some information about the characters' historical background, the narrative remains in conversation with the immediate past of the narrator alone, rather than with any sense of a shared history.[29]

However, we also see that the historical temporality from which the narrator's memorialization is distinguished frequently interrupts that memorialization. Thus, when Rayna begins to recall her experiences during the Second World War and speaking about her husband Jacques, who was a survivor of a concentration camp, the

[29] This obfuscation of the past offers an interesting point of comparison to the fragmented recollections encountered in *Surajmukhi Andhere Ke*, where the past interjects in unintelligible fragments, and simultaneously remains hidden while constantly impinging upon Ratti's present. As in Sobti, here too, there is a disruption of linearity, although the past that interrupts Sobti's narrative is an individual one, whereas in Verma it is a historical one.

narrator's inscription of his own present upon it surfaces a tension between the historical and the intimate, as well as the narrator's need to dehistoricize Rayna in order to empathize with her. As in the case of his friends, with whom he shares a tradition of evading "private lives," the narrator wishes to put Rayna's past aside in order to be at ease with her:

> That evening, walking with her, I felt just as I would with Maria or Franz—she was with me, and that was enough. There was *nothing beyond it*—her past was *no longer a threat* to me. In fact, *it was nothing*. She was separate from it—and no matter how powerful it might have been—that evening, her being by my side—that was greater than it. It was greater than anything else. Because whatever was outside of that moment held *no meaning for me*. Every time this thought crossed my mind, I was filled with a strange joy. (Verma, *Ve Din* 159-60, my italics)
>
> [उस शाम पहली बार लगा था, जैसे मैं उसके साथ वैसे ही चल रहा हूँ, जैसे मारिया या फ़्रांज के साथ—वह मेरे साथ है, यही काफ़ी था। उसके परे कुछ भी नहीं था—उसका अतीत मेरे लिए ख़तरा नहीं था। वह कुछ भी नहीं था। वह उससे अलग थी—और चाहे वह कितना ही शक्तिशाली क्यों ना रहा हो—उस शाम उसका मेरे संग होना—यह उससे ज़्यादा था।वह सबसे ज़्यादा था। क्योंकि उसके बाहर जो उसका था, वह मेरे लिए कुछ भी नहीं था। और यह सोचते ही एक असम्भव-सी ख़ुशी मुझे घेर लेती थी।]

The repetitive nature of the narrator's speech ["nothing beyond it" ("उसके परे कुछ भी नहीं था"), "no longer a threat" ("ख़तरा नहीं था"), "it was nothing" ("वह कुछ भी नहीं था"), "no meaning" ("वह मेरे लिए कुछ भी नहीं था")] contains both an insistence upon overlooking the historical, and the pressure of the historical upon the intimate present. The narrative's attempts to write the intimacy of friendship and love are repeatedly disturbed by the voice of history that interjects like static, impinging upon, molding, and distorting that experience so that language becomes suffused with emptiness, as if canceling itself out. When at the end of his second day with Rayna the narrator learns of her proximity to the concentration camps, although he cannot point out what has

"happened," he finds himself "tormented" by something that he cannot articulate. What we see is an overwriting of the narrator's joy of spending time with Rayna with a void of perplexity:

> *Nothing* had happened between us. We had just spent the whole day together, and we had *not thought of anything*. What had happened was as unexpected as when a person climbs onto the stage in an auditorium and begins to say something that is not part of the script, but it doesn't upset you, because you know what they are saying needs to be said, and that those words cannot be ignored. No, you cannot ignore those words. (132)

Here too, we find a schizophrenic vocabulary of denial. Even as the narrator refers to "those words (that) cannot be ignored," the words themselves remain unarticulated in the text. Although the narrator emphasizes the difficulty of thinking about history in the present, or of seeing the intimate as a subset of the historical, his repeated emphasis on the unthinkability of historical events in that moment calls attention to history.

The sublimation of history into aesthetics

Cheedon par Chandni, Verma's travel memoir of Europe, presents us with a portrait of the youthful author as the bohemian intellectual in reckless pursuit of experiences, art, and culture. Although the memoir is not a fictional text, I draw on Vineet Gill's characterization of it as a rough bildungsroman, based on Verma's development of his own interiority, and its sense of movement, and based on the bildungsroman's own genealogy in the diary and travel memoir. However, Verma's inner journey is less linear than cumulative: each experience comes to be stored in a reserve of memories

that intermixes the past with the present, and it is this fluidity that comes to constitute the narratorial/authorial 'self.'

While traveling in Europe, Verma's attention is frequently drawn to both the material and immaterial presence of a violent history, which deeply inscribes the landscapes of the cities that he visits. In Berlin and Lidice, for instance, cities whose destruction by the Second World War was overtly visible, the 'force' of history once again presses in upon the writer's gaze and his words. Ruined public buildings and houses stand as concrete, tangible evidence of a violence that Verma is able to locate himself in, even though he does not directly refer to the violence of the Partition:

> Roaming around in the cities of Europe, I have often felt like an 'outsider.' Will I ever really be able to fully understand or feel the meaning that fascism has for Europe? Today, it is a part of its soul; in every way, a sin that is not only an inheritance of the past, but which every person carries within himself (sic).
>
> And then, walking amongst the ruins of Lidice, I felt for the first time that calling myself an outsider is somehow dishonest. Under the rubble of broken walls, a part of all our souls was buried … because each of us is a witness to the age in which we live, and by bearing witness, we are accountable too [क्योंकि जिस सदी में हम जीते हैं, हममें से हर व्यक्ति उसका गवाह है, और गवाह होने के नाते जवाबदेह भी]. (104)

As in the interview quoted earlier, where Verma speaks of fiction as an alternate record of "what is happening in the broad daylight, what is being printed in the newspapers," here too, he stresses the importance of "bearing witness" ("गवाह होना") and being "accountable" ("जवाबदेह") (104).

It is in his viewing of Bertolt Brecht's play *Terror and Misery,* which triggers thoughts about what the word "contemporary" means, that we find Verma's most concrete articulation of the pressure of history upon aesthetics:

> That night, watching (Brecht's) *Terror and Misery*, I was introduced to the word "contemporary" for the first time. If that word has a meaning, it is related to an aesthetic experiment in which every aspect of a person's being attains an unexpected meaning … when external/historical circumstances loom upon us like a large, chaotic shadow, a silent ghost that says nothing, but also does not leave us alone to get on with our lives. It is an unbearable force that works upon every human being, whether awake or asleep. To be freed of this ghost, some writers mold it into images of themselves—then, what is outside does not seem so alien or frightening. Kafka, and in a different sense, Sartre, were such writers. This is one way to come out of this dark tunnel—turning a subhuman ghost into a normal, ordinary reality using a personal symbol. (12-13)
>
> [उस रात 'टेरर एंड मिज़री' देखते हुए मैं पहली बार 'समकालीन' शब्द से परिचित हो पाया। यदि उसका कोई अर्थ है तो सिर्फ़ एक प्रयोग, जब आदमी के अस्तित्व की हर तह एक नए स्तर पर अप्रत्याशित अर्थ ग्रहण कर लेती है … जब बाह्य परिस्थिति एक बेडौल, विकृत छाया है (एक गूँगे दैत्य की मानिंद), जो न कुछ कहती है, न हमारे सामने से हटती है, एक असह्य-सा दबाव, जिसे हर मनुष्य सोते-जागते अपने पर महसूस करता है। कुछ लेखक हैं, जो इस 'दैत्य' से मुक्ति पाने के लिए उसे अपने एक आत्मपरक प्रतीक में ढाल लेते हैं—तब, 'बाह्य' इतना पराया, इतना डरावना नहीं रहता। काफ़्का, और एक दूसरे अर्थ में सार्त्र ऐसे ही लेखक हैं। यह एक रास्ता है, इस भयानक सुरंग से बाहर आने का—एक अमानवीय 'दैत्य' को निजी प्रतीक द्वारा साधारण, औसत वास्तविकता में ढलने की प्रक्रिया।]

Verma's use of the word "*dabav*," which can be translated into "pressure," a shaping force, once again characterizes history as something that acts upon the lives of individuals, who remain passive subjects. It is interesting that Verma thinks about the word "contemporary" ("समकालीन"), which denotes an immediate/present relationship to time, specifically in aesthetic terms to suggest that reality can only be understood by mediation through aesthetics–a formulation that is echoed in his ruminations upon Anna Akhmatova, where he describes art as the "struggle" to make sense of a reality that is "shapeless, frightening, and beyond our understanding" (Verma, *Shabd*, 22). Particularly interesting is his reference to an aesthetics of "experiment" ("प्रयोग"), wherein the individual's sense of self "attains an *unexpected*

meaning" ("अप्रत्याशित अर्थ"), thus gesturing towards the insertion of newness in the aesthetic experiment, and potentially towards a modernist aesthetic. If history is the haunting presence that the individual feels but cannot see or speak to directly, the only way for the writer to "free" oneself of this "ghost"—to understand it—is to "turn (it) [. . .] into an everyday, ordinary reality" using a "symbol" ("एक अमानवीय 'दैत्य' को निजी प्रतीक द्वारा साधारण, औसत वास्तविकता में ढलने की प्रक्रिया"). Verma directly calls attention to changing processes of meaning-making and representation, and the use of language. It is thus through a formal, modernist experiment, it would seem, that the operation of history can be comprehended at a scale that is not merely that of the "calendrical time" of the newspaper (Anderson 26).

In *Ve Din*, there are several instances where the text references a modernist aesthetic through texts and artworks that were seen as embodying it—a disheveled TT after a brawl appears in terms of a scene out of a Hitchcock film; a description of a quiet afternoon as an Italian movie; a portrait of Nijinsky and Stravinsky in Franz's living room during the same afternoon; the music of Bartok and Stravinsky, and gypsy songs that formed the foundation of much of the modernism of Bartok and of Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*. In addition to these references, a letter that the narrator receives from his sister, the only fleeting glimpse the text provides of an identity beyond his status as a student in Prague, models a modernist reading. The letter, which remains unopened throughout the novel, presses in much like the force of history upon the reader's understanding of the narrator. When handed to the narrator, the envelope exhibits a "window" on account of the postage stamp being cut out by a

stamp-collecting doorkeeper (mockingly referred to here as St. Peter). The narrator observes the disconnected words that tumble out of this opening with keen attention to the disrupted integrity of language:

> There was a hole in the envelope where St. Peter had cut out the postage stamp with his scissors. My sister's words peeped through that hole. In this manner, they appeared strange to me. Within full sentences, they may have bored me, but here, separated from their adjoining words and peeping through the hole, they seemed rather inert and mysterious. Behind them were my sister, home, the corners of my house … I kept it back in my pocket. That night, I did not want to go there. (Verma, *Ve Din* 24)

While he had initially met the letter with disdain, the defamiliarization of his sister's words, and their ability in that form to signal indirectly towards her, his home, and the corners of his house, rather than directly describe them to him—in other words, the loss of their realist referentiality—arouses his curiosity.

However, the narrative not only references but also embodies a modernist sublimation of history into aesthetics. During an afternoon spent in the company of his friends, after hearing Franz express his impatience to leave in the face of the unlikelihood of Maria being granted a visa without marriage, the narrator writes: "We sat there silently. This must have been that limit beyond which we were helpless towards each other. It felt as if we were tied to something beyond us, and each knot of these ties, each of their ends, were in the hands of someone else [. . .] invisible to us" (Verma, *Ve Din* 62). Here, the narrator's thoughts reference both, the invisible force of history, and the silence into which it is transformed in the individual. Soon after, when Franz plays the piano, the narrator's attempt to represent its evocations linguistically results in a profusion of fragments:

> With the very first note, we knew it was an afternoon of Bartok. One of those Hungarian gypsy tunes [. . .] Franz had his back towards us. It was good that he could not see us. We could only hear him, as if we were hearing the slow dripping of water in the darkness. A tangled joy. Not even joy, but the moment before it, which is the nameless, endless terror of the gypsy tune. It isn't fear. It is the cowardliness of choosing between taking something and giving up. Like a child on a swing, whose heart sinks as the swing sinks low, but who emits a scream as soon as it rises—who has given up the fear of falling, but not yet embraced the ecstasy of rising. (Verma, *Ve Din* 65)

The negation of successive images through which the narrator tries to describe his feelings embodies a failure of language in describing what can only be contained in the alternative "language" of music.

Besides its substitution by silence and music, we also see language substituted by unorganized sound, such as the audible hush that the narrator comes upon almost mystically on a day of false spring:

> Then, all of a sudden I heard that sound. Not even a sound—barely a murmur [आवाज़ भी नहीं–महज़ एक सरसराहट], buried in the snow and sunshine. I was always caught unawares by this voice when I was alone, or perhaps it was when I was alone that I could hear this voice. It would come from the sea—but I was not sure if it was the sound of the sea. It could only have been the wind—sharp, white, and shapeless. Or maybe the noise of the city, shapeshifting as it moved between old buildings. A note dropping in the midst of the houses—murmuring upon the keys of trees, rooftops, alleyways, a brown whisper moving upon the whiteness of snow. (Verma, *Ve Din* 55)

Language turns synesthetic, describing sound through texture, color, and shape as "sharp white and shapeless" ("तीखी सफ़ेद और आकारहीन"). The barely audible "murmur" (सरसराहट) that the narrator hears in this instance is a parallel to the sound of the river which the narrator describes to Rayna:

> "It's the sound of the river," I said. "It stands apart from the sound of the wind." For a while, we listened silently. From high up, it was nothing but a soft lapping sound. Sometimes it would fall quiet. Then the wind would intervene… between them and that sound… a white loneliness. Then again it

> would rise, of its own accord, like a weak emphasis, as if it were desperate to free itself from the wind.
> [. . .]
> "You can always recognize the sound of the river," I insisted.
> [. . .]
> "If you listen, you will know. It is something dark and deep." (Verma, *Ve Din* 115)

The description of the sound of the river as a "weak emphasis" ("कमज़ोर आग्रह") directly figures sound in terms of speech that is overpowered by something greater, as if the sound of the river were the voice of the individual swept away in the flow of historical time.

This idea of the "murmur" as an alternative to language appears in Fredric Jameson's analysis of the modernism of William Carlos Williams' poem *Paterson*, where deaths in the waterfall, "conceived as a kind of infinite murmur of language and expression," gesture towards the inability to speak (9). Jameson's reading of *Paterson* compares its use (or failure) of language to what he calls the "Utopian function" of language, the "idea of a purification of language, a recreation of its deeper communal or collective function, a purging of everything instrumental or commercial in it" (8). This "Utopian language," which can be seen as referencing the nation, appears either as presence or as absence in the modernist text according to Jameson, so that in the work of Williams he finds "the very failure of an American language itself, its silences, its incoherencies and inarticulate outcries, its awkwardness and un-European clumsiness and lack of rhetorical grace or elegance" (8). Jameson's attention to the modernist undermining of a language that is otherwise representative of a national identity is significant here as it highlights the subversion

of the national as an effect of linguistic experiment. Modernism is an "aesthetic response [. . .] generally by way of formal, structural and linguistic invention" to "a radically altered situation" (Jameson 157). In the specific case of European modernism, the "radically altered situation" is provided by the displacement of a "significant structural segment of the economic system" to an "elsewhere"—the removal of production to the colonies; what is modernist is the transformation of the 'real' into modernist style, an aestheticization that will, however, always "have something missing about it, but in the sense of a privation that can never be restored or made whole simply by adding back the missing component" (Jameson 157).

For the postcolonial subject, the juncture of the mid-twentieth century becomes such a "radically altered situation," where the migration and losses of the Partition are hidden from view by the narratives of national development. In *Ve Din*, both Verma's memory of the violent beginnings of India's nationhood through the Partition and the violent disintegration of the nation form in the metropolis—points that constitute the historical context for the novella—are sublimated into modernist style. The pressure of history thus appears not only through a dislocation onto the intimate, but also through transformation into an affective and synesthetic landscape where it takes the shape of sound, silence, and music—forms that in their proximity to language call to mind its failure. It is this use of modernist style that leads to language not re-presenting, but rather becoming marked with history.

However, what we read is not only the failure of language as a concept, but also the failure of a proto-national language, that is, Hindi, which, like English in

William's *Paterson*, comes to be traced with "silences," "incoherencies and inarticulate outcries," "awkwardness," "clumsiness and lack of rhetorical grace or elegance" (Jameson 8). As we will see below, this failure of language not only embeds modernist style, but also creates a new Hindi that, instead of referencing the nation, simultaneously references alternate scales of the cosmopolitan and the intimate.

Travel, translation, cosmopolitanism

In his examination of Mexican and Indonesian "nationalist" novels, Anderson draws attention to the content of these novels as painting a picture of "sociological solidity" which puts the reader "in a world of plurals: shops, offices, carriages, kampungs, and gas lamps [. . .] we-the-Indonesian-readers are plunged immediately into calendrical time and a familiar landscape" (30, 32). For Anderson, it is the creation of this familiar landscape, the placement of the character that the text calls "our young man" within a world that is shared by both the narrator and the readers, that mediates a sense of the nation as an "imagined community" (25). Foundational to the formation of this imagined community is the existence of a shared language through which the public sphere comes into being. *Ve Din*'s repudiation of this imagined community–the public sphere that articulates a nation into being through the use and evolution of a shared language–then takes place not only through the use of modernist form, whose temporality distinguishes it from the "calendrical" temporality of the novel and the

newspaper, but also through its placement of a proto-nationalist language in a milieu that is unrecognizable to the readers of that language. As it does so, *Ve Din* chooses the lived community of transnational friendship over the "imagined community" of the nation.

In *Ve Din*, the sublimation of history and the nation into modernist style and the intimate is accompanied by the surfacing of cosmopolitan communities founded through translation. Not only characters, but also their languages, which otherwise act as symbols of national identity and culture, become defamiliarized as they are placed in relationships of exchange and negotiation with and adjustment to other languages. While Hindi is not actually a part of this system of defamiliarization and exchange as no one other than Verma and the narrator speak it, in both *Ve Din* and *Cheedon par Chandni*, it becomes part of the system as the language into which the entire milieu, including translations and defamiliarizations between other languages, are translated.

In his lecture "What is Modernism?" Raymond Williams describes metropolitan cities such as Paris, Vienna, Berlin, London, New York—many of which Verma visited during his stay in Europe—as "transnational capitals of an art without frontiers," and "the most appropriate locale for art made by the restlessly mobile émigré or exile" (50). If Verma was one of the many writers who—albeit in the wake of European modernism—was drawn to the cosmopolitanism of Europe as the "émigré" or "exiled" artist, his writing in Hindi is at the same time a reversal as it represents this cosmopolitanism by means of a postcolonial language, and through the gaze of a postcolonial writer.

However, Verma's evasion of the historical in his fiction determines the invisibility of that postcolonial perspective which rarely, if ever, surfaces as an acknowledgment of colonial history. Instead, ahistoricism—a forgetfulness of past racial and colonial violence—is what allows the characters of both *Ve Din* and *Cheedon par Chandni* to form friendships with each other, and as such, contains a desire for cosmopolitan and universal forms of empathy that transcend racial and national differences. In *Ve Din*, this cosmopolitan desire is represented through the narrator's embedment in the cityscape of Prague as a 'local' despite being a foreign student, which requires a transcendence of differences of language, race, and nationality to which translation is essential. Early in the narrative, a passage about the overlapping translations through which conversations between the narrator and his friends take place offers a glimpse of the density of translation in the text:

> (Franz) was not very fluent in English. He was German, and he knew very little English, and even less Czech . . . when he couldn't find the English word for what he was trying to say, he would tell the German to Maria, who would translate it for us into Czech. Maria knew English, but preferred to speak in Czech, which Franz did not speak. TT and I did not speak German. And sometimes, in a rush to say something, we would forget what language to use with whom. (Verma, *Ve Din* 57)

A similar description of translational exchanges appears in *Cheedon par Chandni* when Verma describes the failure of language and translation at an international festival in Vienna that brings together representatives from different parts of the world: "There were all kinds of people in that crowd: Iraqi, American, Polish… When language would fail us, we would speak in gestures, and when those too would fail, we would just laugh" (135). Much like the autobiographical narrator of *Ve Din*,

in *Cheedon par Chandni*, Verma encounters a number of languages and linguistic cultures, all of which he navigates through his knowledge of English and Czech. In both texts, translation becomes a tool for the leveling of historical and political difference, and while this largely takes place through English and Czech, the translations themselves are retranslated, or at times transcribed, into Hindi, so that beyond the narrative, Hindi too is introduced into the translational economy of this cosmopolitanism. For instance, in *Cheedon par Chandni*, while some parts of a conversation with two Canadian women is translated, some English words, phrases, and utterances are left untranslated and are merely transcribed, and at times the English is not even transcribed, such as when Verma writes in the diary of one of the women, "Alice, let us pray that here in Europe, both of us may succeed in overcoming our inhibitions" (140).

In either text, Hindi appears less as a language in its own right, and more as a thin film that covers over other languages—one which is frequently broken by other languages. The experience of reading a Hindi cathected with translation, where one language is invested with the rhythms of another, or even rhythms that belong to neither language, is often alienating. For instance, in *Ve Din*, Rayna invites the narrator to have a seat by saying "बैठ जाइए, मैं अभी आती हूँ" (Verma, *Ve Din* 70). In a uniform English translation, this may be rendered as "Please have a seat, I'll be back in a minute." However, the literal translation of the awkward Hindi phrase "*baiṭh jāie*" would be a strangely authoritative sounding "Sit down" that captures Rayna's discomfort with English. The discomfort in a language that is not one's own is also

referenced in the narrator's compulsion to use the formal second-person pronoun with Maria in Czech, even though she uses the informal second-person pronoun—both of which are easily translated into "*tum*" and "*tu*" in Hindi. It is not only the inclusion of unfamiliar turns of phrases that defamiliarizes Hindi. Often, parts of the conversations between TT and the narrator, both of whom are fluent in English, are translated into Hindi with a literalness that estranges Hindi. For instance, the phrase "तुम क्या सोचते हो?" is a literal translation of "what do you think," but is less apt in Hindi than "तुम्हें क्या लगता है?" (what do you feel). In addition to the translations taking place between characters, the multilingualism of the novel also comes through in phrases that read as if they were first thought in English, such as "looking at your own city through a stranger's eyes" (Verma, *Ve Din*, 74). Equally, there are English phrases that are left untranslated, and are only transcribed into Hindi.

Commenting upon the suffusion of translation in Verma's writing, particularly in *Ve Din*, Harish Trivedi calls Verma's Hindi "resourceful," and credits him with "extending the capacity of [the] language" (00:16:09). According to Trivedi, one of the ways in which Verma accomplishes such an expansion or "extension" is through "the hidden elements of English brought in deliberately [. . .] into Hindi [which] are not accidental" (00:14:35). Trivedi goes on to suggest that such experimentation bore not only the imprint of English, but also of Czech, a language with which Verma's deep familiarity had developed through the translation of Czech writers into Hindi. In a panel discussion with Verma and other writers, Trivedi also attributes to Verma "an attempt to change the behavior of Hindi," and "experiments that have made Hindi

more flexible" (Verma, "Silence" 75). The defamiliarization of Hindi in Verma's writing that we see in his use of modernist style is then exacerbated by the extensive use of translation. Such usage reveals Verma's Hindi not only as the medium of writing but also as an object with shifting significations.

Ve Din and *Cheedon par Chandni*, further, are not only layered with translation and experiments, but offer translations of foreign landscapes. This traveling of a language with the writer complicates the embedment of language and writerly identity within a sense of place and a national/regional location. Examining the cosmopolitanism of modernism, Williams describes modernism as an "endless border-crossing at a time when frontiers were starting to become much more strictly policed and when, with the First World War, the passport was instituted" (50). This process, he claims, ultimately led to the "naturalizing" of the idea of language as "*non*-natural" (50). For Williams, the "endless border-crossing" of modernism in the face of the policing of borders was a contestation of language as an extension of nationality and culture. Not only was language no longer "naturally" embedded in one landscape, but its placement in unfamiliar landscapes and in proximity to other languages and worldviews also highlighted the artificial nature of its descriptive abilities, among others. We see precisely these forms of "border-crossings" in *Ve Din* and *Cheedon par Chandni*, where the use of translation and modernist style act as complementary strategies to defamiliarize and denaturalize textual language as well as the language of the text, that is, Hindi.

The (immigrant) Hindi writer

In her book, *Cosmopolitan Style*, Rebecca Walkowitz analyzes writers who are on the one hand considered foundational to the category of British and/or English literature, and on the other seen as pushing the boundaries that demarcate those categories. Examining the relationship between national affiliation and narrative style, she asks the question, "What does it mean, today, to be a British novelist, or even an English writer?" (18). Walkowitz notes that while the categories of "British novelist" and "English writer" are often lapsed into one another, membership in either category is riven with contradictions arising from the intertwinement of questions of language, literary style, and national belonging. Thinking about style and experimentation as political categories, Walkowitz examines Sartre's rejection of modernist style and his subsequent embrace of it, particularly in the form that it took in the work of the négritude poets who, Sartre argued, will "speak (French) in order to destroy it" (Sartre qtd in Walkowitz 25). Further quoting Sartre, Walkowitz continues, "the négritude poet aims to 'de-Frenchify' French words by 'break(ing) their usual associations' and 'violently' bringing them together with unfamiliar images and topics" (25). Strategies such as the "break(ing) (of) usual associations" and making "new" and/or "violent" connections "do not simply offer alternatives to national affiliation; they attempt to make national culture less homogenous" (25). The disassociation of language with anticipated processes of meaning-making that is effected by modernism, Walkowitz

argues, can allow for the denationalization of a language that is otherwise seen as integral to a homogenous national identity.

Although the experience of racial violence and colonialism is intrinsic to the new associations cathected into French by the experiments of Négritude, Walkowitz inverts the violence and foreignness of colonialism by thinking in terms of immigration. Drawing on Michel de Certeau's discussion of "the paradigmatic tactician" and Raymond Williams on the effect of immigration upon modernism, Walkowitz states that "immigrants add themselves to national cultures, which are then transformed in the process" (26). What is significant to the formation of modernist style is therefore a foreignness that could/can be located equally through colonialism—a migration from the center to the periphery—and immigration—a migration from the periphery to the center. In the case of Verma, both these movements take place simultaneously: on the one hand, Verma moves from the colonial periphery to the center, and on the other, with regard to Hindi, he moves from the center to periphery (albeit in a postcolonial, not a colonial framework).

Walkowitz emphasizes that Sartre saw négritude poetry as potentially changing how literature functions as a "social institution," and as allowing Afro-French writers to "alter descriptive methods, which are embedded in the French language of the past" (25). Verma's experiments with translation in Hindi can be seen to similarly "alter descriptive methods" that are embedded in standard Hindi, and thus disrupt Hindi and Hindi literature's nationalist affiliations.[30] It is the use of "altered

[30] While it may seem a bit contradictory to apply analyses of the use of colonial language to the use of a proto-national language, I am emphasizing here that a "national language" embodies its own modes

descriptive methods" such as translation, defamiliarization, and modernist style that allow him not only to narrate but also to signify cosmopolitan desire and transnational, transracial, and transhistorical empathy through Hindi.

This intertwinement of the questions of language, literary style, and national belonging are central to Verma's identity as a Hindi writer, which was in part constructed through interviews, conversations, and essays. In his biography of Verma, *Here and Hereafter*, Vineet Gill situates the writer in a longer tradition of Hindi writing that historically drew on regional/national and international sources. Gill frames Verma within a tradition of world literature and pays close attention to his engagement with Europe not only as a location, but also as an idea or an "invention" (Gill, Introduction).[31] Reading Verma in relation to other writers who wrote in or about Europe such as Jorge Luis Borges and John Berger, Gill argues that for these writers, Europe was not "an inheritance" but rather "an invention—it was a utopia that denoted openness, cultural convergence, modernity, and individuality" (Introduction). From this perspective, Verma's travels in Europe—particularly in Eastern Europe—were not a pursuit of the colonizer, but rather of experiences that would allow him to engage with European art, literature, and politics while also

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of colonialism by marginalizing other proximate languages as 'dialects,' and in the case of India, by establishing a hegemony even over other regional, standardized languages. The English that Verma infuses into his Hindi is therefore not a marker of colonialism but of dehomogenizing a hegemonic language. While there has been a robust discourse around the indigenizing of colonial languages in the Francophone as well as Anglophone context, my research attempts to take this discourse into the realm of national language literatures to complicate the nexus between the nation, language, literature, and belonging. For the indigenizing of colonial languages, see Derrida, *Monolingualism of the Other*; Chow, *Not Like a Native Speaker*.

[31] Gill makes an important argument against regional literatures being considered "provincial," in order to counter the skewed emphasis of the concept of 'world literature' upon the metropolis, metropolitan languages, or the colony-metropole binary. For other arguments highlighting the significance of the local over the world, see Nerlekar and Zecchini, and Orsini.

exposing him to a European culture that was neither Anglophone nor aggressively imperialistic. Although Gill's emptying of the signifier 'Europe' of its racialized and imperialistic past is somewhat problematic, his claim that "Europe brought (Verma) into contact with a variety of literary traditions that were contiguous yet dissimilar, provincial yet international at the same time" is useful (Introduction). It suggests that Verma's travels not only opened up new ways of thinking about aesthetics and politics, but also reconfigured cosmopolitanism for him as a concept that was no longer determined entirely by colonial influence.

This reconfigured notion of a cosmopolitanism that evades colonial hegemony comes up in Verma's interview with the Tamil writer P. Krishnan, where he notes that his decision to write in Hindi as well as his translations of writers such as Karel Čapek, Milan Kundera, and Bohumil Hrabal from Czech into Hindi emanated from a desire to overcome reliance on the colonizer's language. In the interview Verma states, "We should be wary of discovering global literature only through English. We must keep a direct relationship with French, Russian, Czech, German, and Swedish languages, so that in the context of translation, we can use our understanding and choose such writers and pieces of literature that will be of interest to Indian readers" (21-22). Verma's writing in Hindi about his travels in Europe can therefore be seen as such an attempt to sustain a "direct relationship" with the European languages that he names. This need to redefine Hindi for the Hindi reader was accompanied by Verma's belief in the relationship between writing and travel. In emphasizing the need to

"have direct relationships" with foreign languages, Verma is espousing an idea of Hindi as a language of translation and cosmopolitanism.

Gill's biography also attributes to Verma an internationalism that was founded upon travel and a writerly engagement with art, literature, and culture, and because of this, he claims, was not a "rootless cosmopolitanism" (Chapter 4). While it is difficult to accept Gill's salvaging of Verma from accusations of rootlessness and Eurocentrism that have been made on several occasions, given that Verma did in fact spend a decade in Europe while rarely returning to India, and rarely writing about India, Verma's decision to write in Hindi can be seen as one of the points where a connection with his "roots" is sustained. By articulating his European experience in Hindi, Verma was making that experience his own, and testing it out on the grounds of his own realm of experience and meaning-making. In fact, Verma's extensive writing about Europe, including *Ve Din* and his memoir *Cheedon par Chandni*, is foundationally the translated recollection of experiences that would have taken place originally in Czech and English, into which many other languages—French, Danish, German, Icelandic, and others—were being translated. By engaging with European culture and languages through Hindi, Verma takes Hindi out of national boundaries and its embedment in the nation. Thus, his engagement with European literature, culture, and history in *Ve Din* and *Cheedon par Chandni*, while being a writerly exploration, also serves a Hindi audience, and in doing so invests both the Hindi language and the Hindi readership with cosmopolitan desire.

At the same time, however, the category of the 'Hindi writer' remains deeply ensconced within a particular set of nationalized and localized qualities. While writing in Hindi makes Verma a Hindi writer, the category of the 'Hindi writer' is complicated by him through the new associations that he brings to the language by way of modernism and translation. What we thus find in his writing is thus a cosmopolitanism that, in Walkowitz's words, "abjures" national affiliation by disrupting the constitution of national identity through language (13). Verma figures himself as well as the narrator of *Ve Din* not as proto-national but as cosmopolitan, non-national subjects, albeit ones that are articulated in a proto-national language. Further, his experiments with modernism and translation in Hindi lead to the texturizing of a hegemonic language that is widely instrumentalized for nationalism in its standard, homogeneous form.

However, Verma's "abjuring" of national affiliation takes place not only through the coupling of cosmopolitan desire and modernist Hindi, but also through the appropriation of Hindi as a language of his own spiritual makeup. In addition to the translations that make up the fabric of Hindi in *Ve Din* and *Cheedon par Chandni*, the emphasis on memory as a central aspect that informs Verma's fiction means that the idiom he uses here is intensely personal and shaped by its articulation of "solitary experiences" in the form of individual memories and intimacies (Verma, *Shabd* 22). An example of this idiom, in which translation and memory merge, is a loosely translated quote from Proust in *Cheedon par Chandni*, through which Verma described his experience of walking along the Seine in Paris:

> A wanderer like me, who has been living away from home in alien lands for years, is not surprised to discover that the places where we have lived don't belong to the world of 'space.' In fact, each place is a small slice of our past lives—one moment in a series of passing moments that leave impressions on us. A lasting memory of how something looked is nothing but the pain of a moment that has passed … and the old houses, streets, alleys, are as fleeting as these years. (132)

In chapters that show a distinct influence of impressionism, Verma uses fragments and dream sequences to describe the feelings and memories evoked in him by certain scenes. In these chapters, the writer's mind's eye moves fluidly between vastly different space-times, the connecting thread between them being only his own memory.

Although, considering the importance of English to Verma's navigation through Europe, it may have served as a more accessible medium for his travel narrative, it is significant that in both *Ve Din* and *Cheedon par Chandni*, Verma chooses to undertake the additional work of translating his European experience into Hindi, retaining for himself a consciousness of a language that was alien to the context in which he was writing. Thus, when asked by P. Krishnan why he chose not to write in English as some writers of his generation did, Verma explains, "(m)y stories and my novels are the product of my emotional universe, and the language of my inner universe is Hindi" (P. Krishnan, 57). Unlike Krishna Sobti, Verma does not argue for Hindi's supremacy based on its capacity to absorb other languages, but rather privileges it as his mother-tongue and embeds it with a personal significance–a linguistic and spiritual intimacy–that circumvents the nation. As such, the language—like Verma's own identity in *Cheedon par Chandni* and that of his characters in *Ve Din*—is divested of its violent national past and detached from its

hegemonic status in national language debates. Neither Verma and the narrator's memories nor the idiom in which they are articulated activate a relationship of the language with national history. Instead, they appropriate the language as an intimate object, and use it as a tool for narrating cosmopolitan intimacies.

The proto-national Hindi of Verma's essays

The experimental idiom of Hindi that Verma employs in *Ve Din* and *Cheedon par Chandni* however, stands in contrast to the idiom that appears in his non-fictional writing and commentary. Thus, the essays collected in *Shabd aur Smriti* (*Words and Recollections*, containing essays written mostly between from 1972 to 1974), exhibit a distinctly standardized Hindi that does not, for instance, lend itself to translation (or carry the imprint of it) in the way that the Hindi of *Ve Din* and *Cheedon par Chandni* does. Where the Hindi of his fiction is modernist, cosmopolitan, and translational, the Hindi of his essays appears as relatively uniform, standardized, and even Sanskritic. The alternative language *saṃskāra* of these essays, further, accompanies a shift in how Verma deals with his subject matter as well. Verma saw his fictional output and his essays as complementary to each other, each illuminating different aspects of the same problems. Where the former built upon the silent and unseen pressures of history upon the individual as well as upon the written word, the latter elaborated upon the historical underpinnings of fiction. The essays, much more so than the fiction, become a space for Verma to conduct a historico-philosophical exploration of

the nation, language, and literature. As such, the essays are also an alternative mode through which Verma engages with his readers, and even tells the reader how to read his fiction. It is, further, through his essays that he inserts himself within the discourse around Hindi and Hindi literature. Even as Verma changes the nature of Hindi in his fiction and casts it as a language of intimacy rather than the heritage of the nation, in the essays, Hindi is used to mediate both his individual and writerly relationship to the nation. The standardized and modernist idioms of Hindi thus open up different forms of thinking for Verma.

In an early 1990s interview with the journalist Tarun Tejpal, Verma makes a distinction between one's beliefs ("ideologies") and one's artistic practice. When asked if his shift from Marxism to Gandhian politics after his return from Europe led him to "alter (his) artistic sensibility," Verma replies, "this is a peculiar thing—one can have ideologies and thoughts on one level, and an entire experiential world on a different level, and they may not meet as clearly as we wish them to meet" (00:9:48-00:10:00). Although Verma draws attention here to a dissonance between literature or the "artistic sensibility" from politics, his statement also gestures towards a "meeting" or a point of contact, albeit one that is not as "clear [. . .] as we wish" it to be. This awareness of a point of contact appears frequently in Verma's discussions of the differences between the essay form and fiction. In the essay "Beauty and Ethics in Art," quoted earlier in this chapter, he writes: "The form of each story is determined by the subject matter of the writer's life, and because the warp and woof of the subject matter is the experiences, challenges, and decisions of the time, the

search for a form is tied deeply to the search for ethics, and for the right language"[32] (Verma, *Shabd* 21). This meditation upon the search for the "form of each story" is followed by the question, "Is this not the point where a writer ceases to create a narrative as an indifferent 'aesthete,' and instead turns the creative process itself into the prestige of an ethical struggle?" (21). Although Verma's response to Tejpal speaks of fiction as enjoying a certain degree of independence from the writer's political allegiances, claims, and beliefs, the essay cited here insists on narrative's determination by historical and material circumstances, contained within a notion of 'ethics.' Much like his belief in the "dabav" or the invisible force of history upon narrative, in his capacity as a writer of fiction, Verma abdicates any conscious or agential responsibility of the politics of his fiction. Yet the writer's engagement with ethics takes place in a material and historical world that, unbidden, determines the form of the story.

In yet another interview, with Sukant Deepak, Verma sets up the relationship between his essays and his fiction in terms of a complementarity when he states that "The questions that I cannot raise in the limited frame of my short stories and novels are raised in my essays" (par. 11). Contradicting the many readers and critics who "love my fiction but hate me for my articles and essays," and who "think there is a lot of dichotomy in me as a writer," Verma states that his identity as a writer would be incomplete without one or the other: "I am certainly not catering to different people but different layers of sensibilities in the same person" (par. 11). A similar notion is

[32] The original text is "the search for morality, the right words, the right names".

expressed in his response to Tejpal's question about politics and the "artistic sensibility," where he says, "Whatever I felt about Gandhianism and about culture, I began to write in my essays, and the essays were a part of my thinking which I thought I would not be able to capture in the emotional images of my stories. But I can do it conceptually in my essays" ("Writer at Work" 00:10:00-00:10:19).

Here, Verma sets up his fiction and essays as "complementary" because they were dealing with the same issues, even as the formal differences led to a surfacing of different aspects of those issues. While in the interview with Deepak, Verma refers to fiction as allowing him a "limited frame" for engaging with issues of historical and political significance such as "industrialization, religion and secularism," with Tejpal, he draws attention to the "emotional" images that develop in fiction, and compares them to the "conceptual" possibilities of the essay form. A brief aside in his preface to *Shabd aur Smriti* where he traces his interest in writing essays to his school days, when one was not "allowed" to write stories in school—an injunction that clearly valued 'rational' thought over the imagination—also points towards this difference between the two forms (Verma 12). This separation is clearest towards the end of Verma's 1975 preface to *Shabd aur Smriti*, where he writes about essays and narrative fiction as dealing with two different worlds:

> There is the world of time (mortality), which contains illusion, pain, and death. And there is the world of eternity (immortality), where beauty, peace, and independence reside. Our ordinary experiences take place in the world of temporality, but in moments of meditation and remembrance, we are allowed a glimpse into that other world.
>
> For me, the essay is a thing of one world, and fiction of the other—but sometimes [. . .] I find the line between the two beginning to blur. (13)

For Verma, if essays allow the writer an embedment in history and an agential "conceptualization" of ideas—in other words, an apt medium for the writer's politics—fiction is free from the writer's political inclinations, although it continues to be determined indirectly by history.

In this regard, the difference between the Hindi idiom of Verma's fiction and essays is worth observing. In contrast to the modernist and translatory Hindi in which he writes *Ve Din* and *Cheedon par Chandni*, the Hindi of Verma's essays lacks the element of translation, and shows an affinity to a more 'national' and standardized Hindi. It is also in these essays—and rarely in his fiction—that Verma begins to formulate what were later read as his "conservative"[33] and essentializing notions of Hinduism, Indian civilization, and language. Verma's pronouncements about his essays and his fiction betray the belief that while a 'standardized' language is necessary for developing the historical and political ideas that the writer is directly expounding upon in the essay, fiction's autonomy from history and politics allows for language to be employed in more elastic forms. It is thus the autonomy that he attributes to fiction—the *indirect* "dabav" of history upon language and upon the narrative—that facilitates the innovation of a non-national, modernist, translatory, and cosmopolitan idiom. It is precisely the fictive and/or imaginative universe formed by the "struggle" that transforms "personal pain into a collective experience," whose

[33] I put the word "conservative" in quotes because there is considerable disagreement about whether Verma was a conservative or not. While several critics and writers have accused him of being an aesthete, others have accepted his claim that he is an 'agnostic Hindu' and that his interest in Hinduism is philosophical and not political. The latter group has also commended him on his ability to critique Marxist literary criticism, particularly as it has developed through a close experience of the Soviet dictatorship in Czechoslovakia.

temporality circles the intimate as opposed to the historical, and its detachment from the writer's political affiliations that allows for the generation of a new idiom (Verma, *Shabd* 22). This perhaps is the reason why Verma has remained popular despite his conservative statements: his insistence on the autonomy of his fiction is equally an insistence on the freedom of the interpretation of fiction. Similarly, his suggestion that the realm of ideology and realm of 'experience'—the "solitary experience" that informs fiction, and that he references in "Beauty and Aesthetics"—"may not meet as clearly as we wish them to meet" makes his fiction an unstable and ghostly extension of the political views that he expresses in his interviews and essays (Verma, *Shabd* 22; "Writer at Work" 00:09:55-00:10:00).

Conclusion

If fiction was the space where historical experience was transformed into a "historical document" that transmitted a "collective memory," it is significant that even though Verma wrote some essays and gave interviews in English, the language of his fiction remained Hindi. I have argued in this chapter that in *Ve Din* and *Cheedon par Chandni*—two texts that were part of his European oeuvre—Verma's use of modernist style and translation allows him to generate a new idiom for Hindi that is inflected with both a cosmopolitan and an intimate desire, and as such to be reconfigured beyond its proto-national status. Essential to these innovations in the language is Verma's destabilization of the national embedment of his characters, his

writerly self, as well as his language. Verma's writing is informed by both the historical and the intimate, and by emphasizing different aspects of this binary, his essays and his fiction act as supplements to one another. While this split may be read as a dichotomy in his thought, I argue that it is what allows for Verma to generate a new Hindi in his fiction. It is in order to depict a universe of memories and intimacies that Verma invests Hindi with a translation and modernist style, and building upon those innovations, with a cosmopolitan desire, albeit one that is transhistorical.

While his European oeuvre is embedded in a Hindi that aspires to cosmopolitanism, it was also simultaneously a Hindi that was the language of Verma's individual and writerly self, and as such, codes an intimacy with the language that circumvents the nation. Yet this intimacy too is part of the affective realm that is silently shaped by history, even if it does not speak to that history directly. To Verma, the very purpose of literature, then, is to record this silent pressure of history upon the individual's affective world.

Chapter 3

Thick, Obscene, and Absurd: Krishna Baldev Vaid's Syntax of Failure

[Sexual desire and narrative form as history]

Krishna Baldev Vaid's writing often narrates lives shaped by lack and/or loss. In *Uska Bachpan* (*Steps in Darkness*, 1975), Beeru and his family live an impoverished existence in a house with blackened walls and without sufficient food to eat. The world outside never enters the narrative, which itself remains largely confined to the decrepit house, and even as the narrative ostensibly moves, no change registers upon either the house or the characters. In *Guzra Hua Zamana* (*Times Past*, 1981), which is a historical novel, the protagonist, an older and somewhat different Beeru, looks upon his past through the lens of the Partition, and reminisces about pre-Partition communal unity. Speaking to Krishna Sobti in the *Sobti-Vaid Samvad*, Vaid talks about being haunted by his pre-Partition past: "The small town in which I was born, Dinga, the crooked lanes of that town, old houses made of small bricks, the hours spent under sprawling *ber* trees—in short, my difficult but full childhood and boyhood—were snatched away from me by the Partition" (36). Vaid's words draw attention to the ways in which his memory of the past is overwritten by another time and experience: the Partition, its incumbent terror, and the anticipation of violence and/or death for oneself or one's loved ones. Often, the anticipation of terror looms large over what seems like an endless wait for nothing—an image that may be traced back to Vaid's own experience of the Partition. Rather than highlighting the

individual's capacity to hold on to the past in the form of fragments that are attributed personal meaning, as in Verma, time in Vaid's writing is infused with interweaving and alternating feelings of boredom, terror, sadness, and despair.

Vaid's 1974[34] novel *Bimal urf Jaayein to Jaayein Kahan* (henceforth *Bimal*), presents us with an eponymous protagonist who 'moves' incessantly, but without a direction, purpose, or telos. Here, the sense of loss is situated in the oppressive despair that infuses the narrative, even as it propels the narrative forward in the search for a solution. This chapter analyzes *Bimal* as a Brechtian experiment that is based on the novel's exploration of both literary and social forms upon the twin axes of desire and despair. The novel's use of an alienation effect that draws attention to its own artifice co-opts the reader as co-writer in order to critique an unthinking, 'voyeuristic' readership that demands gratification from the text-as-commodity. The text's registering of histories of the nation, masculinity, and literature at the level of form leads to the generation of a language that coagulates as it fails to move forward, even as it simultaneously injects non-reproductive pleasure into the text through the use of pornographic obscenity. Hindi thus becomes a language that is placed in the hands of a failed masculine author and that fails to write the nation as well as the masculine protagonist. At the same time, its hypersexualization through the use of obscenity disassociates it from the civilizational imperatives with which processes of nationalization invested it.

[34] *Bimal* was written over a period of more than a decade, with the first parts composed as short stories between 1961 and 1965.

Vaid's formal and stylistic choices in *Bimal* shape the novel antagonistically in relation to the sentimental novel, which is seen as writing the nation by educating its readers in individual and collective forms of existence. *Bimal* rejects both the sentimentality and reformism conventionally embedded in the novel, and tries to re-educate its readers in new forms of reading consistent with a historical moment that demands new forms of social relationality. In doing so, it reconfigures the novel form and disrupts the relationship between the novel and the nation, so that the novel becomes what the narrator calls "*shaili ka dushala*"—the guise of genre worn by Bimal as a writer, but also *Bimal* as a novel. Genre here is a pretence, and not an organic relationship between the text and reality, between novel and nation.

Bimal's critique of the nation form is embedded at several levels in the text: not only does it take place through a repudiation of the linear narrative that shows the protagonist's growth and progress, and ultimate subordination to the nation as citizen, but also through a rejection of a readership that demands such growth. In *Bimal*, Vaid sees such a readership as a precursor or extension of the 'consumer' of art, who ultimately turns the text into a commodity. Experimentation is thus centered as necessary for producing a critical and engaged reader, and ultimately for creating a broader Hindi readership that is critical of the calcified socio-sexual forms that are considered foundational to the nation's cultural identity. Bimal's irrepressible sexual desire drives the narrative 'forward' even as it operates as the grounds for ridiculing the reader's expectations of narrative. At the same time, the centrality of desire codes a utopian impulse—the novel's insistence upon failure and impossibility and the

stifling circles in which Bimal's thought moves without reprieve forces the reader outwards in a Brechtian manner to look for answers to the question of where the novel form, as well as the nation, are to "go."

Going nowhere: *Bimal*'s (un)structure

Bimal is divided into five long chapters, titled "The Meditation," "The Situation," "A Walk," "The Questions," and "The Solution," and, following the time-honoured modernist technique, tracks the eponymous character through a single day in his life—a day, the narrator tells us, when the underlying 'crisis' of his life has surfaced. Through the course of the day, Bimal visits, or finds himself in, spaces that alternate between the public and the private sphere as well as their interstices. Thus we see him at home, in a crowded bus, a leper's colony, a Marxist literary gathering, a coffee house, a pub, and a brothel. These spaces also range from the institutional (family, school) to the quasi-institutional (coffee house, Marxist literary gathering), transitory (the road, the bus), and marginalized (the leper's colony, pub, brothel). The narrative opens with Bimal waking up at his home, where he lives with his joint family. He then proceeds to his study to write and/or 'meditate' upon writing, where his literary productivity is satirized by offering "meditation" as a euphemism for masturbation.[35] The next chapter takes him to the school where he teaches—a job from which, by the end of the chapter, he resigns. As Bimal moves from one location to the other, he

[35] See Rosalyn Clare Matthews, *The Incurable Dr. Vaid: Transgression, Nation and the Crisis in Postcolonial Hindi Criticism* (PhD Dissertation)

bemoans his unfulfilled sexual desire, its entrapment in normativity, and his own impotence. Driven by the twin affects of desire and despair, Bimal finally ends up at Guston Buston Road (G. B. Road), the red-light district of Delhi. While this location generates readerly anticipation about the sexual fulfilment that has been postulated throughout the narrative, as Bimal stands on the staircase of a brothel, the novel sidesteps this satisfaction and provides three possible endings: Bimal is left standing on the steps, Bimal dies, or Bimal has an erection and consummates his desire with a prostitute.

The use of a non-linear and non-teleological temporality in *Bimal*—evidenced in the lack of a destination to Bimal's journey through the narrative, and in the multiple endings with which the text closes—is central to the text's withholding of both growth and progress from the protagonist and the pleasure of a satisfactory ending from its readers. This lack of unitary purpose is further intensified in the novel by a textual structure that lacks standard punctuation and paragraph breaks, and yet splits constantly between the voice of Bimal and the narrator, who frequently speak to each other, and whose voices are often indistinguishable from one another as the text moves seamlessly between the first, second, and third person. The narrative is also fragmented by the interjections of imagined characters' voices, whose origin is either Bimal's writerly imagination (Shyama), his daydreams (Prastuta), or his repressed selfhood (Rammu). Thus, despite its apparent linearity, not only is the protagonist's constant movement juxtaposed with a complete absence of narrative progress, but any

possibility of coherence is also fractured by a cacophony of voices that both are and are not Bimal's own self.

If in *Steps in Darkness* and *Times Past*—both of which are autobiographical novels—the past, in the form of an individual or communal history, appears laden with Vaid's desire to exorcise himself of it (Vaid puns upon the Hindi word "bhūt," which means both "past" and "ghost"), in Vaid's experimental novels, including *Dard laDava* (*Incurable Pain,* 1982) and *Bimal*, the time of boredom accompanied by terror—the time spent under the *ber* tree, overwritten with the time of waiting in temporary shelters to protect oneself from immediate harm—is endlessly elongated. While the autobiographical novels depict the pre-Partition past in terms of both lack and communal fulfilment, in the more 'existentialist' oeuvre, the sense of anticipation for an inarticulable reprieve becomes central. As Anne Castaing notes in her analysis of *Incurable Pain*, Vaid's writing can be seen as a response to the Partition in so far as it left him with a feeling of being exiled from himself. This exilic feeling, which Castaing associates with the incessant, circular wandering of the protagonist of *Incurable Pain*, is equally visible in *Bimal*. Although Bimal's movement seemingly provides a linear structure to the narrative of the novel, his aimless rambling through Delhi simultaneously deprives it of any notion of narrative progress. There is no causal relationship between any of Bimal's actions, and his movement through the city is arbitrary, motivated only by the unanswered question in the title, "where do we go from here?"

Postcolonial flânerie: 'Rambling' in Delhi

In its stream-of-consciousness depiction of a single day in the life of the protagonist, *Bimal* draws on quintessential techniques of the modernist novel. Although the city in which Bimal moves lacks the profusion of commodities that is central to Walter Benjamin's discussion of the flâneur, his undirected wandering and close attention to the sights, sounds, and smells as they constitute a private map of the city make him into a kind of postcolonial Benjaminian flâneur. Bimal's "rambles" on foot, further, are accompanied by the neurotic "rambling" of the narrative which, like him, "goes nowhere." The correspondence between the protagonist and the text that is referenced in the title, *Bimal*, thus finds its corollary in its subtitle, *Where do we go from here?* A reading of both, then, may be considered through Michel de Certeau's mapping of the movement of the flâneur-like individual through the city as a textual field.

In "Walking in the City," de Certeau contrasts walking, an "elementary form" of experiencing the city, to the panopticon-like view afforded by standing at an elevation, which mimics the perspective of the city planner who sees everything as a simultaneity, and which also "transfigures" the beholder into a "voyeur" (93, 92). Where before, the individual was enmeshed within the text, "the bewitching world by which one was 'possessed'", they are now able to "read" the text from a distance, "be a solar Eye, looking down like a god" (De Certeau 92). De Certeau represents the objectivity provided by distance and elevation as a position not unlike that of both the narrator and reader of realism, who discern everything from the intimate moments

between characters to their innermost thoughts—a voyeuristic position echoed in *Bimal*'s representation of its own readers. From their 'godlike' position, the city planner, much like the realist writer, directs the feet of the city-dweller from one place to another in an orderly fashion that involves both an anticipation and a pre-ordained knowledge of their desires and motivations; the reader of realism, like the voyeur who stands at an elevation, peers into these trajectories, desires, and motivations.

As opposed to this, to be a walker is to traverse the ground of the text, without a pre-existing knowledge of where one is fated to go, without a plan, much like Bimal himself:

> (t)he ordinary practitioners of the city live 'down below' . . . They walk—an elementary form of this experience of the city; they are walkers, *Wandersmänner*, whose bodies follow the thicks and thins of an urban 'text' they write without being able to read it . . . The paths that correspond in this intertwining . . . elude legibility. It is as though the practices organizing a bustling city were characterized by their blindness. The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator, shaped out of fragments of trajectories and alterations of spaces: in relation to representations, it remains daily and indefinitely other. (De Certeau 93)

To move with the walker, then, is to "write without being able to read." There is only movement, and no destination orienting the movement. If the city is a 'text' for de Certeau, the walker is simultaneously a character and writer of their trajectory, which has no prior existence in the eye of an omniscient narrator or author. While the walker writes the city-as-text through walking, they do not do so as an "author"; neither can they read what they write, since the city-as-text written by them "(eludes) legibility." Further, the "manifold story" thus written "remains daily and indefinitely other (in relation to representations)." If by "representations" de Certeau refers to the eye of

the city planner, who functions in this context as the third-person narrator, then the story written by the walker both lacks the teleology of a long duration, and the coherence, singularity, and identity of omniscient narration.

In *Bimal*, whose narration is closely tied to the protagonist's flânerie, walking-as-writing—the operation of a proliferating, ever-changing, and non-teleological practice—is facilitated by the absence of both destination and genre as structuring frameworks for the narrative. Further, de Certeau's attention to the text's "elusive" "legibility" and the absence of an "author" reminds us that this lack of structuring has implications for the reading of the novel as well, such that the reader becomes enmeshed in the "thicks and thins of (the) urban 'text'" alongside the flâneur (93). As such, the reader is displaced from the position of spectator to one forced to experience Bimal's despair and lack of direction alongside him. This centrality of wandering to the (lack of) structure of the text as well as to how it is read is reflected in the title of the novel—*Bimal aka Where do we go from here?*—which centres both the character of Bimal and his aimless wandering, even suggesting that the two are synonymous in their co-constitution of the narrative. The question "where do we go from here" and the directionlessness of the protagonist thus come to be experienced by the reader as she not only wanders with Bimal, and wonders with him about where he is going/will 'go' next, but also what is the meaning of Bimal's life, and where the narrative is 'going.'

Rather than the directing gaze of an omniscient narrator, the setting of milieus within which actions and characters are placed, and devices such as plot and

dialogue—quintessential characteristics of the realist novel—the 'wandering' of Bimal's thoughts, which the reader is forced to follow all too closely, becomes the sole map through which the reader can comprehend the text. The centering of walking as the form through which Bimal the character as well as *Bimal* the novel are written, then, draws attention to the novel's repudiation of a linear and teleological mode of narration (wherein the narrative trajectory is shaped largely by the generic conventions employed by the text), of realism as an 'objective' mode of representing and engaging with 'truth' or a reality outside of the text, and of reading styles that are guided by linearity and realism.

***Bimal*'s Reader: The 'third arm of the triangle'**

If we think about genre as a unifying structure that creates readerly expectations which then mediate the act of reading a text, *Bimal* plays with as well as flouts multiple reading conventions, and pushes for new forms of reading, and therefore for new forms of relating to an 'external' reality. One of the ways in which it does so is by calling attention to the very artifice that distinguishes the text from the world of reality, and by drawing the reader into its pages. The modernism of *Bimal* thus resides not only in the depiction of Bimal as a kind of postcolonial flâneur, but also in Vaid's significant use of Brechtian devices to draw attention to the artifice of the text. Direct addresses to the reader allow for a textual breaking of the "fourth wall," a device central to Brecht's notion of the alienation effect.

Establishing an interest in practices of reading and consumption early on, the text presents three different kinds of readers to us: the common reader who will be bored by the complexity of the novel, the critic who will be frustrated by its meaninglessness and express concerns about the common reader's inability to receive the novel, and the media, which will grope for a 'moral lesson' for 'the people.' In the preface, speaking to an unnamed reader who is not clearly aligned with any of these categories, Bimal situates the reader as the "third arm of the triangle," without whom the text cannot be written:

> (Reader): Between you and your novelist…
> (Bimal): Lies a desert. And this novel traverses the desert, dividing it into two halves between us.
> (Reader): Equally?
> (Bimal): That is for you to decide.
> (Reader): Am I to be dragged into this too?
> (Bimal): Several times.
> (Reader): Why?
> (Bimal): Because you are the third arm of the triangle, friend. (Vaid 9)

By drawing the reader into its framework, the narrative of *Bimal* opens upon a 'reality' that the realist literary text is conventionally both closed off from and bound up with in a neat subject/object relationship.

This self-referentiality of the narrative is one of the strategies through which it marks itself out as a subversion of the temporalities and narrative techniques embedded in popular genres such as the sentimental novel and the bildungsroman, as well as popular cinema.[36] References to each of these forms, as in the example above, shows the novel's awareness of the constitution of readerships by generic

[36] The gesture towards cinema is located in the title of the novel, which refers to a song from the 1954 Bollywood film *Taxi Driver*. In the fourth chapter, this song begins to play when a drunk Bimal tries to turn on the jukebox.

conventions, as the above mentioned popular genres are seen as oriented towards a readerly fulfilment that is achieved vicariously through the fulfilment of the protagonist. Bimal and the novelist frequently enter into an argument that emanates from Bimal's desire to defect to narrative conventions that would give him the chance to 'go somewhere,' that is, move towards a destination/telos. Complaining to the narrator/novelist about the lack of possibilities that he is offered in the current narrative, Bimal claims:

> I am . . . lifeless, and senseless. If I wasn't, I would have never set foot on this stage. Wouldn't I have been making a romantic reader weep? You were the one who taught me this nonsense. Without you, I would have learned love making . . . You were the one who screwed me over. I could have been flying in the sky. You were the one who stole my faith from me. I could have been leaping. You were the one who gave me boredom. I could have been smiling gently at someone. In a touching manner. If you were a romantic, rather than wiping my sweat with a smelly handkerchief, I would have been wiping the tears of a gentle lady, and locking eyes with her, asking, what are these veils upon your countenance? If you were a romantic, your reader would have been in tears by now. You were the one who made me bitter. I could have been professing love to someone in a grave voice, or writing the future of India, or describing my state in simple prose. (Vaid 135)

In the comparison of his predicament with what he could have been in a 'romantic' or 'sentimental' novel which may have been educating its readers in sentimentality—a notion found frequently in the 18th or 19th century European novel as well as in several 19th and 20th century Indian novels—Bimal addresses the difference between his own frustrated, self-involved, purposeless self on the one hand, and the possibilities that would have been available to his character in a genre more closely aligned with realism. In doing so, he also draws attention to an alternative temporality

of fulfilment and consummation that in this novel is withheld from him, and thus from the reader.

The problem of genre here becomes a corollary to the depiction of the voyeuristic reader, as both anticipate the question of how the text is to be read. By intertwining the protagonist's fulfillment and the narrative's closure with Bimal's *sexual* consummation, the novel equates the reader with a voyeur and a tasteless consumer of the text-as-commodity, who primarily seeks unthinking pleasure. Writing of amusement under late capitalism in "The Culture Industry," Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer remark that "Pleasure hardens into boredom because, if it is to remain pleasure, it must not demand any effort and therefore moves rigorously in the worn grooves of association . . . Any logical connection calling for mental effort is painstakingly avoided" (10). Although *Bimal* is written in a postcolonial rather than late-capitalist milieu, its attention to voyeurism speaks to the commodification of art through cinema and the novel. By representing Bimal's sexual desperation as a parallel to his (and the narrative's) disorientation, the novel elicits the reader's parallel investment in Bimal's sexual fulfilment and in a satisfactory end to the novel, and thus manipulates the reader into inhabiting a voyeuristic posture.

Rammu: The voyeuristic reader

The most significant figure of the voyeur is Bimal's alter-ego 'Rammu,' whose use of obscenity embeds his language as well as his notion of culture within popular

conventions that were geared towards cathartic readerly satisfaction. Entering after Bimal's failed attempts at writing the story of a fictional female character, Shyama, Rammu chastises Bimal for his inability to write a story of any interest to him, for caring only about Shyama's liberation, and for neglecting him as a reader:

> If you must write . . . then at least let it be something that makes some sense, even if it is a distorted sense, something with head and feet, a top and a bottom, and if you really can't put together a head and feet then perhaps some other body part, maybe the genitals, because all I'm saying is that you can't make something out of breast beating. A breast simply won't stand by itself, it'll fall to the ground. Shyama came. Yes, I heard you. So what if she came? What would you like me to do? Stand upside down? Or dance around naked? And I might even agree to do that if she agrees to give it to me. But that bitch just stands in a corner and sobs. Doesn't even mock my tortured dick. Shyama came! As if she is the only one who comes, and the rest of us are gone cases. You fucker, I gave up everything I had to serve you, I drowned myself, shaved my head, held my life in my hands and stood lifeless, and didn't make a sound, never questioned you, whatever nonsense you wrote, I read it all, or at least pretended to read it. I took all your bullshit, in the hope that someday you might say something that I would care about, but all you care about is Shyama! (Vaid 46)

As a foil to Bimal, Rammu chastises Bimal for "going in too deep," and encourages him to stay on the surface of things, and to seek sexual gratification like him (Vaid 50). Rammu's description of Bimal's authorial failures contain a notion of the text-as-commodity, which centers readerly satisfaction, at times through titillation or erotic suggestion. In its constant hints to the sexual fulfillment of the protagonist, and simultaneous deferral of this fulfillment, the novel references forms of popular culture, which, "(b)y repeatedly exposing the objects of desire . . . only (stimulate) the unsublimated forepleasure which habitual deprivation has long since reduced to a masochistic semblance" without fulfilling that desire (Adorno and Horkheimer 11). However, where Adorno and Horkheimer describe popular culture as both "ascetic

and unashamed," "pornographic and prudish" for its presentation of erotic situations that "indicate unmistakably that things can never go that far," the inclusion of Rammu's voice in *Bimal* means that it is "unashamed" and "pornographic" without being "ascetic" and "prudish" (11). In other words, despite the deferral of pleasure, unlike popular forms, the novel's titillation is not merely repressed in the figure of Bimal, but also explodes to the surface in the rhetoric of Rammu-as-reader: even as Rammu demands this titillation, he offers it to the reader in the form of suggestions of what the reader could have been reading, but is not reading.

The possibility of what the text could have been—earlier raised through comparisons to other genres—arises again in the final section of the novel, titled "Solution," where the reader is offered three alternative endings (status quo; death; sexual consummation with a prostitute). By its very title, the chapter suggests that it will provide a "solution" to Bimal's problems, and in doing so, plays with the reader's yearning for relief from the inconclusiveness of the narrative and for a scene of Bimal's sexual fulfilment. While the chapter attributes narrative control to the reader, the third narrative possibility clearly situates the reader as a Rammu-esque voyeur. Here, standing on the steps of the brothel, Bimal wishes that he could be free of the narrator/novelist and this narrative, and "reach(ed)" to his readers "from whom (the narrator) is intent upon cutting (him) off," as he wonders about how he will be (mis)read, by both critics and lay readers:

> I do not want that because of me, critics should feel perplexed, and go around asking each other what, after all, was the point of such an absurd anti-protagonist, when we ourselves are able to grasp nothing but air, the lay reader will understand less than nothing, all this time we thought that maybe

> at least in this final section, something will happen, and we will be able to put our finger on it, and say that now we understand Bimal's Bimalness, but if the novelist has been unable to impress the reader even after bringing Bimal to the brothel, what can he do now, now that after touring all of Guston Buston he has arrived here, our readers are wagging their tails in the hope that now they will be rewarded for their patience, and it was only to hear the ultimate groans of gratification that they have been listening to the story of Bimal's boredom and tolerating the novelist's ninnying nonsense for the last two hundred pages, the mystery that is to be revealed for which they are salivating from every pore of their body, if the time for it has not come now when will it come . . . (Vaid 212)

Bimal's harangue begins with references to the critics' and readers' inability to understand the text, but moves the question of reception seamlessly from a problem of intelligibility to one of gratification, thus framing the reader directly as an iteration of Rammu. The intertwinement of textual finality, as suggested in the title "The Solution," with sexual intercourse turns the reader's longing for linear orientation in the narrative inside out, and shows the reader an image of themself as the voyeur, "salivating from every pore of their body," and desperate to hear "the final groans of gratification" (211).

Even though the third ending, in which Bimal consummates his desire with a prostitute, presents the reader with a scene of the fulfilment of Bimal's sexual desire, the shifting of the onus of the ending upon the reader leaves them to determine not only how the narrative will end, and whether it will end or not, but also what the reader is to be—a voyeur, or a co-writer. What I wish to highlight here is the novel's problematization of popular, sentimental forms such as the novel and cinema, whose linearity and conventional stylization of the protagonist offer to the reader an opportunity for what Adorno and Horkheimer call "amusement," that is, an easily

consumable commodity, as well as its problematization of the notion of a "climactic" catharsis, which Vaid compares to the purely sensual pleasure of an orgasm. Both Rammu's invitations to Bimal to stop thinking and his patriarchal masculinism make him a parody of the unthinking reader who seeks voyeuristic release in the act of reading. However, this problematization is undertaken through a referencing of popular forms that is so thick that it forms the very texture of the narrative. The novel's simultaneous presentation and criticism of the pleasures of consumption, I argue, places a heuristic demand upon the reader. By withholding the release that is sought by the voyeur, the novel enacts a Brechtian anti-catharsis that compels the reader outward in search for an unconditional "Solution" that the text refuses to provide.

Minor affects and thick language

The enmeshing of the reader within the text and within Bimal's literal as well as mental 'wandering' without the support of a narrative arc or generic framework is also replicated visually in the text through the absence of paragraph breaks, which hinders the reader's ability to situate themself within the longer duration of the narrative. Correspondingly, the lack of plot and the absence of ruptures and/or events through which time might be marked in the narrative also restricts such an orientation for the reader. The reader is thus dropped within a morass of words, voices, and sentences with no guidelines as to how to make 'sense' of the text. *Bimal*'s

accumulation of text in the form of voices, words, long paragraphs, sights, and sounds is part of the novel's strategic use of language in which the signifying function is undermined alongside linearity. For instance, passages that may provide descriptions or plot movement are instead filled with alliteration, fragments, tangents, and wordplay—strategies by which language accumulates but does not move forward:

> bāsī bas sṭaiṃḍ kī badbudār bagala meṃ baiṭhī pān kī dukān aur pīlā panavāḍī . . . sir par savār sūraja . . . sāle kā sātvāṁ ghoḍā . . . aur ek kumhalāyā huā kuttā . . . do mailī mahilāeṁ use dutkār rahī haiṃ. bhikhārī kā bayāna. māṁjī, maiṃ mar rahā hūṁ. maiṃ bhī. baṃdagī se bhāg kar gaṃdagī kī or. bosīdā nizām kā nāmak harām. baṃdhī baṁdhāyī badmaza naukrī par laṃgḍī lāt mar kar. (Vaid 101)
>
> [The jaundiced shopkeeper in the corner shop in the smelly pits of the stale bus stand . . . the sun beating down on my head. Its bloody seventh horse . . . and a sickly dog. Two foul women cursing it. The beggar's testimony. Mother, I am dying. Me too. Escaping from imprisonment into the filth. A disloyal slave to a decaying master. A limping leg kicking away a secure soulless job.]

In the alliteration and rhymes used in the above passage, the logic by which words follow upon each other is determined first by the auditory relationship between them and then by the meaning that it makes in the present context of the scene, often barely impinging upon the larger context of the narrative.

Vaid's use of language in *Bimal* frequently creates the effect of what Sianne Ngai, in her book *Ugly Feelings*, calls "stuplimity," an affect she describes as a "strange amalgamation of shock and boredom" (2). Ngai's book focuses upon what she thinks of as 'minor' affects that appear in a corpus of literary texts, including literature, film, and art. Central to her argument is a concern with temporality—the duration for which certain affects last—and the possibilities generated by affects that are experienced in terms of a continuity rather than in terms of a rupture that shifts the

direction of the narrative. As opposed to "grander" emotions and passions such as anger and fear, or "potentially ennobling or morally beatific states like sympathy, melancholia, and shame," Ngai's book turns its attention to feelings that she insists lack both a moral and a cathartic dimension, so as to withhold "satisfactions of virtue" as well as "therapeutic or purifying release" (6). Thus, comparing irritation and anxiety with anger and fear, she remarks upon the "flatness or ongoingness" of the former as diametrically opposed to the "suddenness" of the latter (7).

In her discussion of modernists such as Samuel Beckett and Gertrude Stein, in whose work she focuses on the aforementioned affect of "stuplimity," Ngai writes about "the overlapping accretion of phrases and clauses within the boundaries of a severely limited diction (that) results in a language that is paradoxically both ascetic and congested, 'thickening' even as it progresses into a narrative of non-progressing" (255). This non-progress in a text that yet continues to "accrete" is described by Ngai as a "slowdown of language" wherein "the logic of progression from statement to statement is paradoxically propelled by a series of implicit or explicit objections continually jerking us backward, resulting in writing that continually calls attention to itself as lacking, even as it steadily accumulates" (256). This "stacking of multiple temporalities," Ngai argues, goes against a linear progression in time, and the absence of a "sequence of cause and effect" produces in the reader the effect of "delay," "fatigue," or "paralysis" (256). Aside from thinking of it as a slowdown, Ngai refers to this as a kind of "thickening" (255) or "agglutination" (274) of language that often

appears "visually on the page through the absence of punctuation"—an aspect that we encounter in *Bimal* as well (274).

Like Beckett's language in the prose poem "Stirrings Still," which Ngai analyzes, Vaid's language constantly undoes itself even as it proliferates. Thus, the end of the fourth chapter, "The Question," does away with punctuation marks and devolves into a string of binaries separated by the phrase "it's hard to know," which could apply equally to the phrase before or after.

> What cannot be it's hard to know whether it's dream or disease it's hard to know whether it's fire or spark it's hard to know whether it's flesh or vegetable it's hard to know whether it's you or the shopkeeper it's hard to know in this stubborn darkness one hand misses the other this atmosphere of nothingness it's hard to know whether she's a widow or virgin in this country with a polluted gaze it's hard to know whether it's the shit of seriousness or lightness it's hard to know whether it's a great destruction psychological it's hard to know whether cunt or cleverness in this deep domestic darkness even this song of alliterative unrealism is too awkward even humanity is very heavy it's hard to know whether man or woman it's hard to know if this sadness is of the nation or of the self this cobweb of hymns it's hard to know . . . (57-58)

Syntactical confusion and the absence of punctuation are used here to emphasize the difficulty of any form of 'knowing'/knowledge and the lack of fixity in the narrative—everything can be refuted, reconsidered, negated. As Castaing writes about Vaid's other novel, *Dard laDava*, "each assertion, each word, and each assumption is immediately submitted to doubt or refutation," and "the constant repetitions (of words but above all of *full propositions* or *sentences*) condemn the narrative to stagnate" (154, 159). The narrative's linguistic tendency of doubt and the destabilization of meaning is even enacted in the title. There, the supplementing of the first title, *Bimal*, by a qualitatively different title, "Where do we go from here?"—a question instead of

a noun—draws attention to the insufficiency of the first title and betrays the centrality of doubt and hesitancy to the protagonist and the novel.

History as form

Ngai's discussion of the "slowdown of language" is significant for the attention it draws to the enmeshing of meaning and temporality in the narrative. If meaning is made through the forward movement of narrative, texts such as Beckett's and Stein's that she analyses, as well as *Bimal*, undermine this impulse towards meaning-making through a forward movement that is a kind of illusion, behind which lies an accretion of details, lists, language, or words that do not form a coherent whole when subjected to existing modes of reading. This absence of meaning is directly addressed in the novel when Bimal curses the narrator for failing to sketch a realistic picture of the coffee house: "You took no names, you shared no background, you painted no picture, gave no framework, all you did was blacken pages, no matter what, I'm sure you did this just to fatten your book, because I know that in our literature special respect is reserved for books that weigh over two-and-a-half kilograms" (Vaid 157). Bimal's references to "blackened pages" and a "fattened book" directly echo Ngai's notion of a language that accumulates and coagulates.

Ngai points out that the 'stupefaction' that is created by accretion ultimately deprives the reader of their ability to respond to the text using existing strategies of reading, in a way creating empathy between the text and reader. The "change in

temporal organization . . . slows down the interpreter—as if the loss of strong links in the text paradoxically strengthens an affective link between text and reader, transferring the text's 'stupor' to him or her" (256-57). At the same time, however, "(i)nducing a series of fatigues or minor exhaustions, rather than a single, major blow to the imagination, stuplimity paradoxically forces the reader to *go on* in spite of its equal enticements to readers (to) give up," thus "pushing us to reformulate new tactics for reading" (273). Ngai's observation about the failure of existing reading strategies in the face of a text that activates the affect of "stuplimity," and the need to generate new reading strategies, is significant for the directions in which readings of *Bimal* can be allowed to 'go.' By offering multiple endings, as well as in suggesting the potential inadequacy of this novel in satisfying the reader's expectations, *Bimal* demands a redefinition of readership. The inclusion of the reader in the narrative thus not only becomes one of the strategies through which the novel both signals and demonstrates its refusal to follow popular narrative conventions, but also shows that the novel is intentionally trying to create a different kind of reader.

In *Bimal*, the text's ability to force the reader to "go on" and its inducing of the impulse to "give up" are intertwined with the desire/despair axis upon which the narrative turns. Even as the titillation offered by the text, as well as the promise of fulfillment—both of which manipulate the reader's voyeuristic desire—compel the reader to "go on," the frustration induced by reading (which the text repeatedly acknowledges), the constant deferral of fulfillment, and Bimal's despair about finding fulfillment in existing social and literary forms push the reader outwards in the search

of relief from the text. While Ngai writes of the anti-cathartic method of producing 'minor' affects, I argue that in *Bimal*, this method needs to be read in relation to the Brechtian emphasis upon the reality outside of the theatre or, in this case, outside of the text. As Augusto Boal points out in *Theatre of the Oppressed*, where for Hegel and Aristotle, the use of catharsis served the purpose of purging the audience of the discomfort produced by the protagonist's tragic fate, and thus ultimately restoring the world to "its perennial stability, its infinite equilibrium, its eternal repose," for Brecht's Marxism, it was necessary for theatre to "show the ways in which society loses its equilibrium," rather than ending in "repose" (105). Where a cathartic theatre "(desired) a quiet somnolence at the end of the spectacle, Brecht (wanted) the spectacle to be the beginning of action: the equilibrium (was to be) sought by transforming society, and not by purging the individual of his just demands and needs"—these needs, in *Bimal*, being the protagonist's sexual desire (Boal 106).

The withholding of gratification in *Bimal* can thus be seen as the "dabav" or pressure of history/reality that Verma had written about in relation to Brechtian theatre. In *Bimal*, the effects of history are to be found not so much within the text as much as in the text's gestures outside of itself—much like the clamoring voices that Verma imagines pushing from the outside in, in the Brechtian theatre. The text, which is seemingly bursting at the seams with its minor affects, its "ugly feelings," points towards both possibilities outside of itself, and the reader as a locus of those possibilities. Verma's image of voices outside of the theatre clamoring to get in is an image that draws attention to the tenuous borders that separate the text from the

reality outside of it, and as such are also a theorization of the relationship between the text and external reality. In this theorization, the "contemporary"—the word that provokes Verma's thinking through "dabav"—without being within the text or the theatre is nonetheless present as a force that dictates the formal possibilities and impossibilities of the text. What is outside of the walls of the theatre cannot be seen, yet can be affectively "heard" or felt.

Verma's formulation of "dabav" bears some resemblance to Fredric Jameson's positing of history as the absent cause that can only be accessed by the political unconscious of the narrative. Jameson's notion of "ideological closure" carries echoes of the sonically breached walls of the Brechtian theatre as that which "maps the limits of a specific ideological consciousness and marks the conceptual points beyond which that consciousness cannot go, and between which it is condemned to oscillate" (32). Within the text, locating the points of "ideological closure" helps us see both how the text functions as a "libidinal apparatus" cathected with an ideological investment and possessing defined ideological limits, and what lies outside of the closure as that which is repressed, as it "(reveals) terms or nodal points implicit in the ideological system which have, however, remained unrealized in the surface of the text, which have failed to become manifest in the logic of the narrative, and which we can therefore read as what the text represses" (33). Jameson's "ideological closure" is a reference to that which the text lacks the language to articulate due to its historical and/or ideological location. As in Verma's formulation, a detection of such

"closure"—the walls here become what Jameson calls the "Greimassian semiotic rectangle"—is in fact a key to understanding what lies outside of this "closure" (68).

In *Bimal*, the ideological closure is served by the desire/despair axis upon which the text pivots: Bimal is oppressed by despair about the lack of literary and social forms in which he can find fulfillment, yet his irrepressible but oppressive search for sexual fulfillment moves the narrative 'forward,' only to be encountered once again with despair—an oscillating structure that is reproduced stylistically through the hesitancies and self-questioning. As an experimental text, *Bimal* does not square its circles, but rather moves in circles and draws the reader's attention to its inability to square the circle. However, the coupling of this failure with an insistent, destabilizing sexual desire that is queer and unreproductive—codes the utopian desire for a form that the text craves and/or innovates a vocabulary for.

History as literary history

In her article "What was so new about the new short story?" Preetha Mani analyses the Hindi New Short Story, a form that arose during the post-independence period in India. Mani discusses the ways in which writers of the New Short Story or *Nayi Kahani* both referenced and challenged prior modes of representation such as realism. In doing so, they not only drew attention to the postcolonial experience as one that required a different form of representation, but also to the fact that the supposed ideological objectivity through which much of their past literature was written was

inadequate to the postcolonial moment. The new generation of Hindi writers, she argues, "maintained that no single morality could be held as fixed or superior during the transitional post-independence moment, particularly because it was ideological rigidity and religious orthodoxy that had led to Partition violence" (233). This rejection of "ideological rigidity" in the work of the *Nayi Kahani* writers, of which Nirmal Verma was an important representative, was accompanied by a questioning of the narratorial position.

Mani's analysis of the New Short Story is encased within her argument that the form's "modernist realism" employed literary history as a "third term" besides modernism and realism that facilitated the text's relationship to an external reality (228, 231). In her readings of short stories by Rajendra Yadav, Mohan Rakesh, and Mannu Bhandari, literary history stands in for a history that, in the postcolonial moment, can no longer be represented realistically. By navigating through past genres such as the sentimental novel and socialist realism, the New Short Story referenced the past through form rather than representing it as content.

Central to Mani's discussion is her notion of "nayi kahani empathy," a "discourse . . . that established an interchangeability between the positions of reader, narrator, and author" (239). The reader, looking through the eyes of a first-person narrator who is part of the narrative, is allowed to "relate" to the characters (242). Such empathy was a marked contrast to the "sympathy" created by the "idealistic realism" of writers such as Premchand (240). Noting the uses of such empathy, Mani writes:

> Rather than morally instigating readers to create social change, nayi kahani empathy captured modern sensibilities such as alienation, disconnection, and disillusionment. It entreated readers to recognize their own circumstances from the position of an 'other,' to detachedly relive their individual experiences through the medium of literature. (240)

In *Bimal*, which is replete with its own references to literary tradition, reading styles, and genres that the narrative fails to live up to, the use of an unstable voice leads to a shifting between readerly positions of empathy and sympathy without allowing for either to be experienced fully. While the narrator/novelist occasionally comments upon Bimal, his omniscience, and thus his capacity to place the reader in a position of sympathy, is repeatedly brought into question through Bimal's arguments with him, which reveal this position as a pretence. At the same time, Bimal's first-person narration, which weaves in and out of the third-person narratorial voice, remains too deeply involved in lamenting his position in a way that, rather than eliciting the reader's empathy, alienates the reader by frustrating her expectations of any characterological fulfilment. In this manner, the reader is both drawn into the narrative and forced to experience Bimal's frustration, even as this frustration alienates her and inhibits any empathy for Bimal, instead producing the aforementioned voyeuristic desperation for cathartic release from Bimal's misery as well as from the text.

An important aspect of Mani's argument is the claim that the "modernist realism," of the *Nayi Kahani* was characterized by "constant interchange between literary and metaliterary texts (that) stood in place of explicit references to the colonial past" (231). She continues:

> Such references were vehemently disallowed by the promises of freedom and equality that Indian Independence heralded—promises which blanketed early postcolonial cultural and political enterprises with an aura of hopeful cooperation and solidarity. The *nayi kahani* modernist realist mode was therefore marked by a utopian impulse and ideological imperative to imagine a landscape free from the scars of colonialism and the violence of decolonization: the atrocities and displacement of Partition; frenzied debates about national language; brutal struggles over land and resources; and intense protest surrounding caste, religious, and regional identities. Replacing history with literary history allowed the *nayi kahani* to articulate dissatisfaction, discontent, and estrangement—sensibilities which were incongruent with the postcolonial state's project to install 'unity in diversity'. (231)

While Mani's argument pertains specifically to the form of the short story, we find a similar principle at work in Vaid's experimental novel. Much like the other texts studied in this dissertation, despite being written only a few decades after independence and the Partition, and during the developmentalist period, *Bimal* refuses to make any direct references to national history. Instead, its preoccupation with genre places the text in conversation not with history directly, but with past literary modes of representing and engaging with history.

However, where Mani sees this replacement of history with literary history as "marked by a utopian impulse and ideological imperative to imagine a landscape free from the scars of colonialism and the violence of decolonization," I argue that it is, rather, a strategy of the sublimation of history into form (231). Mani's argument in fact draws attention to the relationship of correspondence that the work of the *Nayi Kahani* writers—as well as Vaid—established between literary and historical form. Much like Brecht, who argued that "(r)eality changes; in order to represent it, modes of representation must also change," the *Nayi Kahani*'s evolution of a literary form that is based on the referencing of past literary forms is itself a response that, rather

than attempting to overcome history through a utopianism, internalizes it through sublimation since that is the only recourse left to represent the contemporary reality (qtd. in Cronan 98). In other words, the replacement of direct references to history with references to literary history serves the evolution of a form that is more appropriate to representing the reality of the postcolonial nation.

At a broader level, Mani's argument also draws our attention to the historical reasons behind the text's generation of the ideological closure discussed in the previous section. It is in response to a lived reality that deprives language of the ability to articulate the dissatisfaction and discontent of the present that *Bimal* both replaces that history with literary history, and becomes obsessed with sexuality, which becomes the text's vehicle for the critique of multiple, overlapping forms including literature, gender, and the nation. As Caroline Levine argues in her book *Forms*, "literary forms reflect or respond to contemporary political conditions. Forms matter, in these accounts, because they shape what it is possible to think, say, and do in a given context" (5).

The sexual and the textual: *Bimal* as an anti-bildung

Bimal's intense preoccupation with sexuality, is particularly visible in the figure of Rammu, whose desire for a cathartic 'climax' allows for the suturing of the voyeur and the reader-as-consumer. However, it also surfaces in the text's treatment of

gender through the figures of Shyama and Prastuta, through which it addresses the intertwinement of social and literary forms explicitly.

In Shyama's story, which is the subject of Rammu's admonishment of Bimal, we see Bimal as the writer struggling to release Shyama simultaneously from patriarchal heteronormativity and corresponding literary/cultural forms that fail to articulate her desire and instead contain her within a reproductive economy. Shyama ultimately remains trapped within both social and narrative conventions, which are represented metaphorically by Bimal's library—the "room" that Shyama cannot leave:

> All day and all night, I think about the fulfillment of my sexual desire, and yet somehow as soon as I settle down to write, I find myself stuck in Shyama's family drama . . . tradition grabs at my independence, so what if there are in fact some literary possibilities in this mother-daughter drama, they have already been sucked dry by the Hindu Hindi writers, to the very last drop . . . Many a times this wretched Shyama has entered the proverbial room, and every time, her mother follows uninvited, and Shyama has to run away sobbing, and the room is still there, its walls do not shake, its ceiling does not give way to the sky, what a strange room, all kinds of jaundiced characters enter it, grope around in its darkness and knock their knees against its corners, drink the bitter nectar of familial pain, get intoxicated, get frustrated, curse my imagination, and leave, they come and they go, the half-dead characters of my innumerable incomplete stories, limping, stumbling, flailing, unknown to themselves, estranged from their worlds, alienated from their society, weary of their present, weak warriors of meaninglessness, lost followers of oblivion, they come, and they go away, with their faces just so, without leaving an indelible mark upon Shyama's body or her bed, without tarnishing my sheets, they come and they go away, I have been able to say nothing to them, and this my room is so dead, so unfeeling, that it stays right there as it was, I wish I could tear it to bits. Oh, this room! Oh, the lifelessness of this room! Oh, Shyama, unable to bring life into it! Oh, Shyama's wasted youth! Oh, these walls of tradition and the impossibility of stealing her youth! Oh, Bimal, trapped within these walls! Oh, Bimal's resignation! Oh, the infertility of this resignation! Oh, the staircase to this infertility! And lying trodden upon that staircase, the broken Shyama, defeated by her family, but successful in safeguarding her womb, her motherhood. (Vaid 45)

It is significant here that Bimal's lamentation of his failure to write Shyama out of convention begins with a reference to the oppressiveness of his own desire. It is thus not only feminine desire that is trapped within a reproductive economy, but also Bimal's desire. As such, even as it acts as a propelling force in the novel, Bimal's desire is presented to us as transgressive due to its non-procreative and extra-marital position.

The conflict between Bimal's desire and a heteronormative, marital desire that centers procreation is presented at the beginning of the novel, when Bimal wakes up with an erection in the midst of a joint family, all of whose members are sleeping together on the roof of the house. Bimal's desire here must be hidden, and yet finds itself directed, inappropriately, towards his sister-in-law and his aunt.

> The moaning before the meditation. The warrior's weapon in hand. Overflowing vigor. No wonder it's haughty. Bimal had one eye turned towards his sister-in-law. The other towards Nanhi. Two windows to the body. Nanhi is nascent. More scrumptious is her mother. She fusses over you. Don't mind the mothering. A distant aunt. What we wish to show is that Bimal's two eyes were opening upon two separate directions. The third eye is the arrow. And in the morning, he is a hidden predator upon the joint family. Hidden and hideous. Above, the stars glimmer, down here, the tip of his spear . . . Stirred up over sister-in-law. Nanhi, not yet. Prankish peekaboo with aunt. Fat aunty. Light filters through her skirts. When might we bump into sister-in-law. On a moonlit night, maybe her dark parts will show. Sister-in-law is infertile. So am I. My atheist bows his head in reverence. The succinct and shriveled stirrings of the morning. Bedsprings, be quiet. Every object a noise. What if father were to see? Fondling first thing in the morning? Putting it back to sleep. The tyrant's tyranny. The father and the son. Generations and cessations. (Vaid 13)

While such co-sleeping was a common practice at the time when the novel was written, the presence of the joint family, even if asleep, as Bimal is in a state of arousal positions it as an agent of surveillance, not dissimilar to Shyama's mother,

who chastises Shyama when the latter is found masturbating. It is this surveillance and repression that on the one hand orients Bimal's desire towards female family members, and on the other causes him to perceive himself as a "hideous" "hidden predator upon the joint family" (Vaid 13). The hypothetical appearance of Bimal's father further highlights the patriarchal scrutiny of Bimal's sexuality while at the same time drawing attention to its non-procreative nature. Bimal recognizes that while his own father's desire was suitably directed towards creating his progeny—"generations"—Bimal's own desire is a "cessation" of this continuity.

The positing of Bimal's masturbatory fantasies as transgressive because of their pleasure-giving and non-reproductive nature is re-established in the next section of the chapter, when Bimal turns to his work. Here, the notion of "samadhi"—a state of deep, meditative concentration or yogic trance from which Bimal's authorial voice will ostensibly emerge—becomes a euphemism for masturbation, and soon after, his pen, prior to embarking upon Shyama's narrative, becomes a metaphor for Bimal's penis: "Bimal wished to write something with his pen, but the pen shook its head with a jerk. Drops of ink fell upon the paper, the table, upon Bimal's face, on the wall, the floor, and went wherever else they could go" (Vaid 42). The masculine authorial voice, which surrounds Bimal in the form of texts by great authors stacked in his library, is thus replaced by Bimal's self-pleasuring. In particular, the scattering of drops of ink/semen here invokes notions of Hindu masculinity that are embedded throughout the chapter, including in the reference to "samadhi" as meditation. The pun upon meditation as masturbation offered here draws upon discourses of

masculinity that postulated the preservation of semen as a source of masculine strength. In her book *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims, and the Hindu Public in Colonial India*, Charu Gupta writes of "brahmacarya," i.e. male celibacy, as "one of the core doctrines of Hindu dharma," which "emphasized the preservation of semen as essential for male empowerment and energy" (67). In the nationalist archive,

> Celibacy and self-control are viewed as most important requirements for achieving body discipline, and female desire and sexuality as the greatest evil. Vivekananda's call to sexual abstinence for building a nation of heroes gave brahmacharya renewed meaning in the colonial period. Gandhi applied a related though somewhat different concept of brahmacharya. He believed that stored-up semen was the source of splendid energy in the male body, but turned brahmacharya into a discourse which went parallel to ideas on the integrity of the nation. The nation required an end of wasteful expenditure of time and energy, and this included the pleasures of sex. (68)

The repression of Bimal's desire, therefore, serves not only to draw attention to the appropriation of desire by compulsory heteronormativity, but also deliberately presents an emasculated male protagonist who subverts a nationalist masculinity that on the one hand refrains from sexual pleasure, and on the other subordinates sexual desire to procreation.

The novel's presentation of Bimal as an effete and emasculated protagonist as a subversion of nationalist gender norms is accompanied by its presentation of the female character Prastuta, who 'appears' to Bimal in a daydream in the fifth chapter. As opposed to Shyama, whom Bimal is unable to liberate from tradition, the apparition of Prastuta possesses both desire and voice. In a scene of sexual foreplay, growing impatient with Bimal's hesitancy, Prastuta

> throws her clothes away, and stands like a bare sword, exclaiming, take me, you fool take me, and if you cannot, then say so clearly, that I may take you, tell me, will you take me or not, take me, not because I am yours but because I am nobody's, I simply am, and when I am taken, I become even greater, and it is out of lust for such greatness of being that I am always present for everyone, and so I have been named the present one (Prastuta),[37] and when someone is taking me—I cannot reveal to you how many have taken me so far—I don't lie silent beside or underneath him, I keep speaking, take me, take me more, don't hesitate my lord, you do not know the meekness of woman, and now that you are here, I will say this to you too, take me, take me, take me! (Vaid 189)

Prastuta here narrates herself entirely through her desire, so that in the text she appears as the very embodiment of female desire. In her encounter with Bimal, Prastuta moves through several stereotypes of femininity—the submissive woman, the spurned woman, and the demoness. However, each of them is revealed to be a pretense that is enacted with the intention of fulfilling her desire. In being defined solely through her desire, with which she merges herself when she says "I am (not) yours . . . I am nobody's, I simply am, and when I am taken, I become even greater," Prastuta becomes a kind of corollary to Bimal, who is also moved primarily by his sexual desire, her attention to her "eager pussy" becoming a parallel to Bimal and his conversations with his own member (191). As such, Prastuta forms a continuity with Sobti's Mitro in her articulation of her desire, and Ratti in her assertion of her autonomy from gendered social structures.

Addressing the reformist Hindu movement of the Arya Samaj, which aimed "to use Hindi to develop the self-perception of a Hindu community," Gupta elaborates

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[37] From Oxford Hindi-English dictionary, "प्रस्तुत *pra-stut* [S.], adj. 1. praised. 2. proposed. 3. mentioned; relevant (to a matter in hand); in question (a topic under discussion); submitted (documents, &c). 4. present (time, or circumstance). 5 ready (to do sthg., को, के लिए). 6. prepared, made. – प्रस्तुत-कर्ता, m. inv. presenter (of a programme); producer (of a programme, or of goods). प्रस्तुतीकरण, m. presentation, submission." (667).

on the suspicion of pleasure in the normative Hindi literature that was associated with nationalism:

> This important strand of Hindi literature was strategically tied to the nation, and to the assertion of civilization and pride. Endeavours at linguistic standardization were combined with attacks on any hint of eroticism and obscenity in literature, these being seen as hallmarks of a decadent, feminine and uncivilised culture. There was a growing fear of romance, of sexual and bodily pleasure: these were seen as a transgression of the ideals of the nation. The assertion of a nationalist Hindu identity became associated with the formation of shared notions of morality and respectability . . . (The) shift from the sensual to the virtuous radically altered gender imagery, and the woman was gradually transformed from a figure of eroticism, sexuality, excess and playfulness to a classic, calm, and perfect figure in most of 'high' literature. The assertion of a moral code in a canon of literature became a national virtue. (40-1)

Not only does *Bimal*'s narrative's and its characters' obsession with sexuality cathect the text with a preoccupation with bodily pleasure that goes against Hindu nationalist notions of gender, sexuality, and literature, but equally significant is the presentation of a male protagonist who, as an 'author,' fails to either embody or write the nation, so that *Bimal* presents us with a subversion of the conventional *bildungsroman*, where the journey and coming-of-age of the protagonist was a corollary for the progress of the nation. The thwarting of progress takes place in the narrative at multiple levels: the protagonist's physical "journey" through the narrative is thwarted by a circular temporality by which he "goes nowhere"; his spiritual growth is similarly thwarted as the narrative fails to progress and his desire remains unfulfilled; and his emasculation and externality to marital reproductivity thwarts any possibility of generational progress. Each of these levels correspond to the thwarting of the progress of the nation at the scales of the individual, the narrative, and the collective.

Coagulated language versus obscene language

Stylistically, this thwarting of progress is replicated in the texture of the narrative through the use of the same devices that produce the anti-cathartic minor affects discussed earlier in the chapter. In view of the hindrances placed upon male sexuality by a nationalist discourse, the slowdown of the narrative caused by the use of language that coagulates instead of moving forward here becomes a metaphor for the stored semen that was thought to be a source of masculine strength; however, instead of lending virility to the narrative, it becomes both a symptom and cause of the narrative's failure to progress, that is, its non-reproductivity.

At the same time, this coagulated language is also infused with obscenity through its constant preoccupation with the body and sexuality and a replication of the pleasure of sexuality so that we encounter a language that is simultaneously emasculated and sexualized. Like the coagulated language that uses alliteration and negation to continually hold the narrative back, obscenity in the narrative does not contribute to its plot movement. Instead, depending on the reader's class position, it can be seen as producing either excitement (for a reader with 'low tastes') or alienation (to a bourgeois reader), and as such, undercutting the nationalist appropriation of the language by infusing it with non-national and non-reproductive desires. In the quintessential obscene text of the colonial period, Pandey Bechan Sharma (Ugra)'s *Chaklet* (*Chocolate*), "the de-gendered male was one stereotype of

colonial domination" (Gupta 63). By offering representations of homosexuality, even from the lens of scandal, *Chaklet* "seemed to cast doubt on the stability of the heterosexual regime, on procreative imperatives, on modern monogamous ideals of marriage" (Gupta 63). Likewise, in *Bimal*, the representation of an effete male as protagonist leads to an undermining of the virility injected into the figure of the male by nationalist discourses, as well as of the centrality of marital heteronormativity to those discourses, which were discussed in Chapter 1.

However, if obscenity in the novel subverts the purism of Hindi and invests it with desires that are transgressive of the national ideal, it is also the vehicle for the novel's critique of a voyeuristic readership, particularly through the attribution of a notably obscene register to Rammu, which looks to the text for pornographic gratification. Thus on the one hand, obscenity in the form of a constant preoccupation with unfulfilled sexuality—Bimal's penis and Prastuta's "eager pussy"—serves representations of the effete man and the desiring woman as figures that contest nationalist gender discourses and undermine heteronormative forms of sexuality, gender, and marriage; on the other hand, obscenity as the hypermasculine sexuality of Rammu is associated with a voyeuristic readership to show the novel taking to an ironic extreme the forms of titillation that are already encountered in the popular literature and cinema. Thus obscenity both invests Hindi with a desire that counters notions of civilizational purity, and reflects the reader as desirous of a commodified amusement. In other words, the cathection of obscenity in Hindi produces both

discomfort and desire in the reader, and ultimately alienates by postulating a Hindi readership and public sphere that is based on transgressive desire.

Conclusion

This chapter reads *Bimal* as a Brechtian experiment that pivots upon the dual axes of desire and despair: both the novel and the protagonist are infused on the one hand with despair about literary and socio-sexual forms in which they fail to find a resting point, and on the other with the desire for new forms. By speaking neurotically about its own form and failures, and about an oppressive, unfulfilled sexual desire, the text inextricably entangles the two problems of literary and social form with each other as sites of unfulfilled desire. In what it posits as its own failure, the novel subverts not only realist and linear narrativization, but also the gendered and nationalized trajectories embedded within it. The use of Brechtian devices in the text propel the reader outside of the text while at the same time drawing the reader in as participant. In this, much as described by Verma, history comes to stand outside of the text but puts pressure on the text and shapes it, particularly in formal terms. What the text cannot talk about directly—that is, nation formation and developmentalism—come to inhere in the text formally through its obsession with past literary forms and reading styles, as well as through its preoccupation with sexual desire. The two aspects are intertwined since the narrative's lack of progress/movement and its use of obscenity become corollaries to forms of pleasure, sexuality, and gender that do not cohere with

the forms that were embedded within nationalist movements as well as the developing nation.

Much like in the other texts studied in this dissertation, in *Bimal* too we find the nation present in its absence, in form rather than content. Despite the establishment of nationhood a few decades prior to the writing of the text, the text itself eludes references to the nation, nationalism, or national identity. Instead, I argue, the nation exerts a formal pressure upon the text. In *Bimal*, we encounter a male protagonist who, instead of representing the nation in a narrative of progress and growth, is queered by his emasculation and helplessness and forced to move within temporalities that are all but linear. This non-movement is, further, replicated in the text's language, which is infused with doubt and hesitancy and thus deprived of clear referents, and which coagulates and folds in upon itself constantly rather than moving forward. This coagulation of language acts in the text as an analogy to the emasculation of the protagonist, and Bimal's failures as an author are inherently linked to the failure of his masculinity. If Bimal's pen is his penis, then the words that come out of it act as a metaphor for semen, coagulating in keeping with the sexual impotency attributed to him. At the same time as language coagulates, however, Bimal's own preoccupation with sexual fulfillment and the presence of his imagined, hypermasculine alter-ego infuse the text with an obscenity that is pivotal to its dissociation from the high civilizational culture that is embedded in Hindi through processes of its nationalization.

This discussion of the stylistic texture of the novel allows us to consider the text's engagement of history at the level of form rather than content—something that *Bimal* does both by thickly referencing past literary forms that it is marking as insufficient for the present, and by intertwining this critique of form with a critique of heternormative patriarchy. This intertwined critique is ultimately seen as making *Bimal* an anti-Bildung that subverts not only the novel form and nationalist gender roles, but the notion of individual and collective progress in the nation altogether.

In *Bimal*, instead of being nationalized, the language is deconstructed through its referencing of past forms and its inclusion of the reader so that there is no shared, 'objective' idiom in which it is written. At the same time the language is also emasculated through its centering of a non-procreative sexual desire and of an effete male protagonist who is also a writer. As a writer, Bimal is unable to either 'go anywhere,' or narrate the patriarchal nation in a form that is legible to a readership, and that may thus create a shared sense of the nation as 'going somewhere'.

Faltering Words: An Essay on Language, Immigration, and Inquiry

Recession

> "aphasia and double disfigurement . . . are fundamental to the racialized encounter with language in (post)coloniality" (Chow 10)

During my first summer back in Delhi as a graduate student, I had a conversation about feeling estranged from one's language. Though I had spent a mere nine months away from home, I already felt that my language sat oddly on my tongue. I think of the Hindi word for awkward, "*atpata*," which is positively onomatopoeic in its ability to capture the feeling of awkwardness. Each vowel, each consonant came out differently. Although I had been speaking in both Hindi and English to my family and friends while I was away (in the US), when I came back home, my tongue would still search for the right sounds inside my mouth, groping in the dark, as it were. The right words too would go away, though to my surprise, they came more easily than the sounds. It was hard to understand what had happened. I never spoke in an American accent. So why did my Indian accent go away, and why was it so hard to bring it back?

But of course, it wasn't just Hindi that receded, but English too—the English I had grown up with, the tyranny of the British, the medium of education in my school and many others, which told us for instance not to pronounce the "r"s at the end of words. Hindi being phonetic, we weren't accustomed to pretending a letter wasn't in the room, we weren't into "silent" letters. We saw it, we said it. Vot-ur. Rub-burr. Paint-urr. Taught the de-Hindi-ization of our English, we learned to say Wat-uh.

Rub-uh. Paint-uh. And then somehow, 20 years later, I found myself at a dive bar in a small beach town in California, USA, trying to tell a bartender that what I wanted was "waddar," not vodka. My husband, a US American, is tickled every time I read "sizzler" as (what he hears as) "sizzla," when I say "squirrel" instead of "skorl".

Particularly when it came to English—or perhaps this was more noticeable in English—my sense of loss pertained not only to my accent, the sounds that came out of my mouth. You may think—as I did—that I knew English and so it would all be ok when I was in the US. While it of course helped me get around, I also realized that this English was a different story. So, aside from the sounds, I longed also for certain words—or rather, a grammar—the economy that language in India seemed to contain. As to any outsider to the US, the profusion of "likes" and "sort ofs" and "kind ofs" in American speech grated against my linguistic soul and made me wonder why the Americans couldn't just say the thing that they wanted to say, or why they couldn't pause instead of filling up that pause with words that turn into meaningless sounds. It was an unnecessary and uneconomical proliferation of a vocabulary of evasion. If the American accent were a garment, I would toss it to the Tailor masterji to take it in, make it fit.

The ability to think this question of translation (thinking of the movement from a word in one language to the same word in another language) as a question of voice (a continuum between thought and language) was recent.

My husband's sibling, a singer and voice artist, sharing their recording of a French accent for a podcast, was talking about how it's all about speaking from the

"front of the mouth" when I realized how true it was that the American accent resides in the back of the throat. The American drawl, the "yeahhh" for "yes," the many aspirated vowels where breath escapes not from somewhere just behind the lips, but bursts from deep inside. The "h" in "whole" is so deep that it often comes out as an Arabic "khe". To say a Hindi "la," I make a bowl of my tongue. To say an American "la," I make a canyon of it. Rey Chow writes of call center agents: "Insofar as these brown and yellow people must adapt their bodies–the shapes of their mouths, their lips, their teeth, and their tongues as well as their vocal cords–to the manner of self-expression deemed acceptable by North American and other English speaking customers, are not their skin tones also disfigurements, the defective corrections of what is already deemed defective?" (9). For Chow, the fact that the voice is the only perceptible part of call centre executives, which then needs to be deracialized, is significant. As an immigrant in California, I experience something similar: in a blue state, the colour of my skin is easily consumed, but my accent is not. It is when I speak that I become alien.

Songs/*Viraha*/*Hijr*

After abandoning Hindi in the ninth grade, I began reading Hindi as an adult when my M.Phil advisor made me feel that my ability to read Hindi was a skill to pride myself on, at least in the world of academia. It could be academically valuable, and something that would help me gain entry into US academia, via South Asian studies. The reason why I continued to study it in California, however, was this loss of voice.

I experienced this most poignantly in my inability to sing.

Before arriving in the US, I had begun to learn Hindustani music, an interest that was bred in my family for a few generations, and that I returned to with every trip back home. Every year when I arrived in India, I would soon call on Shobna aunty, erstwhile ghazal singer and my guru, to set up weekly lessons. Shobhna aunty taught me the *holis*, *kajris*,[38] and *ghazals* that had already infused my life and perspective as a native of Uttar Pradesh, the heart of the "Hindi Heartland," and as a consumer of Bollywood, even before I started singing them myself—songs for festivals, songs about the monsoon, songs about separation. I say that it was my MPhil advisor, but it well may have been a reference to a *kajri* in Rahi Masoom Raza's *Aadha Gaon* that formed my decision to study Hindi. It would be an excuse to immerse myself in a language world that had grown inside me my whole life, and inside which I had grown, an indulgence of my own *zubaan*[39] and the ways of seeing therein—both the Hindustani of Bollywood, and the Awadhi of my aunts' *sohars*[40]. Often, the succor that those songs would provide me when I sang them, but especially when aunty sang them, made me burst into tears.

But after spending two years in the US, as the language fumbled around on my tongue, so did my singing voice.

"*Ibaadat* is necessary for *ilham*,[41]" Krishna Baldev Vaid says in his interview with Ashutosh Bhardwaj.

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[38] *Holis* are songs sung for Holi, the festival of colors, often pertaining to Lord Krishna and his erotic play with the milkmaids; *kajris* are sung at the onset of the monsoon
[39] Urdu for language, tongue, speech
[40] Songs sung at the birth of a child
[41] *Ibaadat*: worship/service; *ilham*: inspiration/revelation.

Though I sat down every evening for *riyaaz*[42]—for "*ibaadat*"—the sound of the tanpura setting the calm of a winter dusk upon my mind, there was no "*ilham*". I thought up many reasons—allergies were reducing the sonority of my voice; I was singing too hesitantly; I was singing too forcefully; I was thinking too much about the how instead of the what; I didn't have new songs to sing; I was singing in the voices of others, and so on. My mind recycled each of these possibilities regularly, and I perfected my perfectionism. I often wondered, "what am I afraid of saying/speaking?" The answer may have been, my difference.

Yet, in each of my excuses were embedded small truths that made an *ilham*, which at the time did not appear as such, or appeared as such only momentarily. I was singing in a voice that was not my own, because I did not know what my voice was anymore. I had bent and mis-shaped it, perhaps even contorted it, to make sense to the people around me, pronouncing my "r"s, saying more "pleases" and "thank yous" than were natural to my brown self, overusing exclamation marks in my emails and my speech—me, whose highest form of praise is calling something "very good" (I let vocal emphases indicate really *how* good). I wanted very much to be legible, although now when Americans tell me I have "no accent at all," I'm not sure if what I experience is a gratification of that desire for legibility. In response, I am able to muster an awkward smile and a half-nod, that side-nod so characteristic of South Asians, the translations from Hindi and English into English rattling in my brain as I

[42] Practice

shake my head and walk away not knowing if they know that what they meant as a compliment was experienced as a minor wound (opening).

Return/Milan/Vasl

The return of my voice, if it can be termed as such, comes in fits and spurts now, but at least I am beginning to see it, to find it. It came with certainty as I rehearsed songs for my own wedding in India, saturated with the joyous anticipation of seeing my family at one place after many years, hearing their voices, hearing their songs. It went, too, when my Green Card did not arrive in time, and the wedding had to be put off for a year. In the months before I was able to go home, when I was stuck in the US and a vast country felt like an 8x8 cage, I sang to a vacuum, and though the songs I sang had their own subjects, there was no resonance in me, emotionally or vocally. Often, I sang in a single voice rather than a multiple one, overtones and undertones hiding in the folds of a tense vocal apparatus.

I now find myself often singing to the language itself, and the multitude of people speaking it, from my sister's toddler who knows it only as sounds and inflections for now, to the auto drivers and rickshaw pullers and the people on the metro and multitudes in the marker—there is a world that holds the music of Hindi for me, to which I, my voice, and my singing are legible.

After coming to the US, the more I experienced my day-to-day living as translated, my thoughts and words shaped by what will or will not be legible to the people around me, the more I was drawn to studying literature in my own

language–both because it continued to nourish my relationship to my roots, and because I felt compelled to actively shape the American academy by my outsider's perspective, instead of being passively shaped by it. When a question about reading Hindi in the US (or "Why Hindi?") is asked, then, I turn to my voice—I say, I kept reading Hindi because I wanted to keep it on my tongue, so I could both dream and curse in it. I'd rather translate than be translated.

Linguistic inheritance: Mother tongue

In her book, Chow offers a "counterintuitive proposal": "the colonized's encounter with the colonizer's language offers a privileged vantage point from which to view the postcolonial situation, for precisely the reason that this language has been imposed from without" (14). For Chow, it is not only the colonial language that is a "prosthetic," but also the native language; it is, in fact, precisely through the lens of the colonial language that the native language reveals itself as prosthetic—like the ghost that can only be seen in a mirror. And so, there is another reason why I study Hindi—to examine its plasticity, its appropriability, its deployability.

Hindi is my language, as much as one can have a language. But also/In fact, Hindustani is my language. Belonging to the Hindi belt, Hindustani was the language in which my subjectivity was shaped. As Kayastha, much of my family was on the one hand upper-caste, and on the other had a long history of a deeply segregated yet proximate relationship with Muslims. Like a golden thread, Urdu wove through their Hindi, and the suspicion of Muslims through their culture. They ate chicken and

mutton (no beef, because they were Hindu, and no pork, because of the influence of Muslims. Non vegetarian because they were never Brahmins). They held their awareness of both Urdu and Hindi in high regard and turned their Hindi noses up at people who pronounced their "sh" as "s", and their Urdu noses up at missed *nuqtas*. There was much pride—and discrimination—in this language.

However, the kayasthas have historically been collaborators with ruling regimes. Not too many Shrivastavas or Saxenas or Vermas were to be found amongst radicals. The kayasthas were the quiet underdogs, the silent administrators whose monthly paycheck was to be assured no matter who was ruling. This meant that over the past ten years or more of the rule of Narendra Modi, I witnessed the slow but certain erosion of those nuqtas, the subtle dots under Hindi letters that denoted a sisterhood with Urdu as well as the possession of an intellectual capital.

A few years after Modi's arrival, I left India.

When the Hindu right says, "Hindi, Hindu, Hindustan," I think about all the scars that Hindi bears. By its division from Urdu, and its communalization against that equally communalized language. By the Partition, because it was Urdu's Siamese twin as it were, and also because of its empathy not only with Urdu but also with Panjabi, in Delhi. By the opposition of other languages when it was weaponized as the national language in 1949, and its continued use for that purpose, exacerbated by the right. This dissertation, then, arises out of an intermingled fear of the loss of my language within me, and within my home.

Linguistic inheritance: Another tongue

In "The Language of African Literature," Ngũgĩ writes of the loss of an indigenous language for the colonial subject as accompanied by the subject's estrangement from herself, since it is the loss of a vocabulary within which indigenous subjecthood could be articulated. As opposed to this, the colonizer's language is only capable of articulating a colonized subjecthood, always inferior. It was also, to Ngũgĩ, a loss of a world/vocabulary/community with which the individual was organically coextensive. "Since the new language was a product reflecting the 'real language of life' elsewhere, it could never, as spoken or written, properly reflect or imitate the real life of that community" (Ngũgĩ 118). I recall a young child in India asking her mother, "Why are storybooks always talking about 'a beautiful sunny day' when sunny days are always so hot and miserable?"

In India, while there was undoubtedly a privileging of the colonial language over indigenous languages, accompanied by apparatuses of surveillance and shame in the school system, there was yet the prevailing presence of indigenous languages. Embedded within the linguistic landscape of India, a country whose Constitution recognizes 22 languages, is a bilingualism or multilingualism as a result of which some classes are equally conversant with their mother tongues and English, and others have access only to their mother tongue. Others still speak their mother tongue as well as Hindi, in part due to the association of Hindi with India, and in part due to its dominance in Bollywood films, and English in addition to the two.

Like many members of the middle class, proud products of Macaulay's Minute, the colonial document that located the success of imperialism in the creation of "a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect," I express myself in my mother tongue and English, and both have become, in different ways, the language of my being.

I did not face a language loss, and for me, the bilingualism came easily—I had too many people around me who knew English well, but chose to speak in Hindi, and spoke it with an emphasis and pride that was accompanied by cultural capital. *(The easy access they/I had to English meant that the mother tongue was not, as it is to many people of the working classes, a language of deprivation. We could speak Hindi with pride because our existence did not rely on it)*. Many of my friends attending similar elite English-medium schools as me did face this loss. Their Hindi was frail and arose to their tongue only when they addressed people of the working classes—rickshaw pullers, auto drivers, maids, hawkers, laborers—who did not have access to English. I was surprised to find that they spoke in English even at home, with their parents, that Hindi was never their own language. I wonder now if they would call it their mother tongue.

Although my own experience was not one of the active suppression of my mother tongue, as in Chow's account, this was the experience of many other people in other parts of the country. Students who spoke the mother tongue in school were reported, and a sense of shame instilled in one's language as well as, presumably, in the sense of self inhering in that language. This is in fact still the case, particularly in

semi-urban areas where the aspiration to English is greater, and access to it more limited.

The other tongue

In his introduction to Nirmal Verma's biography, Vineet Gill makes a case for Verma's writing to be read as world literature, beginning with the claim that Hindi literature has always drawn on other languages. Gill's own writing is woven with brief and passing references to writers from a wide variety of social contexts, including a heavy smattering of canonical European writers of the 19th and 20th centuries—Wordsworth, Matthew Arnold, Baudelaire, and Benjamin, to name only a few. In Gill as well as in Verma, I find reflected one of my own conundrums—an attachment to European literature.

As a student, and then a teacher, of literature, I went back often to my first year of undergraduate study for an Honors degree in English at the Delhi University. Despite another fifteen-odd years of studying literature, that first year remained my favorite. The courses on Victorian literature and on contemporary Indian literature became my introduction to reading beyond what had happened to catch my eye at the school library. I devoured *Jane Eyre*, *Pride and Prejudice*, and *Hard Times*, as well as *Ghare Baire* and *The Shadow Lines* with an unexpected voracity. Even now, I remember almost viscerally the emotional impact that those texts had on me—a vast landscape of spaces, feelings, forms of speech, and characters that I felt unfurling in my imagination.

The next significant stage in my journey as a reader came when I began writing. At this time, I had no reason to be 'consistent'. I read Bakhtin, Jameson, Freud, Hemingway, Murakami, Olga Grushin, John Cheever, Raymond Carver, Ambai, A. K. Ramanujan. I don't think I read quite as voraciously as other people do. But in the warp and woof of my own and others' words was formed a relationship with the English language that had first taken shape when I was very young, perhaps ten or eleven years old, and which my father had encouraged out of some belief that I was a prodigy.

While my upbringing in Hindi went a long way towards embedding both a love for that language and an attachment to and deep understanding of its idioms, I have learned to think critically as well as imaginatively—in at least one sense of the word 'imagination'—not only in Hindi, but also in and through the language and literature of the colonizer. This has meant that my sense of good writing, which draws in the heart, mind, and intellect, is irreparably beholden to English. This is one reason why reading Hindi literature was difficult for me, regardless of the comfort I might have had with the language and the script. Even though I speak and think, feel and imagine in Hindi, the tone and texture of literary Hindi at times felt alien. This is, of course, the predicament of millions of people who grew up as part of the middle class in globalization-era India, and whose parents tried to encourage the use of English at home, no matter their own multilingual ease. The assumption was, for instance, that the mother tongue would be learned by default since everyone all around was speaking it. It was English that had to be learned through reading and writing. Hindi

needed no efforts at teaching or learning beyond what was being taken care of at school. *(When parents were told to speak to their children in only one language because bilingualism is confusing for them, they readily sacrificed the mother tongue and chose English over it).*

Reading Hindi

My difficulties in analyzing Hindi texts, that is, in close reading them, also came from being a bilingual speaker in the US. English was the language of my intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and academic makeup. Hindi was all of these, except the last. What I'm trying to emphasize here is the difficulty of close reading Hindi texts without having access to Hindi TV, radio, speech, the Hindi speaking universe, and Bollywood surrounding me on all sides. Access, in other words, to spaces in which the encoding of thought in shapes taken by the language were all around, and all I had to do was to pick them up, and match them to my texts, for an alternate dimension of the text to be revealed.

There was another reason why reading Hindi literature was difficult, which was that I had been taught little about the forebears of Hindi literature. Even though a B.A. in 'English' was a misnomer because we neither studied texts that were solely written in English, nor texts produced solely in England, we were bequeathed a sense of European literary history in comparison to which our sense of an Indian or South Asian literary history was non-existent. That said, my desire to read Hindi literature in and through a literary history that I did not possess was not a result of the extensive

scholarship around regional Indian language literary spheres, nor of Marxist literary criticism's injunction to "always historicize". Being in the US made me feel protective towards my Hindi, and I was sensitive to the use of western literary history and theory to understand Hindi writing. In other words, I was worried about using western forms of reading to appropriate a non-Europhone literature for the purpose of producing scholarship in the west that is ungrounded in the spaces where the literature originates. In many ways, then, this dissertation is about being an English reader of Hindi, about thinking Hindi as an immigrant with a deep connection to, yet great distance from and longing for, the homeland. It is a relationship that allows for both the privilege and resources required for doing this work, and the nostalgia that taints my objectivity and analytical ability.

Passing in English

> "Rather than being signs of inferiority . . . aphasia and double disfigurement can be conceptualized anew as forms of unveiling, as what exposes the untenability of 'proper' (and proprietary) speech as such. This conceptual shift is proposed here . . . for clarifying a simple fact: namely, that the intellectually sophisticated ways of coming to terms with language as known to some of us—with their stresses on error, failure, defacement, disappointment, nonarrival, and so forth—have a vital parallel in the process of racialization, the shadowy tones of which are typically borne by those who are deemed inferior" (Chow 15).

I have been trying to pass as knowing the world around me, and what people are talking about. It was only recently that I became aware of this, and how this pretense at knowing is a corollary of the erasure of my difference, assimilation, becoming translated. The more I try to gain a different, American, voice, the more I become aware that I am not that. When my English is called "impeccable," what is unheard is

the constant processing of my pronunciation before words come out of my mouth, of the right words before they are spoken (hours instead of timing; yard instead of garden, deck instead of balcony, trash can instead of dustbin, power instead of *bijli*/electricity/light, the list goes on). All I want is to be legible, so I do the translations myself (translate myself?) instead of requesting it of my interlocutors and thus asking too much.

I didn't realize when those translations became an act of wishful forgetting that I came from a wholly different world; didn't realize when they went from translations to attempts at assimilating, till the moment I found myself in the midst of "error, failure, defacement, disappointment, nonarrival, and so forth," and I remembered, I am not white, I am not American, I never will be.

After coming to the US, the more I experienced my day-to-day living as translated, my thoughts and words shaped by what will or will not be legible to the people around me, the more I was drawn to studying literature in my own language–both because it continued to nourish my relationship to my roots, and because I felt compelled to actively shape the American academy by my outsider's perspective, instead of being passively shaped by it. When a question about reading Hindi in the US (or "Why Hindi?") is asked, then, I turn to my voice—I say, I kept reading Hindi because I wanted to keep it on my tongue, so I could both dream and curse in it. I'd rather translate than be translated.

Coda

Following Rey Chow, this dissertation approaches language as a cultural artefact that changes constantly with use, and argues that the employment of stylistic and formal experimentation as a rubric to expand a language generates a new complex of significations for it, so that Hindi as the language of Hinduism, conservatism, and nationalism is replaced by these texts with Hindi as the language of feminine autonomy, translation, empathy, cosmopolitanism, hesitancy, and irony. By studying what Sobti, Verma, and Vaid say about Hindi as a national language, how they use Hindi as a literary language, and the relationship of their literary Hindi with that of the nation, I surface the connections between their Hindi and the Hindi of the nation. I argue that these writers use the putative "national language" to "abjure" the nation, and in doing so, demonstrate modernism's potential to destabilize politico-linguistic borders (Walkowitz 13). It is through the complex literary textures that they introduce into the "national language" that they conjure alternative imaginaries of the nation.

Keeping in mind Hindi's status as a "culturally loaded language" and its centrality to the language debates in India, this dissertation also tries to understand what happens when a language that is simultaneously hegemonic and subaltern becomes a medium of experimentation (Orsini 20). It analyzes the ways in which the violent history of the birth of nationhood and nation-building in India come to be written through Hindi modernism, what happens when Hindi turns away from a

realist register, and how history is sublimated in form. It offers a study of the connections between modernism and the nation, modernism and history, and modernism and language politics in the context of India. Ultimately, it asks if modernism has the power to alter a language and the cultural meanings invested in it.

Material (and immaterial) obstacles

One of the challenges in conducting this research was my presence in the US for long durations. While an immersion in the scholarly environments of the US academy allowed me to make arguments and develop stylistic tendencies that were viable to the same academy, I lacked access to conversations that would enliven this dissertation with immediate grounding in day-to-day South Asian politics. Even though my methods as a literary scholar did not require deep archival research, the few opportunities I received to place myself in the Hindi speaking world were immensely helpful. Situating myself in the Hindi milieu frequently allowed me, in a sense, to put meanings back into words. This research was thus conducted in two different worlds—a characteristic, I would argue, of most good scholarly work, although I will refrain from easily slipping my research into the same category as the painstaking archival research and fieldwork that is done by most area studies scholars.

Despite Hindi being my first language, my mother tongue, the practice of reading Hindi took far longer to develop fluency in than I had anticipated. Writing a

dissertation meant not only reading but also analyzing these texts, which formed a non-canonical archive in relation to the tools I possessed for literary critical analysis. What I had assumed would be a process of putting two and two together—I was familiar with literary analysis, and I was familiar with reading Hindi, therefore I would face no trouble in doing both at the same time—was anything but that. Early in the research and writing, understanding meant a piecemeal translation—of words, then sentences, then the paragraph, and then the larger piece.

Agyeya's writing, which I began my research with, posed a particularly difficult challenge. The writer's use of a Sanskritic Hindi to depict landscapes marked by pathetic fallacies employed agglutinative words that often could not be located in the dictionary. In order to understand those words, I was required to carefully and precisely dissect the single word into two or three, a process of *sandhi-vichched* in which I would frequently stumble. I next read Nirmal Verma, whose Hindi, marked with translation, relieved me of the kind of work Agyeya had been demanding of me. It was not difficult to see why Nirmal Verma, whose Hindi carries the cadence of English, is the Hindi writer to which middle class readers bred upon English writing often turn. However, this relief was undone first by Sobti, whose use of colloquialisms posed a challenge to understanding, and then by Vaid, whose nonsense prose deliberately prevented understanding.

I believe that the fact that I had to do this work as a 'native speaker' of Hindi speaks to the validity of my research, to language as a shifting object that eludes competency. This is why, while thinking about the nationalized language, the "native

speaker" in this dissertation is thought in relation to Hindi, and against the assumption that the native speaker can and should speak the normative, standardized idiom of Hindi that was to be reproduced through the Hindi public sphere—the idiom that was, in Vasudha Dalmia's words, "nationalized."

Looking ahead

The exploration of the decolonization or denationalization of language through the employment of modernist strategies that this project undertakes is undoubtedly founded upon an archive that is itself more or less hegemonic, with the partial exception of Krishna Sobti. Each of the writers studied here, as well as the writerly circles in which they moved, were largely middle class and upper-caste, and had access to education, immigration, and both South Asian and international literature. The answers offered here would receive fruitful provocations from the perspective of writers who are either subaltern or outsiders to the male-Hindu-upper caste norm of Hindi literature. Thus, it would be useful to look at modernism in the work of Dalit Hindi writers as well as writers coming to Hindi from different mother tongues. Laura Brueck's chapter on the use of dialect in Hindi Dalit literature in her book *Writing Resistance: The Rhetorical Imagination of Hindi Dalit Literature* offers some noteworthy observations in this regard. Brueck points out that the use of dialect in the work of Surajpal Chauhan and Omprakash Valmiki often signifies the backwardness of casteism. In the work of Dalit writers, standardized Hindi, perhaps due to its claim

to modernity, contains an ability to articulate a caste consciousness. While Brueck allows us to think about the appropriation of standardized Hindi to articulate a caste consciousness, she does not offer suggestions as to how such an appropriation changes Hindi, and if the language, beyond facilitating Dalit consciousness, also internalizes that consciousness in any way. It may be helpful to think, for instance, of formalist strategies developed by Dalit writers that become a set of shared resources, and perhaps come to be replicated in other contexts as well. Such a study would require greater attention not only to how Dalit writers are using Hindi, but also how the language needs to adapt in order to represent a consciousness that is otherwise situated at its margins.

As this consideration of evolving a Dalit Hindi in terms of strategies that are reproduced and replicated suggests, this research can also take into consideration the lineages fashioned by the writers studied here, so that the notion of changing Hindi does not remain restricted to the changes effected within particular texts, but can be seen as broader changes in how the language is used in literature as well as other cultural contexts. In what ways do the experiments undertaken by Sobti, Verma, and Vaid become a set of resources that can impinge upon Hindi in the present day, and allow us to challenge its appropriation and instrumentalization by the Hindu right?

This dissertation remains largely agnostic towards English language writing for reasons discussed under the section "The necessity of Hindi modernism," particularly Laetitia Zecchini's argument that non-Anglophone literatures are rarely brought under the purview of postcolonialism because they do not—to use Ngũgĩ's

term—"enrich" the colonizer's language. Nonetheless, a comparative study of both English and Hindi modernisms of the post-independence period may be helpful in better understanding the extent to which the formal experiments encountered in either should be traced to western modernisms. While the Hindi modernism studied here is clearly influenced by Anglo-American modernisms, it frequently privileges an exploration of the formal possibilities of modernism/experimentalism over the delineation of a literary genealogy. It may be useful to examine these decisions against those made by writers such as G. V. Desani, Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao.

Appendix A

Preface to *Doosra Saptak,* Satchidanandan Vatsyayan 'Agyeya'

When *Taar Saptak* was published, the thought arose of publishing a series of books that would progressively bring together the work of new and ingenious poets—poets who are brilliant enough for their poetry to be published, but who are not yet so influential enough that a publisher will immediately put out their individual collections. *Taar Saptak* too was conceived with this thought, although it was also marked by the idealism of making the publication a cooperative venture. (Those who have read that collection may recall that this idealism could not be fulfilled even then; in the *Doosra Saptak*, it was disposed of altogether.)

The poets of the *Taar Saptak* were poets who, the editor believed, brought something worth bringing to the reader even though they were new, only "aspiring to the poet's fame,"[43] and as such, mere explorers in the world of poetry. It cannot be said that all of them went on to succeed equally in the world of poetry—at least one of them has not only publicly abandoned poetry but has also become such a critic of poetry that he is now intent upon routing poetry from literature; of the remaining, a couple are somewhat fed-up with poetry. Nevertheless, I believe that the publication of the *Taar Saptak*—the publication as well as its arrangement, compilation, editing—was not only timely and useful but can also be considered a significant event

[43] Agyeya uses the phrase "कवियश:प्रार्थी," alluding to Kalidasa's *Raghuvansham*, referenced again later in the preface.

in the Hindi literary world. And the debate generated by it amongst critics can very well be considered an indication of its influence.

Doosra Saptak once again presents the collected creative work of seven new poets. Of the seven, none is a stranger to the world of Hindi letters, although none has had an independent collection of poetry published. Hence, it may be said that this collection is their introduction to the world of published poetry. It is also my belief that of the collections of poetry presently being published in Hindi, few would present so much good poetry as will be found in the *Doosra Saptak*.

Are these poems Experimentalist? Do these poets belong to any one party, are they patrons of any political or literary ideology? Since I have unfortunately and unreasonably been held responsible for founding the doctrine of experimentalism, it is important for me to respond to these questions in some way, if for no other reason than so that the poets collected in *Doosra Saptak* do not from the outset become victims of any bias and are judged solely on the basis of their craft.

There is no theory of experimentalism. I have never been a theorist, and will never be. Neither is experimentation sufficient or whole in itself. In the same way, there is no theory of poetry either. Poetry too is neither sufficient nor whole in itself. Therefore calling me an "experimentalist" is as good as calling me a "poemist." Because I do believe that just as the poet who wishes to express himself through the medium of poetic form has the right to use that medium as he feels fit, the poet seeking inner truth using the medium of experimental form has the right to study the

affordances of that medium. In fact, without studying and internalizing the specificity, power and limits of a medium, it is impossible to use it effectively.

Those who turn to tradition to criticise experimentation often forget that tradition, at least for a poet, is not a neat bundle at his side, that he may carry around at his convenience (though it may be so for some critics). Tradition has no meaning for a poet until he breaks it apart, twists and distorts it, and assimilates it; until it becomes such a deep cultural instinct that it no longer requires conscious attention in order to be brought forth. It is only when the poet's expression takes the form of instinct, that the instinct-granting tradition becomes the poet's own. Otherwise it may be a history, a science, a reservoir of knowledge with which the poet might as well be unfamiliar. I do not mean to say that he *should* remain unfamiliar—since I am accused of intellectualism!— but it is certainly possible to intimately understand tradition and be a poet while remaining unfamiliar with those knowledges.

So, experimentation in itself is not the desired goal; it is a means in two significant senses. First, it is the means for the poet to access the truth which he presents, and second, it is the means for evolving a method and medium for that presentation. In other words, experimentation allows the poet to both know his truth and express it better. Experimentation is generative in relation to both the content and the craft of writing. This is such a simple and straightforward truth that to try to deny it is plain perversity; there are several such perverse people and that they belong to a group that takes upon itself the responsibility of enlightening people about literature should not surprise us. What is the point of debating about today's poetry with a

group whose declared strategy is that in order to have their approval a work or object should be three hundred years old? It will be good enough to talk to them after three hundred years—and maybe by then it will become unnecessary because what counts as an experiment today will have become tradition—their tradition! Those who disapproved of Chhayavaad when it was a living form of expression are now its supporters and champions, when it is dead; now they wish to save it from those in whom the living truth of the day seeks expression, even if awkwardly.

To make it even more clear that there is no theory of experimentalism that I follow, I wish to say one more thing. Experimentation has been practiced throughout the ages, and it is only through experiments that the poem, or for that matter any art, any creative practice, can move forward. He who says that he has never practiced any form of experimentation, is in reality saying that he has never desired to undertake any creative work throughout his life; if such a person is telling the truth then it will be found that what he writes is not 'poetry': it contains no creativity, it is not an art, but rather a skill, a sleight of hand. I will not debate with those who consider that poetry. It is not possible for me to debate with them. Because we use different languages, and even for debate, it is necessary to have common ground! However, even as I remain firm on this position, I would like to add that the ability to experiment is not the sole criterion that makes poetry out of a creative work. My experimentation is of no importance to the reader or sympathiser. What is significant is the truth attained through experimentation. I cannot claim to the reader that I have undertaken a hundred experiments, unless I cannot also say, look, this is what I have

achieved through experimentation. Whatever the significance of experimentation may be for the doer, however sincere his search for the truth and his persistence may be, they become irrelevant for the sympathiser. The connoisseur is interested in the pearl, not in the diver's unsuccessful attempts. The diver's efforts or experiments can only become relevant by presenting the pearl—'To find this pearl, these efforts were made'—without the pearl, they have no meaning.

This makes any doctrines about experimentalism even more dishonest. The one who experiments in search of truth knows well that though his experiments may be a matter of life and death for him, they hold no significance for others. What is relevant is the result of his search. He also knows that this is as it should be. Even to him, the result holds the greatest importance, otherwise he would not so deeply invest himself in the search.

I believe that after laying this foundation it becomes unnecessary for me to respond to accusations that have been laid upon me by calling me an "experimentalist." Some of these accusations cause me great discomfort, not so much because there is any truth to them, but because they pervert reason and logic in a way that is not expected of the critic. A critic may have biases, but it is certainly expected that he will at least know how to use logic and will not pervert it. Shri Nanddulare Bajpai's essay titled "Experimentalist Creations" is a surprising instance of such a perversion of logic. Responding to such insinuations would be a futile experiment; and I have already said that futile experimentation has no general value. However, I would like to say a few things about the question of common intelligibility.

The *Taar Saptak* poets were accused of not believing in the principle of common intelligibility. This is a dual offence. Because not only do they believe in this principle, but they even rely upon it as a justification of experimentation. We must acknowledge that along with the progress of civilization, the sphere of our sensibilities has also been progressing, as have the tools available to us for representing the same. We know that our basic passions have not changed: love is still love and disgust is still disgust, and this is commonly accepted. But we also recognise that though the passions are unchanged, our modes of forming aesthetic relationships[44] have changed, and since the domain of the poet is that of aesthetic relationships, this change has left a deep imprint upon poetry. The difference between dry 'facts' and 'truth'—one may say, between 'objective truth' and 'subjective truth'—is that 'truth' is the 'fact' with which we are able to relate; without this relationship it is an external reality that can never make its way into poetry. But as the external reality changes, the ways in which we relate to it also undergoes changes—and if they do not change, our relationship to the external reality is disrupted. I feel compelled to say that the critics who are failing to understand this change have broken away from the present reality. Unable to form an aesthetic relationship with it, they see it only as an external reality whereas I establish such a

[44] Agyeya uses the phrase "rāgātmaka sambaṃdha" here. The Oxford Hindi-English dictionary defines "rāga," in part, as "passion, desire, love," and "rāgātmaka" as "emotional, passionate" (859). A literal translation of "rāgātmaka sambaṃdh" would thus be "emotional relationships" or "passionate relationships." The difficulty in translating this phrase owes to the overlap between the passions and aesthetics in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the treatise of Sanskrit drama. Thus, the "basic passions" that he cites in the previous sentence are delineated in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* as the emotions that a piece of drama must arouse. Agyeya is writing, I believe, not only of the emotions that are aroused in us but also, and simultaneously, of the shape they take in art. Thus, I translate "rāgātmaka sambaṃdha" as "aesthetic relationships."

relationship and thus turn it into an internal truth. And this transmission inaugurates a fresh crisis of common intelligibility. In ancient times, when the domain of knowledge was limited and more consolidated, when separate designations of poet, scientist, literary scholar, etc. were unnecessary and the reader or student was familiar with, if not adept at, all branches of knowledge, the problem of common intelligibility was of a different kind. At that time language had only one idiom. Or it may be said that the educated classes had one idiom and the masses had another. One was Sanskrit and the other was Prakrit. But is the situation the same today? In the current world of specialisation, despite there being one language, there are several idioms. Language is still a medium of communication; no one says that it has abandoned or that it should abandon its general function. But this is now a function, not a fact. There is no language which is understood or spoken by everyone. English is a language, and its huge dictionaries provide singular meanings for every word, yet the English of Math is one, that of Economics is another, and that of the novelist is a third kind. In such a situation the poet who wishes to express the truth of one sphere (not fact, but truth: in other words, the specific fact within that sphere with which he is able to form a relationship) outside of that sphere faces a major problem. He can either abandon the pretence altogether and choose to express a limited truth in a limited realm using a limited idiom—which is to say, he achieves common intelligibility but narrows the sphere of the common—and therefore takes refuge in a contradiction; or, he could choose to honor his desire to reach out to a greater sphere, and therefore instead of remaining tied to the idiom of his own sphere make the effort of searching for a path

outside of it. This way he will be forced to abandon a common idiom precisely for the purpose of common intelligibility—and thus will take refuge in another contradiction! If this exposition is correct then the question is, which of the two contradictions is to be approved of? I will only say that the one who chooses the second path should at the very least deserves our respect and perception in a more generous and universal light—you may call his courage intrepidity, but how can you call his character ill?

Consider the basic question of language—the relationship between a word and its meaning. How does meaning enter a word, how and why does it change, does it become more or less relevant? An awareness of hermeneutics is unnecessary here; we can work with a very small example. When we use the word ‘rosy’, it brings a specific colour to mind. This plainly gestures towards the colour of a rose; the image is inherent in the word. In the beginning, in order to reach from the word “rosy” to the colour, the mediation of the image would have been necessary; only through the medium of the image could the meaning be arrived at. At that time this usage would have been novel. But it is not so now. Now we arrive straight at the colour from the word; the mediation of the flower is unnecessary. Now, the novelty of the meaning has died away, it has become familiar. Moreover our understanding is not obstructed by the fact that roses come in several colours—white, yellow, red, even a color that is almost black. This process constantly takes place in language and is necessary for its progress. The novelty keeps dying out and novel meaning gradually becomes familiar. In a manner of speaking, the language of poetry is constantly turning into the language of prose. Thus the poet is always facing the problem of the creation of

novelty—he is constantly giving words a new concept, and those concepts gradually infiltrate the common intellect over time and thus become useless to the poet—at least in that form. 'Scrubbing the pot excessively wears off the shine.' When Kalidasa said at the beginning of *Raghuvamsa*:

> vāgarthāviva saṃpṛktau vāgarthapratipattaye|
> jagata: pitarau vande pārvatīparameśvarau[45]

he had understood this idea and therefore had prayed for the generation of meaning in the utterance. The poet does not pray for the generation of the meaning that is already there in the utterance! The word which is already filled with meaning is the soil, the raw material which he uses for his creation; a creation through which he can fill the word with new meaning, fill it with life. This is the meaning-generation for which the poet prays to the Parvati-Parmeshwar, "united like words and their meanings." And to dismiss this prayer as mere peculiarity or search for newness would be to disregard the task of the poet. When the novelty of meaning dies and becomes familiar, then the passionate intensity of the word is also reduced. An aesthetic relationship to that meaning cannot be established. The poet then generates that meaning which will renew the passionate intensity, re-establish an aesthetic relationship. This is what common intelligibility means. Otherwise, if the sentiments, the aesthetic response generated, and the structures of transitory states are all the same,[46] what remains for the poet to do? What is it that will give the poem the honour of creation, not repetition? Only when the poet turns new facts into new truths by forming new

[45] "For the right comprehension of words and their senses, I salute Parvati (the mountain's daughter) and Parameswara (the supreme lord) the parents of the universe, who are (perpetually) united like words and their meanings." (Kale 243)
[46] Here once again Agyeya references concrete categories listed in the *Natyashastra.*

aesthetic relationships between them, communicates those truths, and makes them accessible, does a new creation come into being. This is something that the writer of New Poetry does not forget. Insistence on common intelligibility is of no use to him; in fact, understanding that common intelligibility is increasingly becoming a challenge, he is more conscious of his responsibility and is prepared to make an additional effort to achieve it. To a certain degree it is true that where the poet's sympathies are confused, the reader or sympathiser, as a consequence of the same circumstances, are affected in the same way, and this allows some convenience to the poet's presentation of matters. However, the solution to the above mentioned specialisation of knowledge does not lie in this; instead that question becomes even more difficult to answer. The direction of the progress of modern science and knowledge now lies in specialisation: only when this is understood completely, can it be understood how difficult common intelligibility has become—transgressing past the specialising tendency of the totality of scientific knowledge, rising above it, the poet has to see and show that fragmented truth as whole. He does not forget this responsibility. But he does not comprehend the suggestion that he should leave poetry altogether till the time that all knowledge becomes unified and accessible to everyone—when different idioms reunite under the cry of "one language, one idiom." There is something he needs to say now, which he believes is significant, and so he says it for those who will understand it, whom he can explain it to; he has not left the principle of common intelligibility, but he reaches whom he can, and he wishes to reach further without leaving these people behind. In truth he wishes to move along

with tradition, because he never allows it to become detached from the age, whereas in comparison his opponents say, “Everyone understood yesterday’s truth, if everyone does not understand today’s truth then we can leave it and speak the truth of yesterday”—without thinking about what the relevance of yesterday’s truth is now, and who can satisfactorily form an aesthetic relationship with it.

So far we have been grappling with *Taar Saptak* and the aggressive criticisms it provoked. The preface of *Doosra Saptak* should go beyond this. In fact, it should be seen as beginning here, because to defend one publication in another publication is somewhat unjust to both. I would have avoided referencing *Taar Saptak* here, which will only serve to attract critics’ biases, if I was not certain that the shared names and publishers of the two would do so anyway. If those biases will be used to make allegations, then why not respond to them as we go along?

That the editor is not one of the poets of the *Doosra Saptak* makes his job a little less difficult. On the one hand I will be less hesitant to say anything about the poets, on the other hand, it will be easier [for readers] to put my thoughts to the side and form their own opinion on the poems. These new poets may be criticized as “experimentalist,” or—as has happened in the past—they may be considered worthy of criticism simply based on the claim that their experiments are not particularly novel. However, this criticism would be as inappropriate as it was in the case of the first *Saptak*; in fact, I believe it would be even less appropriate. Even though the linguistic refinement and sophistication of all poets may not be the same, and each

may exhibit a small degree of awkwardness, nevertheless, each of them has managed to give some degree of significance to experimentation. None of them has undertaken 'experimentation for the sake of experimentation,' but rather each understands the demands of the new crises and liabilities, and each has been inspired by them. *Doosra Saptak* undeniably takes Hindi poetry a step ahead and, from the perspective of skill, lights a new flame of hope in the benighted present of the world of Hindi letters. These poets too have not arrived at a resting point, but there is before them a broad path and a lit horizon. Gupta, 'Prasad', 'Nirala', Pant, Mahadevi, 'Bacchan', 'Dinkar'; if we take this list forward, it will certainly include some poets presented in the *Doosra Saptak*. And once again, if we consider individual poems, rarely will so many good ones be found in the same collection as they are here.

I must once again emphasize that the coming together of these poets is not a precursor to the formation of any party or group. In the first preface I had written about the differences in opinion between the poets; this brought Nanddulare ji to the conclusion that the experimentalist poem is written by those poets who do not agree with each other. If I were now to say that the present collection includes poets that I have never met personally, he will find a new definition of experimentalists, which is poets who write similar poetry without ever having met one another! I do not regret giving him this opportunity, his logic is fascinating to read and does not anticipate a response. However I do wish to say that the seven poets here have also not been brought together because of the similarities in their thought or similar literary or political ideologies. Although there are certainly some that I have personal

acquaintance with, the reason for their inclusion here is their poetry. I was drawn to the power of this poetry, and its beauty fundamentally inspired this *Saptak*. On part of the poets this collection received as little, half-hearted and delayed cooperation as the first; in fact this time the difficulty was greater because this time it was not their proposition that a cooperative publication should be put together, but rather my insistence that a representative collection of new poetry be published. Whatever it may be, the collection is before you; you may read the poems for their own good or bad qualities, and judge the poet's success or failure on that basis! Whatever I have said was in the hope that you will not read them through the muddy vision of the biases they have been accused of by critics, but through your own uncorrupted sympathy; I am certain that you will be satisfied by this collection.

Appendix B

"Beauty and Morality in Literature," Nirmal Verma

Commenting upon your own writing is a hopeless and burdensome enterprise. There is something parasitic about it, because less than a goal in itself, it is akin to unearthing dead bodies whose vital blood has already been drawn into our literary works. It is as difficult to bring them back to life as to pursue those unremarkable impressions[47] that had momentarily attained a curious shape, only to scatter in different directions in an instant. A poem or a story are points of concentration, but dissolution in the pure stream of existence is a necessary condition of being. If defining your own creative oeuvre means that you must bring these two drifts together, then it is a largely futile exercise. As soon as we try to take apart a point of concentration, all of those ordinary impressions that were flowing in the stream of existence—the shriveled remnants and dried out bones that formed the soul of the concentrated moment—vanish. When we are distracted with analyzing these impressions, all the traces and signs[48] that had momentarily paused at one place and lent meaning to these impressions, that may have helped us predict the fate[49] of the story,[50] will silently slip away.

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[47] The word "anubhav" can be translated into both "impressions" and "experiences." Here, I chose the former, because of Verma's seeming interest in impressions that are cast upon the mind in passing. The phrase "ordinary experiences" almost sounds like an oxymoron since the word "experiences" is mostly used to refer to something exceptional. At other times, when Verma is referring to something wider and more specific than passing images that are left upon the mind, I have used "experiences."

[48] "sootra aur sanket"

[49] Literally, write up a horoscope of the story

[50] Verma repeatedly uses the word "rachna" which can only be translated clunkily into "literary work." Since he also uses the phrase "story or poem" to similar effect, and since the genre of the short story was so central to his oeuvre, I have taken the liberty of at times translating "rachna" into "story."

In other words, even if I were to connect my stories to my personal experiences, they would be unlikely to lead to the heart, the essence of the story, to the labyrinthine sprawl that lies between the beginning and the end. I am trying to say here that the story's sources cannot lead us to the story's fate. In its most creative moments, criticism may be able to unearth the truth of a story, yet "truth is not the drawing of the veil to destroy the illusion, but the protecting of the illusion."[51] While Walter Benjamin's maxim referred to religious truths, I believe that it is equally apt for illuminating the hidden meaning of a literary work.

Although the truth of a story rises above, and is distinct from my lived experiences, the incorporation of those experiences into the structure of the story or their carving into a meter into allows the truth to overcome the haste, the uncertainties, and the fragmentation and fading that imprint the experiences. Yet, the structure does not altogether abandon those infirmities so that truth may enter some eternal realm of ideological or religious truth. Instead, it carries our experiences to their ultimate destiny. In making that journey, the poem or story evolves so deeply that it begins to seem like an experience in itself, the sovereign of beauty, a complete, self-sufficient unit.

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[51] From Graeme Gilloch, *Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations*: "Benjamin's study exemplified the concept of criticism which he had elaborated in his doctoral dissertation. Criticism is to move beyond conventional interpretations of the work of art, which deal merely with its subject matter (its 'material content') in order to unfold its hidden meaning (its 'truth content')" (45-6); "Although beauty is intimately related to appearance, it should not be simply equated with it. Beauty is not mere appearance: superficial, deceptive, a mask or 'veil' (*Hülle*) which disguises something else. Rather, beauty is precisely this 'something else': truth, not concealed behind, but discerned within, its 'veil'. The work of art, the beautiful, is truth (truth content) within its veil (material content). The task of the genuine critic is not to lift or tear away this veil, for truth always eludes those grasping hands which all too eagerly seek to strip it bare. Rather, the critic must appreciate both the veil and the beauty of truth within it" (53).

It begins to seem, although it is not really so. For a writer to believe that her[52] creation is a self-sufficient unit, that once written, it is unencumbered by the hollows of her selfhood, of her fragmentary remembrances,[53] would be as mistaken as for her to believe that its roots lie only in her fragmentary remembrances—that it has no integrity of its own above and beyond them.

Any creative work is neither completely autonomous nor completely founded upon one's impressions. Rather, facing the narrow doorway at which the author is struck by paralysis, it gathers itself together into an imperceptible shadow, takes a shape suitable to the doorway, and slithers past it. This shapeshifting is what gives birth to that imperceptible daemon that we call form, which then bestows upon the creative work dynamism, vitality, and flesh.

What is this narrow doorway that transfixes us whenever we are trying to write? To me, it appears to be a web of my own past—forgotten memories, and the worlds woven into those memories—what I had described before as the traces and signs caught in the stream of time. They lie in an endless wait like a lock upon the door; and when an impression, a tension, a theory, or the unbearable challenge that causes the theory to fall apart call out "Open Sesame," the door opens, and out tumble half-baked remembrances, ordinary impressions, enveloped in sweat and dust, and they cross the threshold to enter that dark cave that is the world of our stories.

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[52] I have used the feminine third person pronoun here, even though Verma consistently uses the masculine third person pronoun to refer to the writer.

[53] In some places, such as here, "anubhav" is very difficult to translate. Here, I believe Verma is referring to something like "reminiscences," but with the added implication of the affective imprint they leave on the writer, and this imprint itself is somewhat faded or fragmented.

This is why for me, what is most significant is not the impressions that are cast upon the self, but rather the aperture of recollection through which they pass before they become stories. Every creation is, in a sense, a lion's glance at his terrain.[54] Who I will spring upon, who I will ignore, and who I will spare is not determined merely by chance. Rather, the fragmented impressions within me must be beckoned by the magic words, by the signs of recollection, before I can make anything of them. By themselves, they will never form stories.

When an experience enters this sphere of recollection, it is not necessary that it will be transformed into a meaningful, good, and successful story (and here, and here only, do we need that dexterity, that skill, that 'cunning' that Joyce had referred to),[55] but the conception of every story, or the desire to conceive it, emerges from a prayer for this glowing encounter, where memory beckons to the impression, and the impression knocks upon the door of memory.[56]

Franz Kafka had referred to this two-sided prayer as a "summons" or an "invitation." In his diary, he writes: "it would be completely reasonable to believe that the grandeur of life awaits each of us in its utter finality, but it is hidden somewhere very

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[54] "sinhavlokan" means something like a survey, or a bird's eye view

[55] Presumably a reference to the line from Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*: "I will tell you what I will do and what I will not do. I will not serve that in which I no longer believe, whether it calls itself my home, my fatherland, or my church: and I will try to express myself in some mode of life or art as freely as I can and as wholly as I can, using for my defense the only arms I allow myself to use -- silence, exile, and cunning" (184).

[56] Here too, the words "impression" and "memory" seem insufficient translations of "anubhav" and "smriti." In the context of this essay, Verma seems to be referring to two different kinds of remembrances, which may be classified as conscious and unconscious. The "impression" is the faded remembrance that may lie passively in the writer's consciousness, until the time an attempt to recollect it calls it back.

deep, where we cannot see it. It is certainly there and is not without empathy or desire, is not unresponsive to us. If you call it by the right words, the right name, it will come to you. This is the nature of magic: it is not made, it summons."[57]

I believe that for the writer, the "grandeur" to which Kafka provides the key of "the right words, the right name" is really the search for the form that, even though we cannot see it, awaits us. How well this key fits, and whether the name and the words we find are the right ones, is decided by the material of our lives, the events that take place in our lives, as well as our collision with those events. We are brought to this strange conclusion, which appears to be contradictory though it is not, that everything we live through in our lives as well as how we live it, the decisions we take at each turn as well as the decisions we avoid taking, all our moments of courage, crisis, and cowardliness, are that invisible touchstone through which we summon and speak to the daemon hidden within any creative work—its form, its grandeur. The form of every literary work is the content of the writer's life, and because this content is a web of the exigencies, challenges, and decisions of the time, the search for a form is, in itself, a search for the right words, the right name, and morality in our lives.

As an example, I would like to cite a poem written by Anna Akhmatova, which was written during the reign-of-terror in her country:

> Quietly flows the quiet Don;
> into my house slips the yellow moon.

[57] My translation of Verma's Hindi translation.

It leaps the sill, with its cap askew,
and balks at a shadow, that yellow moon.

This woman is sick to her marrow-bone,
this woman is utterly alone,

with husband dead, with son away
in jail. Pray for me. Pray.[58]

These images are excavated from within the self. But the clay in which they have been shaped is the reality that surrounds us—which is otherwise formless and frightening, beyond our rational understanding. What is it that gives that reality form, that takes it from one's personal agony towards a collective remembrance, so that it is no longer formless and irrational, but rather turns into a historical record? It is the struggle that I spoke of before—the struggle to turn the individual, isolated experience into a remembrance that everyone participates in. A remembrance which, despite being invisible, belongs to everyone: in which any creative work can take on the universal status of a myth.

Those people who demand (political) commitment from a writer often wish for him to embed himself within a 'collective experience'. However, this is impossible—because every writer is utterly isolated in her experiences. But on the other side, those 'aesthetes' who oppose artistic commitment—who reduce it to a political squabble and sidestep it—often wish to forget that though the writer may be isolated in her experiences, she is never so in the recollections that 'summon' those experiences and turn them into a creative work. Through that creative work, she

[58] Trans. Stanley Kunitz & Max Hayward

enters into a collective sphere where each artist is linked to the other. This journey from the isolated experience to a shared recollection not only illuminates Anna Akhmatova's creative oeuvre, but also those circumstances to which that oeuvre is bound. What is remarkable is that the poem's beauty prepares a map of personal agony and morality at the centre of which the poet and external, social reality stand face-to-face. As soon as we try to separate them from one another, the structure of the entire poem, the purity of its form and the immediacy of its images—in a single word, if there is such a word, the moral beauty of the poem—falls apart.

It is curious that in the past few years, both of these words—morality on the one side and beauty on the other—have slowly vanished from literature. But the foundation of art, which we often think of as a precipitousness, a passion, has always emerged from the tension and balance between the two. Is not the attempt to separate a writer's creativity and struggle on the basis of these two elements a symptom of that intellectual decline which gives intellectuals like us the honor of being writers, but relieves us from the necessary burden of the artist?

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